



**King County**  
**Department of Development and Environmental Services**

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## **Five-Year Strategic Plan**



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# 1. DDES Overview

The King County Department of Development and Environmental Services (DDES) is the primary local service agency responsible for regulating and permitting all building and land use activity in unincorporated King County. DDES is primarily a self-supporting agency sustained by permit fees charged to applicants. Only 6 percent of the annual budget is funded by the General Fund.

The department’s annual responsibilities include:

- processing approximately 5,000 to 7,000 permits ranging from:
  - small remodels to single family homes,
  - large custom homes to large subdivisions and commercial developments,
  - small clearing and grading projects to large surface mines;
- preparing updates to the county’s building and land use codes and comprehensive plan; and,
- investigating nearly 2,000 new code enforcement complaints each year.

Over the past decade, DDES staffing levels have fluctuated from 330 FTEs in 2000 to 180 presently. Employees represent a range of disciplines including project managers, engineers, scientists, planners, permit technicians, inspectors, and code enforcement officers along with supporting business, financial, and technology professionals.

DDES receives authority and policy direction primarily from the Washington State Building Code (RCW 19.27) and the Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A). A more extensive list of authority and policy citations implemented by DDES includes the following:

Description	RCW	KCC Title
Building Code	19.27	16
Fire Code	19.27	17
Countywide Planning Polices	36.70A	20
Comprehensive Plan	36.70A	20
Land Use Zoning / Planning	36.70A	20, 21A
Critical Areas	36.70A	21A
Surface Water	90.48	9
Clearing and Grading	76.09, 36.70A	16
Floodplains	86.16	21A
Shorelines	90.48	25
Roads	36.86	14
Subdivisions	58.17	19A
SEPA	43.21C	20
Surface Mining	78.44	16, 21A
Code Enforcement	19.27, 76.09, 36.70A, 90.48	23, 16, 21A, 9, 25
Development Permit Fees	82.02.020	27
Financial Guarantees	58.17	27A

## 2. Vision / Mission / Values

The DDES Vision / Mission / Values statement was originally developed by an intra-departmental team in the late 1990s. DDES monitors the changing dynamics surrounding the agency and revises the statement as needed. In 2007, a new intra-departmental team reviewed and updated the statement. The following is the current Vision / Mission / Values statement for DDES.

### Vision

DDES is a national leader promoting responsible and sustainable development to foster environmental quality, economic vitality, and social benefit.

### Mission

To serve, educate, and protect our community by shaping and implementing King County's development and environmental regulations.

### Values

- *Excellent Service*  
Provide accessible and high-quality service to our community, customers, and colleagues through accurate information and cost-effective and timely decisions.
- *Fairness and Consistency*  
Apply regulations, policies and procedures in a predictable, clear and consistent manner for all citizens.
- *Respect*  
Treat customers and colleagues with courtesy, professionalism, and respect.
- *Innovation*  
Actively seek to implement new ideas that support our vision and mission.
- *Teamwork*  
Work together. Establish clear objectives, respect differing views, and commit to cooperative problem-solving.
- *Communication*  
Strive to communicate effectively with our community, customers, and colleagues through listening, educating and sharing current information.
- *A Good Place To Work*  
Value employee satisfaction within a diverse workforce. Promote employee development, responsibility, and accountability while providing necessary resources and a safe work environment. Take pride in the work we do.

- *Fiscal Responsibility*  
Balance the costs of accomplishing our vision, mission and values with available resources and revenue.
- *Partnerships/Coordinate/Harmonize*  
Work with other regulatory agencies to coordinate overlapping regulations so they are seamless to citizens and other customers.
- *Technology & Science*  
Effective technology and science-based practices support the department's vision and mission.

### **3. Accelerated Process and Identification of Priority Issues**

On July 18, 2008, the King County Executive signed the King County Performance and Accountability Act (Ord. 16202) into law. The primary purpose of the act was to create and implement a countywide performance and accountability system. The legislation required the development of a countywide strategic plan by the end of 2009 (King County Code (K.C.C.) 2.10.060). The development of specific strategic plans for most of the agencies within King County government was intended to occur starting in 2010 (K.C.C. 2.10.070). On December 5, 2008, subsequent legislation (Ord. 16308) was enacted, establishing the Office of Strategic Planning and Performance Management. This legislation also required the County Executive to transmit DDES' strategic plan to the County Council by August 1, 2009, in advance of the countywide strategic plan and strategic plans for other county agencies.

A review of the resources DDES currently uses for strategic planning, community engagement, and employee engagement provided valuable input into the development of the agency's strategic plan. In preparation for the development of its formal strategic plan, DDES considered the following resources:

- DDES current Vision / Mission / Values statement.
- DDES KingStat Performance Measures. Since 2006, DDES has monitored its progress through KingStat performance measures. King County's Annual Indicators and Measures (AIMS High) Web site include several DDES KingStat performance measures.
- DDES Business Plan. A DDES Business Plan is developed annually in conjunction with the preparation of the annual budget.
- DDES Customer Survey. With the assistance of a private research firm, DDES conducts an annual customer survey. DDES uses the information to evaluate the agency's desire to provide high-quality customer service.
- Permit Technical Advisory Committee. The Permit Technical Advisory Committee was established by the King County Council in 2008. The committee is comprised of individuals representing a variety of diverse stakeholder groups. The committee includes a representative from DDES, the Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties, Futurewise, rural Unincorporated

Area Council, urban Unincorporated Area Council, the agriculture/forestry industry, the King County Fire Chiefs Association, the Rural Ombudsman, and the Seattle-King County Association of Realtors. The committee advises DDES on several topics, including permit fees and project management.

- Unincorporated Area Councils. Initially established in 1996, Unincorporated Area Councils (UACs) are independent entities formed to improve communication between county government and the residents of the unincorporated areas. There are six county-recognized councils comprised of volunteer members elected by local area residents. DDES works closely with the UACs to address specific community concerns relating to land use policy and code enforcement cases.
- DDES Employee Survey. With the assistance of a private research firm, DDES conducts an annual survey of its employees. The survey assesses employees' opinions and experiences in various areas, including overall job satisfaction, availability of resources, training, accountability, and customer service.
- DDES Joint Labor Management Committee (JLMC). The majority (84 percent) of DDES employees are represented by two labor unions, the International Federation of Professional & Technical Engineers (IFPTE) Local 17 (A, IT, and X) and the Public Safety Employees Union (PSEU) Local 519. The DDES JLMC was formed in 1997. Membership includes DDES senior management and employees from both unions. The goal of the JLMC is to identify, discuss, and resolve management / labor issues within the department.

After gathering and reviewing the above resources, DDES' senior management team evaluated the department's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges (SWOC). Staff from the Office of Strategic Planning and Performance Measures facilitated the SWOC evaluation. The SWOC evaluation provided DDES with a list of strategic issues. Each of these issues is discussed in detail in Appendix A (page 15). These issues broadly impact DDES' ability to achieve its mission and goals. Most of the strategic issues can be sorted into the following ten priority issues:

- **Customer Service**  
Similar to all government regulatory agencies, DDES has two distinct customers. On the one hand, the department is accountable to the public at large for implementing and enforcing adopted land use and development policies and regulations. On the other hand, the department is accountable to the permit applicant to ensure timely and reasonable permit decisions. In many respects, the interests of these dual "customers" overlap. Both the public at large and the permit applicant are interested in a regulatory agency that demonstrates transparency, accountability, and equity.
- **Process Improvements**  
Process improvements are consistently a priority for DDES. These improvements focus on customer service and coordination with other agencies internal and external to King County. Continuous process improvements are critical for the department to efficiently provide the level of service expected by our customers.

- **External Communication**  
 Communicating effectively with DDES customers is vital. The permit process can be complicated, frustrating, and expensive. However, when information is effectively communicated, the permitting process can be understood with minimal anxiety and customers can save significant time and money. Therefore, a major priority of communications at DDES is educating property owners on the permit process.
- **Changing Housing Market**  
 With signs of a slowing economy in 2007, DDES initially forecasted a slight (three to five percent) decline in permit activity for 2008 and reduced staffing levels by three percent. However, due to the significant drop in the housing market, nationally and locally, 2008 department-wide permit activity was 20 percent below the initial forecast necessitating significant reductions in staffing levels.
- **General Fund Support**  
 Only a small percentage (6%) of DDES' annual budget is from the county's general fund sources. These funds support the agency's Code Enforcement and Rural Services programs. The resource limitation affects the department's ability to achieve the goals associated with code enforcement and rural services. Given the large deficit projected for the county's General Fund, it is unlikely that additional resources can be provided in the future.
- **Sustainable Funding for Permit Review**  
 Financially, DDES is primarily a "self-supporting" agency, sustained by permit fees charged to applicants. To the extent permit revenues exceed expenses, DDES holds the excess in reserve accounts. These reserve accounts serve to dampen the financial impact resulting from typical fluctuations in permit volumes. However, during periods of significantly low permit activity these reserves are depleted rapidly to cover expenses. Housing market volatility can affect the department's ability to maintain and improve programs.
- **Emergency Preparedness**  
 DDES is charged by the King County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan to assist in restoring basic County operations and services following a disaster and to provide regional coordination of volunteer inspection resources for both incorporated and unincorporated areas in King County. To ensure the continuation of public safety and economic recovery for King County, it is critical for DDES to maintain and exercise its disaster response plan.
- **Long-Range Growth Management Act Planning**  
 DDES is responsible for updating the King County Comprehensive Plan (KCCP), the primary policy document for land development and service delivery in the unincorporated area. In addition, the department is responsible for ongoing updates to the zoning and other development codes and for updating the building and fire structural codes every three years pursuant to State Building and Fire Code updates.
- **Urban Incorporations and Annexations**  
 The land base for which DDES provides local regulatory services is gradually decreasing and shifting from a mix of urban and rural, to primarily rural. This

gradual change will have implications for DDES financial and operational approaches.

- **Equity and Social Justice**

The Equity and Social Justice Initiative launched in 2008 (ESJ) addresses the underlying causes of social inequities—including disparate access to transportation and affordable housing, quality education, natural resources and parks, safe neighborhoods and health care - to ensure opportunities for all communities in King County. With DDES' focus on responsible development and environmental quality, there are many opportunities for further ESJ.

Based on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges inherent in this set of strategic issues, the following section presents the department's goals, objectives, and strategies to advance the department's mission. Performance measures for the goals are also set forth.

#### **4. Medium- to Long-Range Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Performance Measures**

From the ten priority issues identified by the SWOC evaluation, DDES established the following four medium- to long-range (three- to five-year) goals.

- Provide excellent customer service.
- Provide an effective, collaborative, and fiscally responsible work environment.
- Achieve and promote responsible development and environmental protection.
- Promote Growth Management goals and the efficient use of land in urban areas.

The following information outlines some specific performance measures DDES uses to monitor progress toward each of these goals. These measures are also used in the Executive's KingStat performance management process and as part of the county's public performance reporting Web site, *AIMs High: Annual Indicators and Measures* (<http://your.kingcounty.gov/aimshigh>). DDES will continue to refine the performance measures over time. A more detailed discussion of the specific strategies is included in Appendix A. New strategies are identified by italics.

##### **Goal 1: Provide Excellent Customer Service**

DDES uses several measures to monitor its performance in achieving the goal "Provide Excellent Customer Service." These include:

- the percent of permits DDES completes within the timelines established by K.C.C. Title 20,
- the results of the annual DDES Customer Service Survey, and
- the implementation of the Permit Integration Project, which will improve customer service through technological enhancements.

The following describes the actual DDES performance compared to the department's target for each of these measures.

<b>PERFORMANCE MEASURE</b>						
<b>The percent of permits DDES completed within the timelines described in K.C.C. Title 20.</b>						
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Target (K.C.C. Title)	N/A	N/A	90%	90%	90%	90%
Actual	89%	91%	90%	89%	N/A	N/A

As shown above, DDES achieves or nearly achieves its target of processing 90 percent of its permits within the timelines described in K.C.C. Title 20. Approximately 10 percent of permits are considered outliers and cannot be processed within the Title 20 timelines.

<b>PERFORMANCE MEASURE</b>						
<b>DDES Customer Service Survey. The average rating of overall customer satisfaction with DDES' permitting. (5 = extremely satisfied)</b>						
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Target*	N/A	N/A	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5
Actual	2.5	3.54	3.74	3.53	N/A	N/A

\*This rating is assessing a regulatory function in which a 3.5 target is a realistic goal.

Since 2006, DDES achieved its target of receiving a customer rating of 3.5 or better (3 represents neutral, 4 is satisfied and 5 is extremely satisfied). DDES continues to initiate and implement practices to enhance customer service, striving for a consistent positive satisfaction rating.

<b>PERFORMANCE MEASURE</b>								
<b>Permit Integration (PI) project percentage of implementation completion. (Completion Date – December 2012).</b>								
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Target	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	20%	47%	73%	100%
Actual	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	*8%	N/A	N/A	N/A

\*Through the 2nd quarter of 2009

The DDES implementation phase of the Permit Integration (PI) project is scheduled to be implemented in 45-months from April 2009 through December 2012. This chart shows the percentage of implementation completion to date. The project is progressing in accordance with the estimated schedule.

**Objective A: Continuously improve customer service to provide transparency, accountability and equity.**

### **Customer Service / Transparency Strategies:**

Transparency requires that the public be informed about the process, and have the ability to comment and be heard, and that the decision-making process is open and supported by the facts.

The following are the strategies to achieve this objective:

- Permit Integration project – complete in phases from 2009-2012
- Free technical assistance available Monday – Thursday, 7 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.
- Project management – developed in 2006 with ongoing refinements
- Permits at a Glance – completed real time online permit tracking system
- Customer bulletins – ongoing process to update
- Web site information – ongoing process to update

### **Customer Service / Accountability Strategies:**

Accountability requires that staff complete permit reviews and inspections and citizen inquiries are responded to in a timely and efficient manner. The following are the strategies to achieve this objective:

- Project management – ongoing refinements to monitoring clocks and budgets and developing fee estimates
- Employee performance evaluations – conducted annually
- KingStat measurements – report annually on efficiency measures

### **Customer Service / Equity Strategies:**

Equity requires that citizens are treated fairly and respectfully and that codes are consistently interpreted and implemented. The following are the strategies to achieve this objective:

- Staff training – focused attention beginning in 2006 and ongoing (most sections dedicate a portion of each staff meeting to training)
- Regulatory Review Committee – senior staff meet regularly to review code interpretation and application issues to ensure consistent implementation
- Expedited processing for affordable housing projects – promotes housing for less fortunate in King County

**Objective B: Through enhanced communication, educate property owners on the public health and safety interests behind building and land use regulations, and prepare prospective applicants for the permitting process.**

### **Strategies:**

- Getting to Yes with DDES - ongoing
- Customer Survey - annual
- Phone Center - ongoing
- Media Relations -ongoing
- DDES News letter –quarterly

- Unincorporated Area Newsletter - monthly
- Rural Coordinator/Agriculture Commission Meetings/Unincorporated Area Council Meetings – ongoing

**Goal 2: Provide an Effective, Collaborative and Fiscally Responsible Work Environment**

DDES uses several measures to monitor its performance in achieving the goal of “Providing an Effective, Collaborative, and Fiscally Responsible Work Environment.” These include:

- Percent of DDES Staff Time Directly Processing Permits
- Project Managed Permits within Budget

The following describes the actual DDES performance as compared to the department’s target for each of these measures.

<b>PERFORMANCE MEASURE</b>						
<b>Percent of DDES Staff Time Directly Processing Permits.</b>						
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Target	N/A	N/A	75%	75%	75%	75%
Actual	74%	73%	71%	69%	69%*	N/A

\*Through May 2009

As shown above, DDES expects operational staff spend at least 75 percent of their time at work reviewing or inspecting permits. The remaining 25 percent of work time is spent in training, and non-billable meetings, public information and coordination. Since DDES does not staff to peak workloads, with the strong construction market in 2005 and 2006 all DDES staff had full workloads and were able to come close to achieving their targets. With the slowing building economy beginning in 2007 and with corresponding diminishing workloads, staff time spent processing permits decreased to 69 percent. Following a 2009 second quarter significant reduction in work force at DDES, the percentage should increase for the remainder of the year and into 2010.

<b>PERFORMANCE MEASURE</b>						
<b>Project Managed Permits within Budget</b>						
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Target	N/A	N/A	90%	90%	90%	90%
Actual	88%	87%	87%	87%	*86%	N/A

\*Through May 2009

As shown above, DDES nearly achieves its target of completing project managed budgets within the estimated budget 90 percent of the time. These are the larger and more complex projects which receive an upfront fee estimate. Except for stated exceptions, DDES absorbs the cost for projects which go over budget and refunds the excess amounts for projects under budget. DDES staff aim to estimate the project managed budget within 10 percent (5 percent above and 5 percent below budget). In 2009, DDES initiated further enhancements to the Project

Management program and to the fee estimation process, which should increase actual performance.

**Objective A: Continuously develop and implement process improvements by upgrading technology, expanding online services, refining project management services and improving the partnerships with agencies within and outside of King County.**

**Process Improvements Strategies:**

- Voluntary PM Services – third quarter 2009
- Dedicated PM Services Department Wide – end of 2009
- Expand Online Services (remote permit submittal, payment, etc.) – 2011
- Permit Integration – complete implementation of all phases by end of 2012
- (eReview) Residential Permits – completed second quarter 2009
- Ag Permit Review Team – ongoing
- DDES / Health Department Committee – ongoing
- DDES / DOT Roads Coordination – ongoing

**Objective B: Keep DDES' permit review programs fiscally sustainable.**

All of the goals key to fulfilling DDES' Vision and Mission depend on a fiscal plan that ensures sustainable revenue for the permit processing programs at DDES. This objective faces significant challenges, given the dynamics of funding for permit processing and the fluctuating housing market.

**Strategies:**

- Pursue increased efficiency through technology by implementing the Permit Integration (PI) project - 2009 through 2012
- Decrease operating expenses by reducing the number of vehicles in DDES' fleet and switching to hybrid vehicles when feasible - 2009 and 2010
- Decrease operating expenses by achieving silver LEED certification and continued Energy Star rating for the DDES building. Targeted completion: silver LEED certification in 2010
- Per the recommendations of the Permit Technical Advisory Committee, tie annual fee adjustments to an independent price index - 2010
- Pursue increased efficiency through technology by implementing the Accountable Business Transformation (ABT) project
- Pursue increased staff efficiency through enhancements to the Project Management program - ongoing
- Pursue increased efficiency by monitoring permit volumes, staffing levels and employee performance - ongoing
- Decrease operating expenses by occupying the DDES building four days a week – ongoing - initiated in late 2008
- Decrease vehicle/travel expenses by consolidating field inspections into a four-day week – ongoing - initiated in 2008

**Objective C: Keep DDES' General Fund programs (Rural Services and Code Enforcement) effective and fiscally sustainable.**

The Rural Services and the Code Enforcement programs provide important services to the citizens of King County and align with DDES' Vision, Mission, Values, and Goals. This objective faces significant challenges, given the dynamics of the county's General Fund.

**Strategies:**

- Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the Code Enforcement Program by implementing the recommendations of the 2008 Performance Audit of DDES' Code Enforcement Unit 2008 -2010
- Adjust expenses and services provided the Code Enforcement Section in accordance with annual general funding - annually
- Adjust expenses and services provided the Rural Services Program in accordance with annual general funding - annually
- Seek opportunities to partner with other organizations, such as the King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks (DNRP) and the King Conservation District (KCD) to maximize the effectiveness of the Rural Services Program - ongoing

**Goal 3: Achieve and Promote Responsible Development and Environmental Protection**

DDES uses several measures to monitor its performance in "Achieving and Promoting Responsible Development and Environmental Protection." These include:

- High Risk Code Enforcement Complaints Responded to within 24 Hours
- National Building Code Effectiveness Grade
- National Flood Insurance Program Community Rating System Score
- Fire Fatalities in Annually Fire-Inspected Multifamily and Commercial Structures

The following describes the actual DDES performance as compared to the department's target for each of these measures.

PERFORMANCE MEASURE						
High Risk Code Enforcement Complaints Responded to within 24 Hours						
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Target	N/A	N/A	75%	75%	75%	75%
Actual	67%	64%	57%	64%	67%	N/A

DDES strives to respond to high risk code enforcement complaints within 24 hours. However, given the high rate of new code enforcement complaints (1,900 / year) and the limited number of General Fund supported code enforcement officers, the agency struggles to achieve the target. As noted in the earlier discussion of general fund supported programs, given the funding challenges for the county, resources for these programs are highly constrained and, therefore, limit the agency's ability to improve performance,

PERFORMANCE MEASURE Building Code Effectiveness Schedule						
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Target	N/A	N/A	3	3	3	3
Actual	3	3	3	3	3	N/A

A national rating, the National Building Code Effectiveness Grading Schedule (BCEGS) assesses jurisdictions' local building codes and their capacity to implement and enforce their building codes. Jurisdictions receive a grade from one (exemplary) to 10 (poor). As shown above, unincorporated King County has a current rating of three which is in the top 20 percent of all rated jurisdictions within the country.

PERFORMANCE MEASURE National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) Community Rating System (CRS) Score						
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Target	N/A	N/A	2	2	2	2
Actual	3	3	2	2	2	N/A

The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) through the Community Rating System (CRS) program awards points for floodplain management activities that exceed minimum NFIP standards. A final CRS rating is established for jurisdictions with FEMA floodplains across the country. (1=high score, 10=low score) King County currently has the highest CRS rating (2) of any county in the country. As a result of the 2 rating, property owners in King County realize a 40 percent savings in flood insurance.

PERFORMANCE MEASURE Fire Fatalities in Annually Fire-Inspected Multifamily and Commercial Structures						
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Target	0	0	0	0	0	0
Actual	0	0	0	0	0	0

The King County DDES Fire Marshal's office began inspecting units in multifamily structures in 1999 for compliance with fire code standards. Since the inspections began, no fire fatalities have occurred in fire-inspected multifamily or commercial buildings in unincorporated King County. Although it would be useful to also have data that tracks reductions in property loss from fire damage, no such data was available.

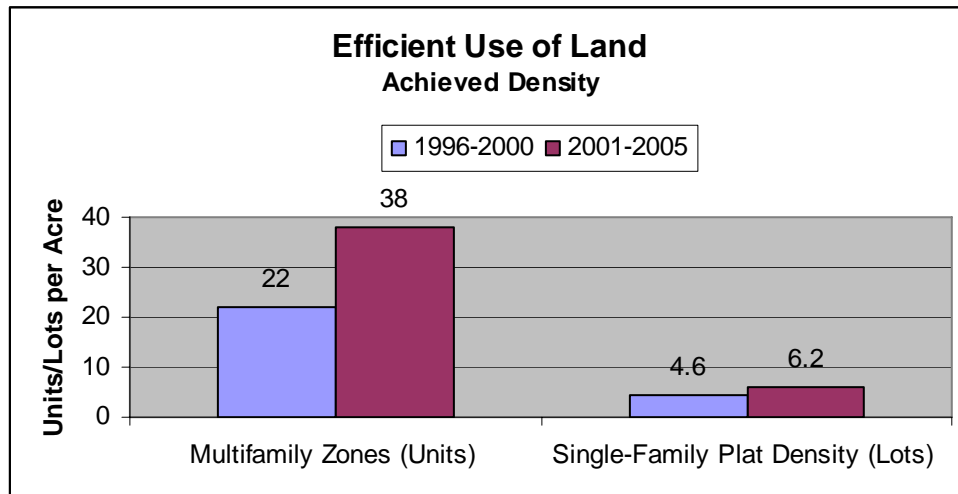
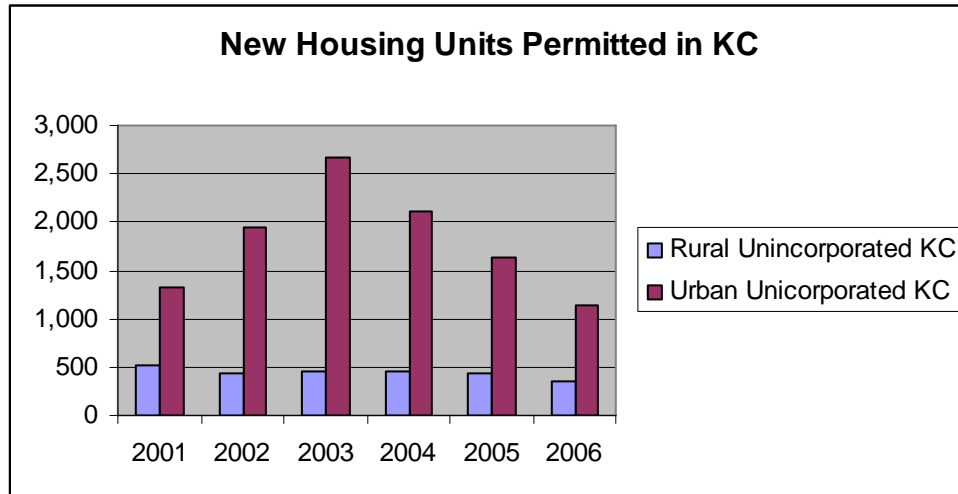
**Objective A: Continued DDES support for Equity and Social Justice Initiative (ESJ).**

Given the alignment of the ESJ with DDES' Vision, Mission, and Goals, the agency intends to pursue efforts supporting equity and social justice.

**Strategies:**

- Initiate an ESJ reserve fund – 2010
- Continue to implement the form-based code project - 2009-2010
- Continue to implement the Affordable / workforce housing project –2009-2010

**Goal 4: Promote Growth Management goals and the efficient use of land in urban areas.**



The Growth Management Act mandates that counties and cities that are required to plan under the GMA concentrate growth in urban areas and achieve densities that support urban development and infrastructure. The King County Comprehensive Plan furthers that goal with policies that maintain rural and resource lands at very low densities and that requires minimum densities in the urban areas. The top graph shows that the vast majority of new growth in King County occurs in the urban areas. The bottom graph shows that the achieved densities for multifamily zones increased from 22 units per acre in 1996-2000 to 38 units per acre in 2001-2005. Similarly, in the single

family zones, densities increased from 4.6 dwelling units per acre during 1996-2000 to 6.2 units acres in 2001-2005. These measurements demonstrate King County's success in facilitating growth in the urban areas and preventing sprawl into the rural and resource lands.

**Objective A: Implement growth management policies which facilitate growth in the urban areas and prevent sprawl in the rural and resource lands.**

The Countywide Planning Policies (CPP) and the King County Comprehensive Plan (KCCP) support the State Growth Management Act (GMA) mandates to facilitate growth in the urban areas and prevent sprawl in the rural and resource lands. The goal is to encourage livable communities and promote appropriate uses and densities.

**Strategies:**

- Develop a form based code for King County – pilots developed in 2009-2010
- Propose amendments to the CPPs and KCCP and to the King County zoning and development codes which further the goals of the GMA – ongoing
- Collect buildable lands data and participate in county-wide efforts to meet the Buildable Land requirements – ongoing
- Staff the Growth Management Planning Council in coordination with staff from cities within King County – ongoing
- Participate in the Utilities Technical Review Committee and the School Technical Review Teams – ongoing
- Participate with staff from cities in King County to develop regional and jurisdictional housing and job targets – ongoing

## **5. Contacts**

Contacts for additional information regarding the DDES strategic plan:

Stephanie Warden, Director  
Department of Development  
and Environmental Services  
900 Oakesdale Avenue Southwest  
Renton, WA 98057-5212  
[stephanie.warden@kingcounty.gov](mailto:stephanie.warden@kingcounty.gov)  
206-296-6700

Joe Miles, DDES Deputy Director  
Department of Development  
and Environmental Services

900 Oakesdale Avenue Southwest  
Renton, WA 98057-5212  
[joe.miles@kingcounty.gov](mailto:joe.miles@kingcounty.gov)  
206-296-7179

# Appendix A

## DDES' Priority Issues Discussion

### Customer Service

Similar to all government regulatory agencies, DDES has two distinct customers. On the one hand, the department is accountable to the public at large for implementing and enforcing adopted land use and development policies and regulations. On the other hand, the department is accountable to the permit applicant to ensure timely and reasonable permit decisions. In many respects, the interests of these dual “customers” overlap. Both the public at large and the permit applicant are interested in a regulatory agency that demonstrates transparency, accountability, and equity.

Transparency, accountability, and equity, are the hallmarks of excellent customer service. It is equally important for the public, whether their interest is in protecting neighborhoods and natural features from intrusive development, or their interest is specific to obtaining permits for new construction, that information about codes is readily available and the processes and decisions are timely and understandable. It is also important that everyone is treated fairly. The permit applicant may be more interested in timely decisions and the cost of permitting services than the general public, but all customers are equally interested in government accountability.

In analyzing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges (SWOC) relating to customer service, the following were identified:

- The need to train DDES staff on best practices for customer service. This is an ongoing process to ensure that staff have the tools and the confidence to provide the most professional customer service possible. Discussions with property owners and neighbors relating to land use and property development are often emotional and volatile. It is important that staff understand how to appropriately handle different situations and that all interactions are professional and respectful.
- Identifying and setting clear expectations for staff. As a self-supporting agency, DDES passes along the cost of doing business to the permit customers through permit review and inspection fees. The regulatory process is extensive and there is considerable variation of site conditions from one property to the next. However, it is critical that staff be held accountable for the efficient and effective review of all permits.
- Focusing on aspects of customer service within our control. There are external factors over which DDES may have little or no control. These include state and federal regulations and special purpose districts such as utilities and school districts. For those aspects of the regulatory process that DDES does have control, however, it is important to focus outreach and communication efforts. These include providing timely and relevant information to the public regarding the county's regulatory process, changes to development regulations, and the growth management planning process. For those aspects of permitting that are

external to DDES, there is an ongoing effort to work with other agencies to coordinate and harmonize the regulatory process.

- Code enforcement responsiveness & protection of property rights. An audit was conducted in 2008 which focused on the DDES Code Enforcement process. The findings included the need for a strategic plan specific to code enforcement and several enhancements to the program aimed at better notification to property owners about the process and more accurate performance measurement reporting. Many of the audit findings have been addressed and all work plan items are in progress. The result will be a code enforcement program with more accountability and focus on results and with enhanced notification to property owners regarding the process and their options for bringing their properties into compliance.
- Providing timely and relevant information to the general public. The general public can access a wealth of information via the King County and DDES web sites, including King County Television videotapes of informational workshops. DDES also issues press releases and contributes articles to the UAC newsletter to communicate topics of interest to the general public. DDES staff regularly attend Unincorporated Area Council, Agriculture Commission and other community meetings to provide information and answer community questions and concerns about the County's development and policy-making process.

### **Process Improvements**

Process improvements are consistently a priority for DDES. These improvements focus on customer service and coordination with other agencies internal and external to King County. Continuous process improvements are critical for the department to efficiently provide the level of service expected by our customers.

DDES is continuously looking for enhanced technology to better serve its customers. This includes improving online accessibility to permit information, expanding online research tools, growing the electronic plan review (eReview) program and improving communication systems to provide faster and more direct links between customer and staff. In addition, DDES is currently upgrading and integrating all of its business and operational software in a major project called Permit Integration (PI). The PI project will replace aging systems which are no longer being supported, and consolidate several outdated customized programs into one system. The project will also provide a critical interface to software programs owned and operated by other County agencies with permitting responsibilities.

Project Management (PM) is another major component of the process improvement effort to better serve customers. This program has been enhanced and expanded over the last several years providing a higher level of customer service on development applications. A voluntary PM program has been developed to address the needs of customers with smaller, less complex projects.

Coordinating and harmonizing regulatory processes with other governmental agencies within and outside of King County is an ongoing effort at DDES. DDES has assembled several committees to coordinate regulatory processes. Feedback from these

committees influence code development, streamline permitting, and improve business efficiency. Agencies involved in the DDES harmonizing efforts include the Agricultural Commission, King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks, Seattle-King County Public Health Department, King County Roads Division, Washington State Department of Natural Resources, Washington State Department of Ecology, Washington State Fish & Wildlife Agency, Army Corps of Engineers, and the King Conservation District.

### **External Communication**

Communicating effectively with DDES customers is vital. The permit process can be complicated, frustrating, and expensive. However, when information is effectively communicated, the permitting process can be understood with minimal anxiety and customers can save significant time and money. Therefore, a major priority of communications at DDES is educating property owners on the permit process.

In addition, it is critical for DDES to communicate effectively with the general public and with citizens who live adjacent or proximate to proposed development. These “customers” require a broader range of topics and communication methods and the ability to access information conveniently and outside of business hours.

Residents concerned about proposed developments are encouraged to participate through reviews of draft documents and public comment periods, public meetings, and interactions with the project manager and review staff. This citizen input is a critical part of the permit review process and is essential to the development of conditions, consistent with county development codes, which mitigate the impact of the development to adjacent and proximate properties. Sometimes through the public comment and review period, review staff are made aware of unique site conditions and can address mitigating conditions accordingly. In other cases, there are comments submitted which go beyond the County’s statutory and legal authority to effectively address.

DDES uses a variety of tools to communicate with its customers. These include a comprehensive Web site and a quarterly newsletter. The newsletter is posted to the Web site and e-mailed to a large distribution list. DDES also regularly submits articles to a new King County unincorporated area newsletter and prepares press releases for the local media. The department also offers free or low-cost classes for potential applicants.

Specific examples of the communication tools utilized by DDES include:

- Getting to Yes with DDES. This is the marketing title given to all course offerings that DDES directs to property owners, realtors, builders and developers who live and work in unincorporated King County. These courses are often videotaped for King County Television and posted to the DDES Web site.
- DDES Website and Permits at a Glance. There is an abundance of information on the DDES website and links to relevant information on DNRP and Public Health’s Community Health web pages. This includes information regarding

permit processes, applications and fees, “hot” topics, contact information, pending legislation, King County Comprehensive Plan, GIS maps and property research tools, DDES news releases, Fire Marshal information (burn bans, firework displays) and business license information. Recently a new feature Permits-at-a-Glance was added to the DDES website which provides real time status information regarding all pending permits.

- Customer Survey. DDES regularly conducts formal customer surveys to ensure that the programs and initiatives are reaching target audiences as effectively as possible. The department also uses these surveys to determine if improvements can be made in any variety of its programs and services.
- Phone Center. The main telephone line at DDES is staffed by highly trained professionals who are familiar with most aspects of the permitting process. These telephone operators play a key role in directing customers to the appropriate DDES staff. They are also the first point of contact for customers looking to initiate the permit process. Consequently, the customer service attitude and technical expertise of these staff are critical.
- Media Relations. DDES strives to maintain good relations with local news reporters and agencies. These relationships become critical when it comes to getting key DDES messages published and/or broadcast. The DDES Public Information Officer works very hard to encourage these positive relationships, and also promote key DDES messages into conversations with reporters, press releases and the resulting news publications.
- DDES News letter. *DDES Quarterly News* is published three to four times each year, along with any required special editions. This newsletter is posted prominently to the DDES Web site and also distributed electronically to a mailing list of approximately 900 interested citizens and property owners. This newsletter covers the latest DDES customer service initiatives, and alerts property owners and developers to any technical change to the permitting process.
- Other Permit Information. DDES will explore other communication avenues to disseminate permit and growth management planning information to citizens of unincorporated King County.
- Unincorporated Area Newsletter. This electronic newsletter is published on behalf of the entire King County government and is directed at the Unincorporated Area Councils, as well as rural property owners. DDES routinely submits content for this publication which is associated directly with the interests of rural property owners. DDES will solicit input from the UACs regarding topics and information of interest to include as future articles.
- Rural Coordinator/Agriculture Commission Meetings/Unincorporated Area Council Meetings. DDES has established a Rural Permit Coordinator position, which is solely responsible for assisting rural property owners through the permitting process at DDES. This DDES staff person also regularly attends Agriculture Commission meetings and Unincorporated Area Council meetings to ensure DDES messages directed toward rural property owners are broadcast to as many pertinent audiences as possible.

### **The Changing Housing Market**

Financially, DDES is primarily a “self-supporting” agency, sustained by permit fees charged to applicants. DDES calculates its annual staffing levels utilizing a variety of inputs including a forecast of permit activity for the upcoming year. DDES’ senior management team monitors actual permit activity monthly, compares this to the budget, and makes staffing adjustments as needed.

With signs of a slowing economy in 2007, DDES initially forecasted a slight (three to five percent) decline in permit activity for 2008 and reduced staffing levels by three percent. However, due to the significant drop in the housing market, nationally and locally, 2008 department-wide permit activity was 20 percent below the initial forecast. Responding to this, management elected not to fill numerous vacancies in 2008, and during the last quarter of 2008 laid off three employees.

In preparing the 2009 annual budget in April of 2008, DDES forecasted permit activity to be similar to the 2008 budget forecast. Budgeted staffing levels were reduced by an additional three percent. However, thus far in 2009, permit application activity is running at 60 percent of forecast, with little indication of improvement for the balance of the year. If this trend continued with no adjustment to expenditures, DDES could have experienced losses of \$3 M to \$7 M beyond the losses already projected in the 2009 budget.

During the first quarter of 2009, in response to a continuing lack of permit demand and to lessen the possibility of the undesignated reserve fund falling to a negative balance, DDES reduced its staff by 49.5 positions (29.5 permanent and 2 temporary employees plus 18 vacant and contingent positions) thereby, materially reducing expenses. This represented an approximate 22% reduction in staff levels overall and represented an annualized \$4.9 million reduction in 2009 expenditures.

DDES remains vigilant in monitoring its workload relative to the changing housing market and will make the appropriate adjustments to staffing levels. If permit volumes continue to decrease, the agency will initiate further reductions in expenses. If permit volumes increase, DDES will consider using overtime, recalling laid off employees, or a combination of both, to address the demand.

### **General Funding**

Only a small percentage (6%) of DDES’ annual budget is from the General Fund. These funds support the agency’s Code Enforcement and Rural Services programs.

Given the challenges associated with the ability of county government to generate sufficient revenue to support the services it is expected to provide, and the severe economic downturn, King County experienced a \$93 million budget deficit for 2009. Absent any additional revenue sources, the King County Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is currently forecasting a \$43 million General Fund deficit for 2010.

The approved 2009 General Fund budget resulted in DDES’ Code Enforcement Program eliminating two officer positions.

Currently, the 2010 forecast of General Fund funding anticipates further reductions. This will likely translate into reduced service by the Code Enforcement Program and/or the Rural Services Program. DDES continues to reference its vision, mission, values, and goals, as it considers staff reductions due to the changing dynamics of General Fund funding.

### **Sustainable Funding for Permit Review**

In DDES' recent history, it funded operations primarily from permit fees charged to applicants. During the early 1990s, DDES struggled to support itself financially and to provide timely permit review services. In 1993, DDES experienced a \$20 million financial debt and laid off nearly 30 percent of its work force (101 FTEs). Subsequently, an enormous backlog of permits awaiting review developed. During the late 1990s, the King County Council increased DDES' permit fees and established performance standards per King County Code (K.C.C.) 20.20, for timely permit reviews. DDES began reducing its debt and backlog of permits. By 2000, DDES achieved a positive fund balance for the first time.

In 2003, the King County Executive established a Fee Task Force comprised of individual builders and developers from the Master Builders Association. The task force wanted more "predictability" in permit costs associated with hourly fees and "accountability" for DDES staff. In response to the recommendations of the Fee Task Force, in 2004 the Executive proposed, and the Council approved, an increase in hourly permit fees and established the DDES' "Project Management" program. Permits under project management receive a "binding" fee estimate from DDES and DDES staff are held accountable to the estimate.

To the extent permit revenues exceed expenses, DDES holds the excess in reserve accounts. These reserve accounts serve to dampen the financial impact resulting from typical fluctuations in permit volumes. However, during periods of significantly low permit activity these reserves are depleted rapidly to cover expenses. DDES must continuously monitor its finances to maintain a positive fund balance.

### **Emergency Preparedness**

DDES is charged by the King County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan to assist in restoring basic County operations and services following a disaster and to provide regional coordination of volunteer inspection resources for both incorporated and unincorporated areas in King County. To ensure the continuation of public safety and economic recovery for King County, it is critical for DDES to maintain and exercise its disaster response plan.

These responsibilities include:

- Adopt and enforce the most recent building codes in King County.
- Maintain a DDES operations disaster recovery plan.
- Train field inspection staff on post earthquake safety evaluation of buildings (ATC-20 training).

- Maintain a list of volunteer inspectors in coordination with local professional organizations (Structural Engineers, Architects, and Building Officials).
- Serve as a critical member of the King County Emergency Coordination Center (ECC) following a disaster.
- Inspect King County facilities in both unincorporated King County and cities as needed. Prioritizing inspections of essential facilities as directed by the ECC.
- Coordinate and deploy volunteer inspectors throughout King County and in cities based on available resources and requests.
- Provide emergency permitting and inspection services for repair and reconstruction of damaged buildings during the recovery period.
- Report findings from DDES inspection and assessment of damaged facilities to the King County ECC in order to determine economic impacts to region.

While historically much of DDES disaster preparation has been related to disaster response to seismic, snow and wind events, more recent risks have been identified including Flood Hazard Planning for the Howard Hanson Dam and Department operational procedures related to the pandemic flu. The most recent reports indicate the Howard Hanson Dam flood control capabilities have been significantly reduced due to significant damage from recent storm events. The likelihood of significant flooding from the Green River could threaten a large population not previously included in the County's disaster response plans. DDES is working with other King County departments to plan ways to minimize flood damage, to respond to help our citizens when and if flooding does occur, and to provide for the continuance of King County government.

DDES had developed a business continuity plan as part of King County's pandemic flu response planning. The department's plan identifies operational procedures that will be employed to protect citizens and staff from the spread of the flu. This plan helps ensure limited business continuity and the safety of staff and clients.

### **Long-Range Growth Management Act Planning**

Growth management planning for the unincorporated area is an important governmental responsibility and a requirement under the state Growth Management Act (GMA). DDES is responsible for updating the King County Comprehensive Plan (KCCP), the primary policy document for land development and service delivery in the unincorporated area. Major KCCP updates occur every four years. These major updates address substantive policy issues and possible amendments to the Urban Growth Area boundary. Annual updates of the KCCP are also conducted to address issues that are technical in nature.

The King County Comprehensive Plan guides development in King County consistent with the GMA by balancing the need for new housing and infrastructure to accommodate growth while preserving the rural areas at low densities and protecting resource areas for agriculture and forestry activities. This requires coordinated planning with the State, cities and with special purpose districts (schools, fire and utility districts) within King County.

Once ratified, the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) guide the comprehensive plans of the county and each of the 39 cities. DDES leads the interjurisdictional staff team that develops CPP amendments for consideration by the Growth Management Planning Council (GMPC) – the regional planning body that adopts the CPPs. In 2009, growth targets for housing units and jobs for all 40 jurisdictions in King County are being updated to plan for future growth through 2031.

DDES initiated a Form-Based Code project to examine the feasibility of replacing the current conventional land use code with a Form-Based Code. Using a more flexible and outcome-based approach to regulating development, the new code will focus on the public space, while encouraging important policy objectives such as affordable housing, sustainable development, and walkability, to create vibrant mixed-use neighborhoods. To assist in the development of the new Form-Based Code, King County has selected three demonstration areas, two in the urban area and one in the rural area.

DDES gathers data on land development for inclusion in the Buildable Lands Inventory required by the Growth Management Act. This document ensures that there is adequate vacant or developable land in the urban areas to accommodate future growth. DDES also participates in the Utilities Technical Review Committee to insure water and sewer comprehensive plans for the unincorporated area have the capacity to serve planned land uses, and staffs the School Technical Review Committee to assess the amount of school impact fees for new development.

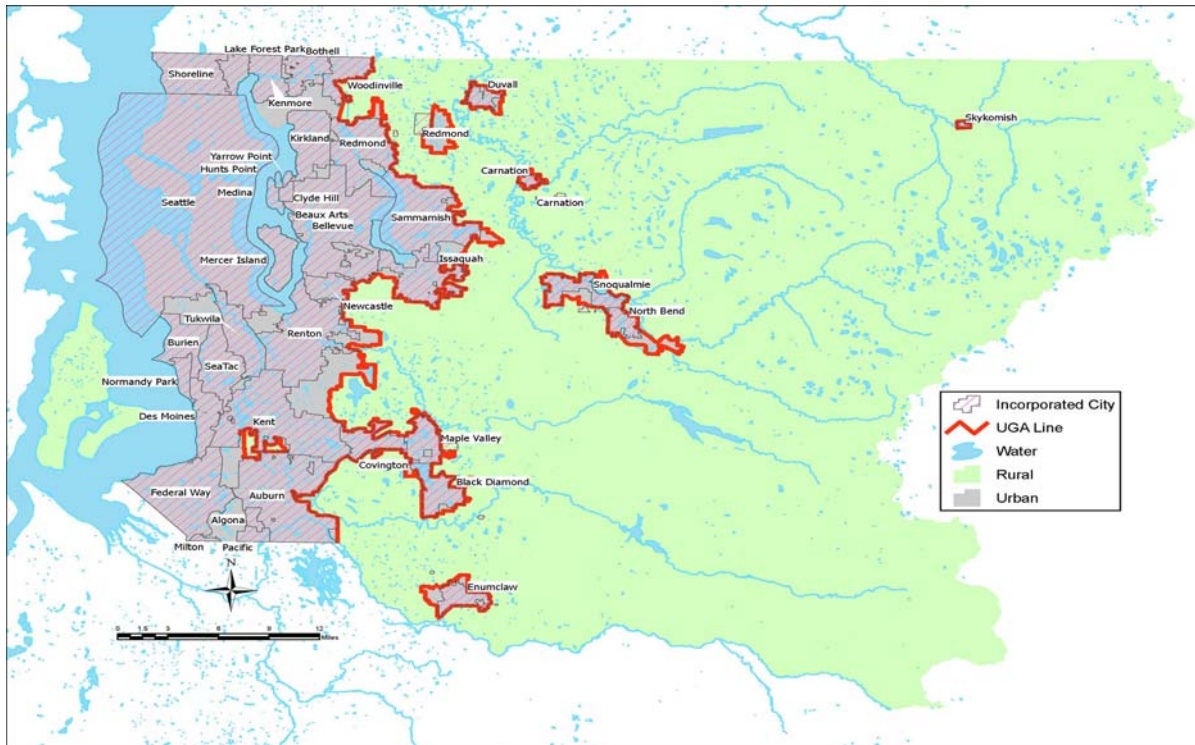
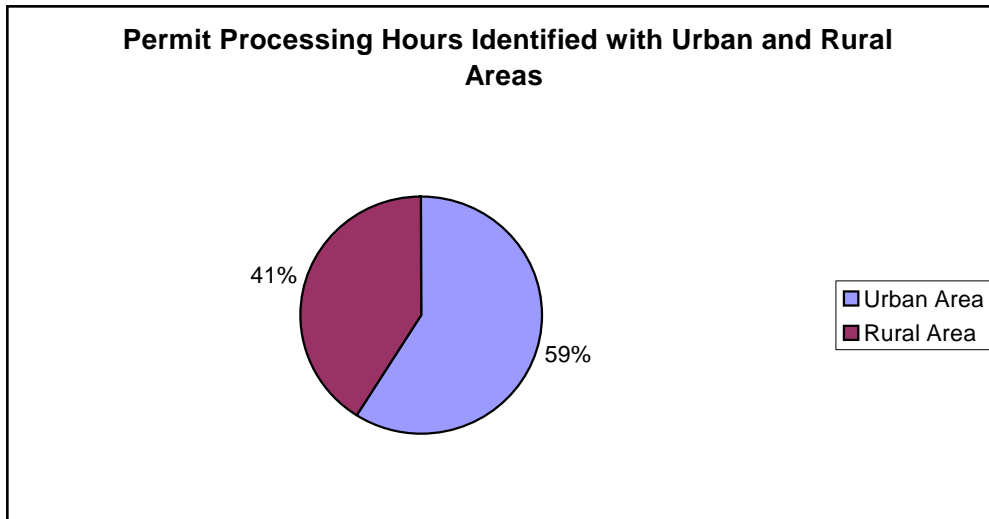
### **Urban Incorporations and Annexations**

DDES historically provides services to all of unincorporated King County including both urban and rural zoned properties. With the adoption of the 1994 Comprehensive Plan, King County began implementation of the State Growth Management Act (GMA) and the associated Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs). Both the GMA and the CPPs encourage cities to incorporate or annex urban zoned properties located within the unincorporated portion of the county. At the end of 1994, approximately 100,000 acres of urban unincorporated land existed in King County. Since the 1994 implementation of GMA and the CPPs, 56 percent of the urban unincorporated land was incorporated or annexed into cities. Annexation and incorporation of the remaining 44 percent (approximately 44,000 acres) has slowed. In 2009 and 2010, only an additional five percent of the urban unincorporated land will likely become part of a city. These include the Panther Lake area (3,525 acres) which proposes to annex into Kent, and the southern portion of the North Highline area (1,673 acres) which proposes to annex into Burien.

Other significant annexations / incorporations potentially occurring within the next five years include:

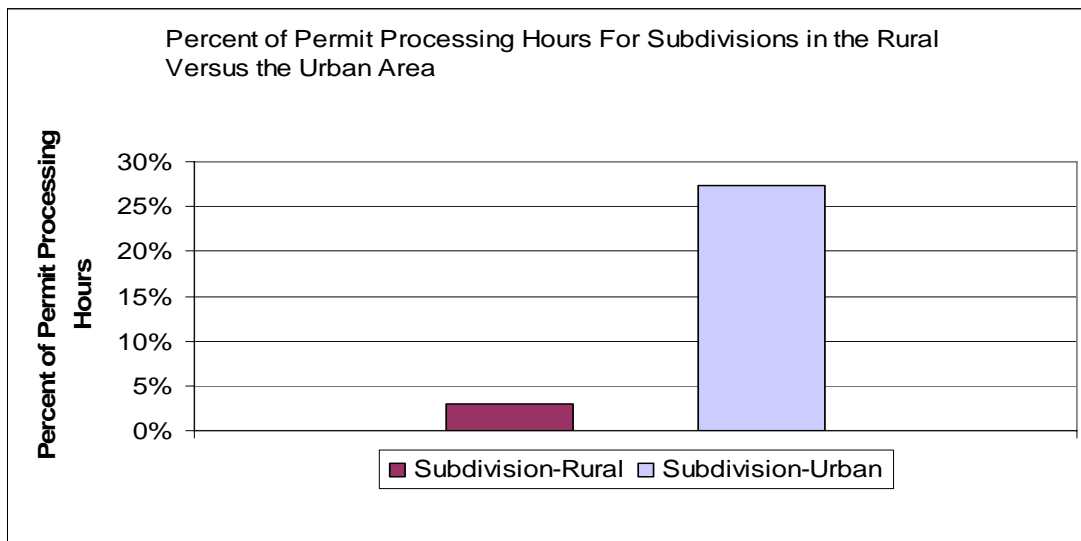
- Fairwood, potential incorporation or annexation to the city of Renton
- West Hill, potential annexation to city of Renton or city of Seattle
- North Highline (Y), potential annexation to the city of Seattle
- Juanita-Finn Hill, potential annexation to the city of Kirkland or city of Bothell

With regard to the permit workload within the unincorporated area, DDES staff currently spends 59 percent of permit processing time on permits from the urban area and 41 percent of permit processing time on permits from the rural area. The significance of moving away from permitting in the urban areas translates into both an overall reduction in permits and a change in type of permits. The following figure illustrates the comparison of DDES permit processing hours on urban versus rural permits and the following map shows the current urban/rural split in King County.



The land base for which DDES provides local regulatory services is gradually

decreasing and shifting from a mix of urban and rural, to primarily rural. With DDES' land base shifting toward rural properties, the blend of permit types is also shifting. While residential and commercial building permits constitute a significant amount of DDES work within both the urban and rural areas, the work associated with subdivisions is significantly less in the rural area. The following figure illustrates the difference in DDES time spent working on subdivisions located in the rural area versus the urban area.



DDES continuously monitors its workload relative to the changing dynamics of urban incorporations and annexations and makes the appropriate adjustments to department staffing levels and services.

### **Equity and Social Justice**

Launched in 2008, the Equity and Social Justice Initiative (ESJ) addresses the underlying causes of social inequities—including disparate access to transportation and affordable housing, quality education, natural resources and parks, safe neighborhoods and health care - to ensure opportunities for all communities in King County.

ESJ aligns with DDES' Vision and Mission. DDES initiated the following ESJ projects:

- **Form-Based Code project.** DDES initiated a project to examine the feasibility of replacing the current conventional land use code with a Form-Based Code. Using a more flexible and outcome-based approach to regulating development; the new code will focus on the public space, while encouraging important policy objectives such as affordable housing and walkability, to create vibrant mixed-use neighborhoods. To assist in the development of the new Form-Based Code, King County has selected three demonstration areas, two in the urban area and one in the rural area.
- **Affordable/Workforce Housing project.** The department created an interagency team to coordinate the siting, funding, permitting, and development of infrastructure to partner and/or support and facilitate affordable and workforce

housing projects in unincorporated King County and on King County surplus properties. The inter-departmental team was created with staff from DDES, the Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS), and the Property Services Section of the Department of Executive Services (DES).

- ESJ Reserve Fund. In conjunction with a strategy of adjusting permit fees in 2010, DDES will establish an ESJ reserve fund to reduce the permit costs for selected affordable housing proposals. This strategy would require the modification of K.C.C. 27, with the adoption of the 2010 Budget, to direct money to an ESJ reserve fund, when the DDES' end-of-year Undesignated Fund Balance exceeds one-eighth of the year's appropriated expenditures. Money held within the ESJ reserve fund could be administered by DCHS and used to subsidize permit cost for approved affordable housing proposals.

DDES continues to seek opportunities to further equity and social justice.

## Appendix B

### DDES' Workload Statistics

The following demonstrates the permit application volumes for subdivisions and building permits and the numbers of code enforcement cases opened and closed in years 2004 through May 2009. The permit volumes have decreased slightly since 2004 due to annexations and incorporations and, more recently and significantly, due to the depressed economy and weak housing market. The volume of code enforcement cases has remained steady, despite the loss of unincorporated areas to annexations and incorporations. Due to general fund reductions, DDES has lost code enforcement staff with a resulting increase in each code enforcement officer's case load.

Permits Reviewed by Year						
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	*2009
Small Subdivisions	33	57	67	66	66	15
Large Subdivisions	29	24	19	21	18	6
Building Permits	6,096	5,839	5,270	5,466	3,898	1,132

\*Through May 2009

Code Enforcement Cases Opened and Closed by Year						
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	*2009
<b>Opened</b>	1,576	1,413	1,781	1,813	1,892	621
<b>Closed</b>	2,038	1,612	1,877	1,773	1,929	599

\*Through May 2009

The following tables compare the number of new lots applied for and recorded in King County from 2000-20007, as compared with Pierce, Snohomish and Kitsap Counties. Both Pierce and Snohomish Counties had significant spikes in subdivision activity during 2004 to 2008. King County's growth has been somewhat steadier throughout this decade with significant spikes occurring during the 1990s.

Number of Lots Applied For								
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
<b>King</b>	3,980	1,912	1,777	4,142	6,650	3,748	3,677	2,636
<b>Kitsap</b>	285	N/A	*21	747	N/A	N/A	N/A	4,552
<b>Pierce</b>	2,196	2,604	3,458	5,174	3,645	6,327	3,595	2,230
<b>Snohomish</b>	1,529	1,410	2,837	3,699	7,167	7,125	9,232	4,178

\*unincorporated county only data, no data for the cities.

Number of Lots Applied Recorded								
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
<b>King</b>	3,335	4,768	4,295	5,334	4,023	4,134	3,556	3,018
<b>Kitsap</b>	285	413	413	541	265	331	367	766
<b>Pierce</b>	2,824	2,303	2,303	2,145	4,129	2,995	3,728	3,288
<b>Snohomish</b>	2,675	2,391	2,391	3,138	3,580	3,775	4,016	3,968

*This baseline data from the past seven years was used to help establish priority issues for the next three to five years.*