

STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE JOINT BOARDS

Central Puget Sound, Eastern, and Western Washington Growth Management Hearings Boards

Mission Statement

The shared mission of the three Growth Management Hearings Boards is to resolve appeals arising from the implementation of the Growth Management Act [(GMA) Chapter 36.70A RCW] in a clear, consistent, timely and impartial manner that recognizes the diversity in their jurisdictional regions. In doing so, the Boards guide local communities to incorporate statewide growth management goals and requirements into local plans and regulations to accommodate growth.

Values

- Fairness
- Respect
- Clarity
- Regional Diversity
- Integrity
- Professionalism
- Timeliness

Context for Growth Board Operations

The three Growth Boards have been operating since the spring of 1992. During that time, overall caseloads have been relatively constant, with marked peaks in caseload when major changes in the law add new requirements or require communities to update their comprehensive plans and regulations. The Boards are presently experiencing major spikes in caseloads. Virtually all counties and cities within their respective jurisdictions are required to complete comprehensive reviews and assessments of their existing comprehensive plans and development regulations to assure compliance with the GMA. RCW 36.70.280 identifies matters subject to Board review.

RCW 36.70A.130 (1) requires that all cities and counties in the state review, evaluate, and revise, if necessary, their natural resource lands designations and critical areas ordinances on a staggered schedule beginning in 2004. Additionally, counties and cities planning under the Growth Management Act, must review and evaluate, and revise, if necessary, their comprehensive plans and development regulations. For the first group of counties and cities subject to these requirements, including the six most populous counties and cities west of the Cascades, the deadline for this required update was December 1, 2004. This update activity has increased the average caseload of the Boards. Because of the staggered schedule for updates, this higher caseload is expected to continue for several years.

In addition to the scheduled updates to GMA plans and regulations, during this same time virtually all jurisdictions in the state are required to update and revise their regulations for

protecting critical areas [fish and wildlife habitat, wetlands, flood plains, geologic hazard areas and aquifer recharge areas]. In short, the next several years should yield a substantial increase in caseloads for the Boards.

To cope with this increased workload, the Boards will continue to build on the efficiency and cost reduction measures instituted in 2004. Achieving the goals set out below could assist in streamlining the adjudicative process and increasing the number of cases that can be resolved outside of the hearing process. These goals include increasing the use of alternate dispute resolution, making needed rule changes to improve the process, providing better access on our website to previous decisions, and promoting educational outreach. These strategies, as well as posting most frequently used forms on our website, the use of telephonic hearings, keeping our digest of decisions and orders up to date on our website, and maintaining and updating our computer systems will make our operations more cost effective and efficient, and help us continue to ensure our decisions are made within statutory deadlines.

The Board will continue to utilize the Small Agency Initiative for assistance in acquiring updated technology. Partnerships with CTED, Association of Washington Cities, American Planning Association, Continuing Legal Education, Washington State Association of Counties, and business and environmental organizations can help us with educational outreach.

The Boards will continue to create and respond to opportunities that present efficiencies in Board operations. The Boards frequently rely upon telephonic conferences and meetings, to minimize Board member and party travel and parking. Each of the Boards has moved its office over time to achieve savings in rents and parking. Co-location of the Eastern and Central Puget Sound Growth Management Hearings Boards with other state agencies has allowed those Boards to share office equipment, office assistance, and computer technical help that have generated savings. The Western Board is actively seeking a similar arrangement.

Goals

One: *Resolve appeals to the Boards in a clear, consistent and impartial manner.*

Two: *Enhance the Boards' focus on service to all stakeholders.*

Three: *Increase uniformity of information and reporting procedures.*

Four: *Ensure decisions continue to be made within statutory deadlines.*

Five: *Encourage alternative dispute resolution (ADR).*

Six: *Maintain and enhance competence and performance at all levels.*

Seven: *Increase the cost effectiveness and environmental sustainability of Board operations.*

Goals and Objectives

Goal One: *Resolve appeals to the Boards in a clear, consistent and impartial manner.*

Objective #1: Use a consistent format in Board final decisions and orders (FDOs).

Strategy: All Board members use a uniform FDO format to the extent practical.

Activity: Discuss annually the adequacy of the FDO format. Seek feedback from stakeholders and persons appearing before the Board on the clarity of the Boards' decisions and the format's role in improving Boards' decision clarity.

Outcome: A generally acceptable format for final decisions and orders that is used by all three Boards. The format will be evaluated annually for workability and changed when necessary.

Goal Two: *Enhance the Boards' focus on service to all stakeholders.*

Objective #1: Be responsive to the identified needs of the parties for all Board proceedings.

Strategy: Conduct a public process biennially for eliciting information about possible improvements to the Boards' Rules of Practice and Procedure.

Activity #1: Periodically survey parties to Board proceedings and solicit input from stakeholders at "roundtable discussions" at semiannual board meetings.

Outcome: A compilation of party and stakeholder concerns and Board responses to comments. Adoption of any needed amendments to the Boards' Rules of Practice and Procedure.

Strategy: Update and refine Boards' public information package.

Activity #2: Review public information package contents against comparable state agencies guidelines.

Outcome: Ready availability of Information on Boards' website.

Objective #2: Increase accessibility to Board decisions, and the Digest.

Strategy: Maintain and upgrade the website as a source of Board information.

Activity #1: Post FDOs, and other major orders on the Boards' website within one week of issuance.

Activity #2: Maintain and update the Boards' Digest of Decisions annually.

Outcome: Timely dissemination of Board decisions.

Goal Three: Increase uniformity of information and reporting procedures.

Objective #1: Provide information about the Boards' case activities in a consistent and readily usable form.

Strategy: Collect, maintain and report case activity information on an annual basis.

Activity: Establish the caseload measures on which information will be maintained.

Outcome: An agreed upon list of caseload measures for maintaining consistent and comparable annual information reported in response to inquiries.

Objective 2: Increase understanding among Washington citizens about the Boards' role in implementing the GMA and how it functions.

Strategy: Seek opportunities to present information and answer questions about the Boards' role in implementing the GMA.

Activity: Communicate with stakeholder groups the Board members' willingness to be speakers in their continuing education processes.

Outcome: Increased public understanding of the Boards' role.

Goal Four: *Ensure decisions continue to be made within statutory deadlines.*

Objective: Issue Board decisions within statutory deadlines.

Strategy: Develop timelines, internal management procedures, and update programs and equipment that enable the Board to meet or beat statutory deadlines.

Activity: Identify equipment and services needs to ensure timeliness of decisions.

Outcome: Timely decisions in compliance within the GMA.

Goal Five: *Encourage alternative dispute resolution (ADR).*

Objective: Encourage increased settlements of disputes between parties.

Strategy: Inform parties of settlement options at early stages of each proceeding, including offering of Board members from other Boards as settlement officers.

Activity: Provide settlement extensions to accommodate dispute resolution among the parties.

Outcome: Increased number of settlement opportunities offered.

Goal Six: *Maintain and enhance competence and performance at all levels.*

Objective: Excellent performance by all Board members and staff.

Strategy: Attend trainings to address identified areas of performance.

Activity #1: Identify areas for each Board and staff member that would improve performance. Each employee shall attend at least two trainings in identified areas every year.

Activity #2: With respect to Board staff, clear direction by the Board Administrative Chair or designee as to job duties and identification of training needs.

Outcome: Training plan and attendance at identified training for each employee.

Goal Seven: Increase the cost effectiveness and environmental sustainability of Board operations.

Objective #1: Recycle office materials and waste products, and surplus outdated office equipment.

Strategy: Create programs within each Board to return all re-usable materials to the mainstream, in compliance with state environmental standards.

Activity: Maintain collection opportunities for recycled paper, cans, and plastics for re-use by special industries involved with resource conservation. Surplus all outdated office equipment and technical support in conformance with state government guidelines.

Outcome: Increased conservation of resources.

Objective #2: Reduce costs and play a role in reducing traffic congestion and air pollution.

Strategy: Reduce travel.

Activity #1: Use telephonic prehearing conferences, motions hearings, and Board meetings, whenever possible.

Activity #2: Use methods such as carpooling, transit and telecommuting by Board members as often as possible to reduce travel, parking costs and vehicle miles traveled.

Outcome: Reduced Board operating costs and increased protection of the natural environment.

Objective #3: Increase cost-effectiveness and efficiency by having each Board co-located with another state agency.

Strategy: Central and Eastern Boards maintain co-location and Western Board explores options for co-location with another state agency.

Activity: Western Board investigates and thoroughly evaluates options for co-location.

Outcome: Western Board co-locates with another state agency if cost-effective and increased efficiencies result.