

To: King County Executive Girmay Zahilay, Transition Committee  
From: Joint Team (see list of organizations at bottom of letter)  
Date: December 1, 2025  
R.E: Urgent Need for KC DLS-Permitting Reform

Congratulations on your election as King County Executive. We look forward to working with you on tackling County challenges.

As previously discussed with you, Rural King County is dying a death by a thousand cuts, which negatively impacts all citizens of King County. Major cultural reform of the KC Department of Local Services-Permitting division (DLS-P) is required to address this challenge. “Rural” includes the Agriculture (A/APD), Forest (F), Mining (M), and Rural Area (RA) zones and lies outside the Urban Growth Boundary. These lands represent approximately 80% of King County.

Rural lands are protected by a solid body of law and policies that start with the Washington State Growth Management Act and cascade through Vision 2050, County Planning Policies, the KC Comprehensive Plan and KC Code. But DLS-P often does not follow the rule of law as required when granting permits for Rural lands, and enforcement of both Code and Permit Conditions is almost nonexistent. The division operates mostly as a black box, with little to no transparency or accountability. As a result, commercial sprawl is allowed for certain special interests to their own economic benefit, while law-abiding citizens and small business owners are disadvantaged. Illegal exploitation of Rural lands is unfair to property owners/renters who pay higher prices for land, higher taxes, and higher costs for infrastructure in urban zoned lands.

A problem many years in the making, it is an open secret that the laws protecting Rural lands can be ignored, which has rapidly increased special-interest commercialization of these ‘protected’ lands.

Sprawl creates increased demand for roads, infrastructure (e.g. sewer hookup), and human services (e.g. policing) into far-flung parts of the County where it doesn’t belong and is expensive to provide. In zero-sum budgets, sprawl pulls funds from inside the urban areas that are needed for more housing, transit, and human services, and makes economic justice harder to achieve. Sprawl hinders the density needed to support better transit solutions. Protecting Rural lands is required to meet the KC Strategic Climate Action Plan (SCAP) goals, provide local food security, ensure clean and sufficient water, support declining salmon populations, and secure wildlife habitat, including for pollinators. Citizens living in increasingly dense urban areas also rely on open spaces for mental health and recreation. Time and effort spent by DLS-P jumping through hoops to allow sprawl for

special interests could also be better spent on permitting for housing in the unincorporated urban area.

Put simply, protecting Rural is the other side of the coin to creating healthy, livable, sustainable, and equitable cities. One can't happen without the other. Upholding the integrity of the Urban Growth Boundary is critical to meeting County goals.

As KC Executive, you are the "Mayor of Rural" and serve as our local government. We urge you to make real cultural reform of the DLS-P division a priority and ensure they abide by the laws that protect Rural lands. Now, with a new administration forming, it is the right time to make this long and increasingly needed change.

We stand ready to help you and your administration in any way we can. Rural leaders across KC have decades of knowledge and experience on matters related to DLS-P and Rural lands.

Thank you for your consideration,

**Rural Area Organizations:**

[Enumclaw Plateau Comm Assoc;](#)

[Four Creeks UAC;](#)

[Friends of Sammamish Valley;](#)

[Greater Maple Valley UAC;](#)

[Green River Coalition;](#)

[Green Valley/Lake Holm Assoc;](#)

[Soos Creek Area Response;](#)

[Upper Bear Creek UAC;](#)

[Vashon-Maury Island Community Council](#)

**Urban Unincorporated Area Organizations:**

[Fairwood Community Group;](#)

[Skyway Coalition;](#)

[West Hill Community Association](#)

**Technical Consultants:**

Environment—Terry Lavender;

Government Relations—Susan Boundy-Sanders;

Growth Management—Ken Konigsmark;

Transportation—Mike Birdsall