



School Siting

by Peter Rimbos, GMVUAC Corresponding Secretary

On Monday, February 2, 2026, from 7 - 9:30 PM at the Maple Valley Fire Station at 22225 SE 231st St and via Zoom. Topics discussed were: (1) Proposed School Siting Legislation and (2) Local Subarea Plan.

Proposed School Siting Legislation

Tahoma School District (TSD) officials were in attendance to discuss school siting issues: Superintendent, Dr. Ginger Callison; Chief Financial Officer, Bill Hernandez; Board President; Jennifer McMaster; and Board member, Nina Rose.

We discussed State Representative Lisa Callan from our 5th District recently introduced HB 2459 Concerning siting schools outside of an urban growth area. HB 2459 seeks to: (1) Expand the ability of counties planning under the Growth Management Act to authorize the siting of a school in a rural area that serves students from an urban area under certain conditions and (2) Prohibit a county or city from refusing to extend public facilities and utilities to such a school, when the site of the school is adjacent to an existing school. One of the intended purposes of HB 2459 is to allow sites not owned by a school district, but are “contiguous,” to site new schools.

In 2011 King County established a *School Siting Task Force (SSTF)*, which included citizens (the author of this article was a member) and school superintendents—including the TSD. It developed a set of recommendations by consensus. The existing ~40-ac Rural Area site on the north side of Summit-Landsburg Rd. ~1/2 mile east of Maple Valley city limits, which currently is the location of the Tahoma Middle School, was studied. Half of the site is developed with school buildings, fields, parking lots. The other half is coniferous forest (~40 ac). The entire site is surrounded on all sides by permanent open space—Rock Creek Natural Area, Maple Ridge Highlands Open Space. The developed portion of site is served by sewer, which is sized for two schools. Water service is available through the existing school on site. It was determined by the SSTF that conversion of the undeveloped portion of the site would remove existing forest and associated benefits to water quality and flood risk reduction in Cedar River Critical Aquifer Recharge Area (Class 1).

At the time of the SSTF (2012) TSD’s student population had grown by 27% since 2000 and was expected to grow by an additional 9% between 2011 and 2017 (with growth continuing thereafter). Those growth projections have been exceeded. The District has completed several capacity additions at existing schools over the last 25 years to accommodate growth needs. However, capacity pressures continue at all grade levels, but unevenly.

The SSTF encouraged TSD to: (1) Work with the county and cities in the district to explore opportunities for finding an alternative site in the UGA that would meet the pressing need for additional capacity that development of another school would provide OR (2) If no viable alternative site that fits within the district’s financial plans can be expeditiously found, the availability of sewer and an existing

school on the site present compelling reasons for development of the site to meet the district's needs. It was recommended that since the TSD site has conservation value, any new development on the site occur *adjacent* to the existing school should seek to minimize impacts to the site's forest cover.

Representative Callan has stated that HB 2459's intent is to: (1) Help find a path for TSD to finally address significant overcrowding at Tahoma High School and (2) Reduce the build cost for the district taxpayers and the school district, while meeting the intent of the UGA/UGB and SSTF. HB 2459 would allow sites that are not owned by a school district, but are "*contiguous*" to site new schools. However, that is not needed by TSD. It is not expected that HB 2459 will make it out of committee in this short State Legislative session. Representative Callan was unable to attend tonight's meeting, but has requested to address the Area Council at a future meeting when the Legislative session ends.

Also discussed were possible sites within the City of Maple Valley, specifically part of the "*Donut Hole*." King County Department of Local Services Director Leon Richardson was in attendance and he said that King County was open to looking at possibilities with that site. In the past TSD officials stated that the price was beyond what the TSD could bare. Further discussions between King County and TSD are planned ;later this month.

Local Subarea Plan

The Greater Maple Valley/Cedar River (GMV/CR) Community Service Area (CSA) Subarea Plan is now being developed. The Area Council territory makes up most of the GMV/CR CSA, so this will be the Subarea Plan for our local area. The Subarea Plan focusses on locally specific policies that address the long-range community vision over the next 20 years.

Long-Range Planning Manager, Lara Thomas, and Principal Long-Range Planner, Kaitlin Harris, both from the King County Department of Local Services (KC DLS), discussed the status of the local subarea planning work and the impending release of the *Preliminary Plan* in early March. They will convene a Community Virtual Meeting. The Public will have 30 days to provide written Comments.

The *Preliminary Plan* will include a *Vision* and *Guiding Principles* and consist of the following Chapters: *Land Use & Zoning; Housing & Human Services; Environment; Parks, Open Space, & Cultural Resources; Transportation; Services & Utilities; and Economic Development*. Each Chapter will include: *Narrative, Community Priorities, and Policies*.

Soon after the *Preliminary Plan* is released to the Public Review the Area Council's major subject-matter committees plan to hold review meetings as follows:

Growth Management Committee—*Land-Use & Zoning* and *Services & Utilities*.

Environment Committee—*Environment* and *Parks, Open Space, & Cultural Resources*.

Transportation Committee—*Transportation*.

Economic Committee—*Economic Development* and *Housing & Human Services*.

The Public is invited to participate in any and all of these meetings—the planning for which will be discussed at the Area Council's March 9 (see new date for this month only below) Monthly Meeting and posted on the [Area Council's Website](#).

Next Area Council Meeting

The next Area Council monthly meeting will be held **Monday, March 9, 2026, one week later than the usual first Monday of the month, due to a room conflict**, from 7 - 9:30 PM at the Maple Valley Fire Station at 22225 SE 231st St (across from the KC Sheriff's Precinct).

Meetings are held on the *first* Monday of the month (except for Holidays, when they are held on the *second* Monday). All meeting announcements, agendas, and Zoom information are posted on the [Area Council's Website](#) and local *NextDoor* platforms. You can also find us on our [FaceBook page](#).

Each meeting begins with an open Public Comment period where anyone can voice concerns, comments, etc.

Area Council Membership

Your Area Council, founded in 1978, is one of the longest continuously active local councils in King County. It serves as an all-volunteer, locally recognized advisory body to King County on behalf of all rural unincorporated area residents living in the Tahoma School District (TSD). The Area Council, in “*working to keep the Rural Area rural*,” collaborates *regionally* with other King County Rural Area organizations through both the *Joint Rural Team* and its *Joint Transportation Initiative*.

The twelve-seat Area Council has four open seats. If you wish to join, please send an e-mail to: info@gmvuac.org or attend (either in-person or virtually) a monthly meeting and express your interest. To be eligible to join as a *Member* you need to live *within* the TSD.

Residents, even those not living *within* the TSD, are eligible to become *Associate Members* who can serve on any Area Council Committee: *Economic, Environment, Growth Management, Transportation, Public Relations, or Train Show*—please see the Area Council’s [Website](#) and use the drop-down menu under *Committees*.

On our Home page recent *Monthly Meeting Summary Articles* can be in the *2026/2025 GMVUAC Monthly Meeting Articles* box (or by using the drop-down menu under *Correspondence*).