



Rural Communities

Objective:

Preserve the unique character of our rural communities in collaboration with rural residents

Strategy:

Meet the transit needs of low income and other under-served populations

What is happening in King County?

The rural preservation policies set forth in this Objective of the King County Strategic Plan began in the 1970s when the citizens in King County came together to save the Pike Place Market, an important market for our agricultural and fisheries products and a culturally important location. The momentum this effort created combined with concern about urban sprawl on prime farmland enabled the successful passage of the Farmlands and Open Space Preservation Bond in 1979, which allowed for King County purchase of development rights on rural lands. Since that time, citizens, stakeholder organizations, and the King County government have continued to work together to ensure our rural communities and rural businesses, especially the rural resource industries of agriculture and forestry, that make up the county's rural character are preserved.

In the 1980s, the County's Farmland Preservation Program was able to purchase the development rights on 12,600 acres of agricultural land in the rural area from the monies obtained by passage of the Bond in 1979 and today more than 13,200 acres are protected. The adoption of the 1994 King County Comprehensive Plan established the Urban Growth Boundary, thus designating 81 percent of King County's land area into land uses that are considered rural in nature. Chapter Three of the Plan outlines the County's approach to preserving the county's rural legacy, rural communities, and natural resource lands. While both agricultural and forestry natural resource lands are protected by numerous policies including being designated as Agriculture and Forest Production Districts, lands within the Rural Area designation have no such policy protections. Rural Area residents and stakeholder organizations have asked that in the next major update to the Plan, in 2016, additional policies be explored by the County with rural residents similar to those in place for the natural resource lands.

As the urban unincorporated areas become part of cities, King County's local services focus is evolving from being a provider of both urban and rural services to one that is primarily rural. In addition to the benefits property owners receive from participation in the Farmland Preservation Program, tax incentive programs include the Public Benefit Rating System, and Timber Land, Forest and Agriculture Current Use taxation programs.

In 2011, King County established 6 Rural Community Service Areas (CSA) in order to improve service delivery and communication in the rural unincorporated area. Each CSA has an assigned Primary Point of Contact who is familiar with the local concerns and issues and the geographic area. While King County staff have long worked collaboratively to improve services for rural residents,

2012 is seeing the development of the first CSA Work Plans. These Work Plans will provide information to rural residents about programs, projects, and on-going services; along with the county staff contact for the service or project.

The long term goal of future CSA work plans includes holding CSA-wide meetings with county decision makers to discuss potential department projects prior to budget development.

In addition, King County maintains a Community Engagement Grant Program, with the first round of grants to be awarded in late 2012. The program leverages community funds and/or in-kind services with small grants to realize local projects that offer unincorporated area residents opportunities to improve their communities and/or enhance local organizations outreach.

What role does King County play?

King County, including both the County Council and Executive Staff, has a major leadership role in ensuring protection of the rural area and resource lands, by maintaining the related policies set forth in the County-wide Planning Policies, the Comprehensive Plan and the Strategic Plan. Since 1994, the County has made the decision to maintain the existing urban growth boundary, based in part on strong citizen support, even with pressures to adjust the boundary during major updates to the Comprehensive Plan. (Major updates to the Comprehensive Plan occur every four years.) Based on this leadership and policy basis, county staff continues to develop and implement on-going programs to support and enhance rural stewardship and economic health.

What role does King County play?

The national and Washington State economies play a factor in preserving rural character, because the health of the rural economy, including agriculture, forestry or small commercial businesses, must remain viable to preserve the traditional land uses that support rural character. Additionally, the high cost of land, along with the expansion of suburban type development throughout the rural area also changes the traditional rural character of the area. King County is already experiencing some of this type of development, as several urban industries have high paying salaries, individuals can afford to purchase large acreage rural and/or resource land and build large scale housing, often referred to as "mega-mansions." This type of development will continue to alter the use of land within both the rural and resource lands, ultimately changing the character of the area.

What can you do?

The King County Comprehensive Plan undergoes a major update every four years. This update opens the door for changes in policy and to the Urban Growth Boundary. King County residents can use the update process to indicate support for preserving the character and land uses found in our rural and resource lands. Additionally, residents and property owners can use programs that aid in maintaining the character of the rural area and supports continuation of these important programs.

Related Links

[Rural Services](#)

[Community Service Areas](#)

[King County Comprehensive Plan](#)

King County Growth Management Planning Council

Agricultural and Forestry Services

Forest Stewardship Planning Information

Technical Notes

- The 2012 King County Resident Survey was conducted in April and May of 2012. Surveys were administered in English, Spanish, and Mandarin. Of the 3,000 households that were selected to receive the survey, 266 completed the survey by mail and 759 completed the survey by phone for a total of 1,025 completed surveys (King County's population is about 1.9 million people). There were at least 250 respondents from Seattle and 125 surveys from each of six other areas. The overall results of the survey were weighted to reflect the actual population of each of the seven geographic areas of the County. The overall results of the survey have a precision of at least +/-3.0% at the 95% level of confidence. The results for the City of Seattle have a precision of at least +/- 6.2% at the 95% level of confidence and the results for each of the other six areas have a precision of at least +/- 8.7% at the 95% level of confidence. All results include "Don't Know" responses in calculations.
- For the table Acres and Parcels of Open Space in Rural King County, owned in fee means King County owns the development rights to the parcel through a fee agreement with private owners. The term easement refers a conservation easement. Conservation easements come in many different forms and the specific conditions may vary depending on the purpose of the easement. Generally speaking, a conservation easement is like a blanket spread across a property. In the areas covered by the blanket, no new development may take place.

Charts and Maps

2011 Acres and Parcels of Open Space in Rural King County

	Acres	Number of Parcels	Proportion of Rural Acres
All Rural parcels	1,065,718	106,381	100%
All Publicly-owned	624,961	5,420	59%
King County-owned in Fee	25,659	1,108	2%
King County Easement	159,843	1,094	15%
King County-protected by Fee or Easement*	184,204	2,137	17%

**Discrepancy between this percentage and sum of KC-Fee+KC Easements relates to overlap in cases where easements were acquired first, then land later purchased in fee.*

Rural Resident Perceptions of Input into King County Decisions



