VISION & FRAMEWORK

Vision for King County 2030

It is the year 2030 and our county has changed significantly in the roughly 40 years that have elapsed since the first Countywide Planning Policies were adopted in 1992. In many ways this is a result of the successful public-private partnership that has supported a diversified, sustainable regional economy and has managed and accommodated growth while maintaining the quality of life and the natural environment throughout King County.

King County in 2030 is characterized by:

• **Protected Critical Areas.** Effective stewardship of the environment has preserved and protected the critical areas in the County, including wetlands, aquifer recharge areas, and fish and wildlife conservation areas. These critical areas continue to provide beneficial functions and values for reducing flooding, protecting water quality, supporting biodiversity, and enriching our quality of life for future generations as the as the region’s population continues to grow.

• **Viable Rural Area.** The Rural Area, established in 1992, is permanently protected with a clear boundary between Rural and Urban Areas. The successful protection of these lands is due in large part to continued innovation within the Urban Growth Area to create new ways to use land efficiently and sustainably. In this way, there is minimal pressure to convert rural lands. The Rural Area is a viable option for those seeking a lifestyle contrast to the Urban Growth Area. The pressure to urbanize the Rural Area has also been lessened by market pressures to use the land for agriculture.

• **Bountiful Agricultural Areas and Productive Forest Lands.** More people are farming and a greater number of residents are benefiting from King County agricultural products, which can be purchased through a network of farmers markets and farm stands throughout the county. Since 2010, the increase in productive farming in the Agricultural Production District and in the Rural Area has accelerated as more residents seek locally grown food. Thriving markets now exist throughout the county for these products. The forests of the Pacific Northwest remain as some of the most productive in the world with large scale commercial forestry prevalent in the eastern half of the county.

• **Vibrant, diverse and compact urban communities.** Within the Urban Growth Area little undeveloped land now exists and urban infrastructure has been extended to fully serve the entire Urban Growth Area. Development activity is focused on redevelopment to create vibrant
neighborhoods where residents can walk, bicycle or use public transit for most of their needs. Improvements to the infrastructure now focus on maintaining existing capacity as opposed to extending the infrastructure into previously unserved areas. Because of the innovations developed in public and private partnerships, there is still ample capacity to accommodate the planned population and employment growth targets within the Urban Growth Area.

Much of the growth in employment and new housing occurs in the Urban Centers. These centers successfully provide a mixture of living, working, cultural, and recreational activities for all members of the community. All the centers are linked together by a high-capacity transit system, including light rail and high capacity bus transit. Transit stations and hubs are within walking distance to all parts of the center and the high capacity transit system facilitates people moving easily from one center to another. Within the collection of Urban Centers there is balance between jobs and housing. Each center has developed its own successful urban character and all are noted for their livability, vibrancy, healthy environment, design, and pedestrian focus.

Smaller concentrations of businesses are distributed throughout the Urban Growth Area to provide goods and services to surrounding residential areas. Most residents are within walking distance of commercial areas, fostering a healthy community through physical exercise and a sense of neighborhood. Local transit systems provide convenient connections to the Urban Centers and elsewhere within the Urban Growth Area.

Manufacturing/Industrial Centers continue to thrive and function as important hubs of the regional economy. These areas too are well served by transportation systems that emphasize the efficient movement of people, goods and information to and within Manufacturing/Industrial Centers as well as connecting to other regions.

The entire Urban Growth Area is characterized by superior urban design with an open space network that defines and separates, yet links, the various jurisdictions and central places. Countywide and regional facilities have been equitably dispersed—located where needed, sited unobtrusively—and have provided appropriate incentives and amenities to the surrounding neighborhoods.

Rural Cities have created unique urban environments within the Rural Area and provide commercial services and employment opportunities for their residents. These include retail, business, educational and social services for residents both of cities and the surrounding Rural Area while protecting and supporting the surrounding Rural Area and Resource Lands.

Federal, state and regional funds have been used to further this land use plan and to fund needed regional facilities while local resources focus on funding local and neighborhood facilities. The sharing of resources to accomplish common goals is done so that the regional plan can succeed and all can benefit.
The economy is vibrant, vital, and sustainable, and emphasizes diversity in the range of goods and information produced and the services provided. Regional cooperation has focused on economic development activities that have retained and expanded key industries such as aerospace, software, and biotechnology while using the resources of the region to attract new business clusters such as in renewable energy. Businesses continue to locate in our county because of the high quality of life; the preservation of the natural environment; the emphasis on providing a superior education; the predictability brought about by the management of growth and the effectiveness of public-private partnerships supporting these attributes.

Housing opportunities for all incomes and lifestyles exist throughout the county and with the balanced transportation system access to employment is convenient and reliable. Innovation in the development of a diverse range of housing types has been fundamental in accommodating population growth. The diversity of housing types has allowed residents to stay within their community as their housing needs change.

King County communities are extraordinarily diverse culturally and this has been embraced and celebrated by the residents of King County. The needs of residents are attended to by a social service system that emphasizes prevention but stands ready to respond to direct needs as well. There is a sense of social equity within our communities and all share equitably in the distribution of and access to parks, open space, and vibrant neighborhood centers.

The Urban Growth Area is completely located within cities, which are the primary providers of urban services. Where appropriate, sub-regional consortia have been created for certain services, and King County government is recognized as a significant provider of regional services as well as the coordinator of local services to the Rural Area and Resource Lands.

Residents and businesses have recognized that, over time, through clear and reasonable timelines and financing commitments, issues will be addressed. Residents and businesses trust in their local governments because the plans and promises made to manage growth starting in 1992 have been followed. Change is accepted and proceeds in an orderly fashion based on the locally adopted and embraced growth management plans.

**Framework**

The year 1991 was one of tremendous change for the management of growth in King County and this environment of change gave rise to the distinctive character of the 1992 Countywide Planning Policies. While the Countywide Planning Policies have been amended periodically to address specific issues or revisions required by the Growth Management Act, the first thorough update of the Countywide Planning Policies was completed in 2011 to ensure that the Countywide Planning Policies are consistent with VISION 2040, the Growth Management Act and changes that had occurred in the previous twenty years within King County. In addition for the 2011 update, the Growth Management Planning Council directed that the revised policies include countywide direction on three new policy areas: climate change, healthy communities
and social equity. Understanding the history of the 1992 policies is important in order to establish the context for the revised policies.

In 1991 five major conditions gave rise to the first Countywide Planning Policies and the process used in their development and adoption:

1. **In 1985**, the King County Council adopted a Comprehensive Plan that for the first time established a clear boundary between Urban and Rural Areas and set forth standards to delineate a clear development character for each.

2. **In 1991**, the adoption of the Growth Management Act transformed the way that local jurisdictions looked at land use planning as well as how they interacted with neighboring jurisdictions.
   A fundamental requirement of the Growth Management Act was coordination between a shared countywide vision on how growth would be planned for and accommodated and how this would be implemented by local jurisdictions. In 1991, the Growth Management Act was amended to include the requirement that Countywide Planning Policies be adopted to describe this vision and how these relationships would be created. These provisions gave rise to the creation of the Growth Management Planning Council – an advisory group of elected officials from jurisdictions throughout the county charged with overseeing the preparation of the Countywide Planning Policies.
   Since the Growth Management Act was new and many jurisdictions had not created a comprehensive plan before, the Countywide Planning Policies became a guide for jurisdictions to follow in complying with the Growth Management Act in areas as diverse as critical area regulation to local growth targets.

3. **In 1991**, the Puget Sound Council of Governments was dissolved and replaced with the Puget Sound Regional Council that initially had significantly reduced responsibilities for regional land use planning and coordination.
   Without an effective regional body for land use planning, it was necessary for the Puget Sound counties to identify their own process and organization for developing the Countywide Planning Policies. In the case of King County, this was the Growth Management Planning Council. Subsequently, as its responsibilities were expanded over time, the Puget Sound Regional Council developed VISION 2040, the multi-county vision and planning policies that set the structure for these revised Countywide Planning Policies.

4. **By 1991**, the Suburban Cities Association had changed from a loose coalition of cities outside of Seattle to a formal organization with the ability to represent constituent jurisdictions in regional forums.
5. Prior to the development of the Countywide Planning Policies, King County and METRO attempted and failed to win electoral support for merger. This defeat left jurisdictions with concerns about the relationship between city and county governments, and further confusion about the roles of governments in the Urban Growth Area.

Because of these conditions and the environment they fostered, jurisdictions in King County decided to go further than just meeting the specific statutory requirements for such policies. The 1992 King County Countywide Planning Policies provided direction for many issues related to growth management and established a policy structure for subsequent issue resolution.

Since their adoption, many of the initial Countywide Planning Policies have been codified into local regulations or carried out in regional or statewide arenas and no longer need to be included in them. Through amendments to the King County Charter and interlocal agreements, the relationship between county and city governments has been clearly defined and annexations and incorporations have brought most of the unincorporated urban area into the cities.

Other key actions that were required by the 1992 Countywide Planning Policies along with their current status are described below:

- Establish housing and employment targets for each jurisdiction – completed in 1994 and periodically updated pursuant to the Countywide Planning Policies;
- Adopt local comprehensive plans pursuant to the Growth Management Act and Countywide Planning Policies – each jurisdiction within King County has an adopted plan that is periodically updated;
- Develop land use capacity and urban density evaluation program – developed and then superseded by the King County Buildable Lands Program as required by the Growth Management Act;
- Develop a growth management monitoring program – King County Benchmarks program established in 1994 and annually updated as described in policy FW-2; and
- Evaluate the need to change the Urban Growth Boundary and work to maintain a permanent Rural Area – established in 1994 and periodically reviewed as described in the Development Patterns chapter.

Framework Policies

Amendments. While much has been accomplished, the Countywide Planning Policies were never intended to be static and will require amendment over time to reflect changed conditions. While the formal policy development is done by the Growth Management Planning
Council, ideas for new policies begin in a variety of areas including individual jurisdictions. Policy FW-1 below describes the process for amending the Countywide Planning Policies:

**FW-1** Maintain the currency of the Countywide Planning Policies through periodic review and amendment. Initiate and review all amendments at the Growth Management Planning Council through the process described below:

a) Only the Growth Management Planning Council may propose amendments to the Countywide Planning Policies except for amendments to the Urban Growth Area that may also be proposed by King County in accordance with policies DP-15 and DP-16;

b) Growth Management Planning Council recommends amendments to the King County Council for consideration, possible revision, and approval;

c) A majority vote of the King County Council both constitutes approval of the amendments and ratification on behalf of the residents of Unincorporated King County;

d) After approval and ratification by the King County Council, amendments are forwarded to each city and town for ratification. Amendments cannot be modified during the city ratification process; and

e) Amendments must be ratified within 90 days of King County approval and require affirmation by the county and cities and towns representing at least 70 percent of the county population and 30 percent of those jurisdictions. Ratification is either by an affirmative vote of the city’s or town’s council or by no action being taken within the ratification period.

**Monitoring.** Periodically evaluating the effectiveness of the Countywide Planning Policies is key to continuing their value to the region and local jurisdictions. In 1994 King County and cities established the current Benchmarks program to monitor and evaluate key regional indicators.

**FW-2** Monitor and benchmark the progress of the Countywide Planning Policies towards achieving the Regional Growth Strategy inclusive of the environment, development patterns, housing, the economy, transportation and the provision of public services. Identify corrective actions to be taken if benchmarks are not being achieved.

**Investment.** Key to ensuring the success of the Countywide Planning Policies is investment in regional infrastructure and programs. Balancing the use of limited available funds between regional and local needs is extremely complex.

**FW-3** Work collaboratively to identify and seek regional, state, and federal funding sources to invest in infrastructure, strategies, and programs to enable the full implementation of the Countywide Planning Policies. Balance needed regional investments with local needs when making funding determinations.