

Greater Maple Valley Unincorporated Area Council (GMVUAC)
P.O. Box 111
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February 1, 2016

To: Sponsors of Senate Bill 6426: steve.conway@leg.wa.gov; bruce.dammeier@leg.wa.gov; dean.takko@leg.wa.gov; randi.becker@leg.wa.gov; mark.mullet@leg.wa.gov; tim.shelton@leg.wa.gov; maralyn.chase@leg.wa.gov Committee on Government Operations & State Security Chair: pam.roach@leg.wa.gov Vice-Chair: don.benton@leg.wa.gov Vice-Chair: kirk.pearson@leg.wa.gov Members: brian.dansel@leg.wa.gov; cyrus.habib@leg.wa.gov; john.mccoy@leg.wa.gov

Re: Proposed State Bill 6426 Referred to Committee on Government Operations & Security--"An act relating to essential public facilities; and adding a new section to chapter 36.70A RCW."

Honorable Senators,

We have significant problems with proposed Senate Bill 6426. Siting schools outside the Urban Growth Area (UGA) precipitates a myriad of problems including increased transportation costs, need to provide urban services (such as sewers and water) to outlying locations, and the acceleration of urban sprawl (please see our Letter to the Editor on the importance of maintaining the integrity of the Urban-Growth Boundary published in the January 17 Seattle Times: <http://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/urban-growth-boundary-it-retains-thriving-businesses-and-and-strong-workforce/>).

Herein we describe the work conducted by the highly successful King County School Siting Task Force (SSTF) and provide concerns with specific language within proposed Senate Bill 6426.

We consider Senate Bill 6426 unnecessary, because local solutions, such as the SSTF, work better than a top-down State solution, as each situation possesses different circumstances. We also see no connection between Senate Bill 6426 and helping to satisfy provisions of the State Supreme Court's McCleary decision.

INTRODUCTION

The Greater Maple Valley Unincorporated Area Council (GMVUAC) represents over 18,000 citizens living in the unincorporated area of southeast King County. Ours is a vast rural area. We and the citizens we represent are of all political stripes, as is our Vision: "Our community's Rural Character will be supported by facilitating strong local ties and communication between the public, organizations, and government; promoting locally owned businesses and supporting quality education; protecting the environment, and maintaining landowners' rights and responsibilities; promoting controlled and well-planned growth with appropriate infrastructure; ensuring proper representation for rural interests and needs; and supporting the health and safety and the privacy of our vibrant community."

We have significant problems with the subject proposed Senate Bill. Siting schools outside the Urban Growth Area (UGA) precipitates a myriad of problems including increased transportation costs, need to provide urban services (such as sewers and water) to outlying locations, and the acceleration of urban sprawl.

Over the years we have consistently strongly opposed allowing urban-related schools sites in the Rural Area to be developed under policies that allow sewer hookups. We have repeatedly opposed policies that look on the Rural Area as a "land bank" for urban-related uses. Urban-related schools should be sited in those urban communities to which they serve to the benefit of all.

In late 2011 and early 2012 the 32-member King County SSTF, of which one of our members was a part, conducted a comprehensive site-specific study of all King County School District capacity current and future needs and lands owned outside the UGA. The Superintendent of every School District in King County which possessed undeveloped rural land and an intent to site schools thereupon was a member of the SSTF. The remainder of the SSTF roster represented a broad and deep level of experience and was comprised of School District subject-matter experts; City Council members; City Mayors; Unincorporated Area Council members; community residents; members of the legal establishment; Children's Public health experts; and King County Department Directors. Additional support was provided by members of the Puget Sound Regional Council; Suburban Cities Association; WA Sewer and Water Districts Association; Real Estate community; and Environmental organizations.

The SSTF conducted its 5-mo study guided by the following State, regional, and County policy and regulatory framework: State Growth Management Act (including RCWs 36.70A.030 and 36.70A.110 [4]); VISION 2040 (Multi-County Planning Policies); King County County-Wide Planning Policies (CPPs); King County Comprehensive Plan (KCCP); and King County Code (KCC). A great deal of information was used

including Demographic data (from 2000 to 2010 King County's rural population under the age of 18 declined by 18.4%, while the urban under-18 population increased 8.3%); School enrollment projections; School construction funding needs, County road maintenance funding shortfalls; and Children's public health impacts. All this was processed through a lens focussed on specific local needs.

The SSTF reached unanimity on a comprehensive set of Recommendations which included a site-by-site solution set for every School District-owned rural property, along with guidelines for future school siting. One size did not fit all, as every solution for every School District was unique. The highly diverse, all-hands-at-the-table SSTF has been commended for an excellent job and in both respecting the Rural Area and its citizens, while working towards solutions that benefit school children, their parents, and their communities. The comprehensive SSTF Final Report, along with 21 Appendices, can be found at: <http://www.kingcounty.gov/elected/executive/constantine/initiatives/school-siting-task-force.aspx>.

CONCERNS

We take general issue with the entire concept of the Senate Bill based on the extensive work conducted by the King County SSTF described above. Such a Bill is not welcome or needed by the residents and school districts of King County. In fact, it would provide only negative impacts and should be dropped from any further consideration.

We take specific issue with the following passages:

P. 1., Lns. 6-8: "(1) The comprehensive plan of each county and city that is planning under RCW 36.70A.040 must identify schools as essential public facilities outside the urban growth area."

We, nor did the SSTF, see any need to site "schools as essential public facilities outside the urban growth area.

P. 2., Lns. 10-12: "(d) Any utility extensions or urban services necessary to serve schools outside the urban growth area are provided for, and are solely dedicated for school purposes;..."

Such "public services," especially, sewers, enable urban sprawl into the rural areas of King County.

P. 2., Lns. 13-14: "(e) Transit-oriented site planning and traffic demand management programs are implemented;..."

There are no "transit-oriented site planning and traffic demand management programs" outside of the UGA, nor are they needed or an efficient use of Public funds in the rural areas, where populations are relatively low and residences generally spread further apart.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We strongly recommend dropping Senate Bill 6426, since it is unnecessary. The State Growth Management Act does not prohibit siting schools in rural areas. We wish to retain local control. It is far better to let local conditions dictate how to approach school siting in counties across the state, which all have very different circumstances.

As detailed above, King County School Districts, cities, citizens, and many organizations already have addressed school siting at the local level on a site-specific basis. Other counties already possess the flexibility, through the State Growth Management Act, needed to address any local school siting issues they may have.

Sincerely,

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Chairman, Greater Maple Valley Unincorporated Area Council

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