

June 28, 2022

King County Executive Dow Constantine, King County Council Chair Balducci and Council Members Dembowski, Dunn, Kohl-Welles, McDermott, Perry, von Reichbauer, Upthegrove, and Zahilay,

Our coalition of environmental, agricultural, community councils/associations, and community advocates are writing to respectfully request that King County pass legislation that prohibits wineries, breweries, and distilleries (WBDs) in the Rural Area and Agriculture zones. These businesses belong inside the county's Urban Growth Area, including our Rural Cities.

Undermining the GMA and Threatening the Environment and Local Agriculture

In 1990 the Washington State legislature passed a landmark land use law called the Growth Management Act (GMA) to stop costly urban sprawl and conserve our farmland, forests, wetlands, watersheds, green spaces, and habitat for fish and wildlife.

In rural King County, wineries, breweries, and distilleries operate as manufacturing facilities and retail shops. They are not small cottage businesses because they are allowed to produce alcohol from grapes and grains grown elsewhere and truck in large quantities of alcohol made offsite by multiple manufacturers. Their retail operations draw large crowds of customers to consume alcohol and food. Building sizes range from 1,500 sq. ft. up to 8,000 sq. ft. If allowed, a proliferation of manufacturing and retail oriented, high intensity businesses would sprawl across 302 square miles of King County's Rural Area and 67 square miles of Agriculture land.

Like bars, taverns, retail shops, and other manufacturing facilities, WBDs belong inside the Urban Growth Area where necessary commercial infrastructure exists, such as sewer hookup, sidewalks, stoplights and turn lanes, streetlights, and parking lots. This kind of urban infrastructure is not allowed in the Rural Area and Agriculture zones.

Businesses without proper infrastructure create toxic runoff and cause flooding. These impacts, together with significantly increased land prices, threaten protected nearby farmland. Polluted groundwater, reduced instream flows, and habitat loss harms fish and wildlife. Public safety issues result from parked cars and pedestrians walking on the side of narrow, unlit rural roads and highways, and no turn lanes increase traffic backups. Manufacturing facilities and retail stores that draw large crowds of people and cars are inconsistent with state and county laws that protect the Rural Area and Agriculture lands.

King County is Not Walla Walla or Napa

Washington's wineries alone make up an \$8 billion industry, which is growing rapidly as temperatures rise and wildfires rage in California. There are more than 1,000 wineries, 500 breweries, and 150 distilleries in Washington State. In 2019, Woodinville's 130-plus wineries and tasting rooms had more than 800,000 visitors. But unlike Walla Walla or Napa, grapes and grains for alcohol production don't grow well in King County. The major interest for WBDs in King County is to create retail stores near a large population center.

County Experiment Created Unfair Economics for WBDs

In 2003, the King County Council experimented with allowing WBDs in the Rural Area and Agriculture zones and put in place important restrictions to minimize negative impacts. The restrictions encouraged the majority of WBDs to locate inside the Urban Growth Area. Today approximately thirty WBDs operate in the Rural Area, with many violating the code restrictions in order to enable retail centric businesses.

This experiment creates an unfair economic playing field. WBDs inside the urban area pay more for land, leases, permitting and operations as it includes urban infrastructure and space with less restrictions. Those operating on Rural Area and Agriculture lands pay much less, allowing them to generate unfair profits. WBDs permitted solely inside the Urban Growth Area eliminates this unfair playing field.

Setting a Dangerous Precedent

If WBDs set up manufacturing and retail stores in the Rural Area and Agriculture zones, what prevents other industries from demanding similar allowances? Why should a cattle rancher located elsewhere be stopped from setting up a slaughterhouse and butcher shop? Or a wheat grower from setting up a bread factory and retail bakery? In fact, one illegal coffee shop with baked goods already exists on Agriculture land in King County. Locating wineries, breweries and distilleries solely inside the Urban Growth Area removes this dangerous precedent.

Stop Wasting Taxpayer Dollars

Futurewise, Friends of Sammamish Valley, and farm businesses appealed King County's Adult Beverage Ordinance 19030, passed in December 2019, to the Growth Management Hearings Board. The Board invalidated the ordinance twice, yet the county prosecutors continue to waste taxpayer dollars defending it. The council can end this nonsense today by repealing 19030.

Time to End a Failed Experiment

King County's current proposed legislation allows WBDs in the Rural Area to import crops and alcohol, which together with lower costs will encourage more WBDs to locate outside the Urban Growth Area. The proposed legislation also violates the Growth Management Act and county planning policies.

Over several decades King County has spent millions of taxpayer dollars on successful rural and farmland protection programs including the Farmland Protection Program, the Land Conservation Initiative, the Critical Areas Ordinance, and salmon and orca recovery programs. Both the appeal of 19030 and the proposed new legislation fly in the face of taxpayer dollars being spent on these programs.

It is time to put a stop to this 2003 experiment and pass legislation that is GMA compliant.

A Reasonable WIN-WIN-WIN Solution Exists

A problem that continues to escalate can be solved with straightforward actions:

1. Repeal Adult Beverage Ordinance 19030.
2. Pass a GMA-compliant Adult Beverage Ordinance allowing WBDs solely in the Urban Growth Area, including Rural Cities.
3. Utilize available processes to grandfather existing businesses compliant with previous legislation.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this extremely important matter.

Sincerely,

Please see signatories on the following page.

Environmental Organizations

350 Eastside
350 Seattle
Friends of Sammamish Valley
OneBothell
Orca Conservancy
Sierra Club Washington Chapter
SnoKing Watershed Council
Water Tenders
Whale Scout

Individuals

Doug McClelland
Gretchen Garth
Judy Courshon
Ken Konigsmark
Nancy Iscovitz
Susan Boundy Sanders

Retail Businesses inside Woodinville UGA

Apple Farm Village
Hollywood Vineyards Retail Center

UACs and Rural Advocacy Organizations

Enumclaw Plateau Community Association
Greater Maple Valley Unincorporated Area Council
Green River Coalition
Green River/Lake Holm Association
Hollywood Hill Association
Soos Creek Area Response
Upper Bear Creek Unincorporated Area Council

Farm Businesses and Farm Support Organizations

A Farm in the Sammamish Valley
Aash Farms
Alki Farms
Black Farmers Collective
Cackling Coyote Farm
Crown Bees
Eunomia Farms
Farms for Life
Farmstand Local Foods
Friendly Hmong Farms
Gladstone Farm (in Rural Area)
Ground Work
Olympic Nursery
Orchard and Vine Farm (in Rural Area)
Regeneration Farm
Root and Rabbit Farm
Root Connection (first CSA in WA State - 1987)
Root of Our Times Cooperative
Sammamish Farms
Sammamish Valley Alliance
Sammamish Valley Grange #286
Small Axe Farm
Songbird Haven Farm
Sweet Hollow Farm
The C-T Corporation
The Common Acre
Theary's Flowers and Produce Farm
Tuk Muk Farm
Washington Women in Food Systems