

Greater Maple Valley Unincorporated Area Council (GMVUAC)
P.O. Box 111
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To: Sponsors of House Bill 2377--State House Representatives:

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Re: Proposed House Bill 2377 Referred to Committee on Local Government--"Establishing schools as essential public facilities within the growth management act."

Honorable Representatives,

We have significant problems with proposed House Bill 2377. 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 House Bill 2377.

We consider the schools siting portion of House Bill 2377 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 House Bill 2377 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 House 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 including school siting in the House Bill based on the extensive work conducted by the King County SSTF described above. Such inclusion in the Bill is not 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 passage:

P. 1., Lns. 11-13: "... The legislature declares that schools are essential public facilities and intends to ensure that schools can be built in the communities they serve."

We completely agree. However, in King County, schools already are sited in the "communities they serve." As stated above, the King County rural population under the age of 18 has been declining for years and continues to do so, while the urban under-18 population has been increasing for years and continues to do so. Allow us to maintain local control.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We strongly recommend dropping the school siting portion of House Bill 2377, since it is unnecessary. The State Growth Management Act does not generally prohibit siting of schools. 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,

Steve Hiester (gmvac_chair@hotmail.com)
Chairman, Greater Maple Valley Unincorporated Area Council

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