



**King County**

King County Countywide Planning Policies  
Biannual Planning Process to Support Public School Siting

~ F.A.Q. ~

### What is the School Siting Planning Process?

- Siting public facilities such as schools in fast-growing King County is challenging; large blocks of suitable land are scarce and expensive. The King County Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs)<sup>i</sup> call for jurisdictions and school districts to engage in collaborative planning that supports school districts and aligns with growth management policies. This means siting schools in cities and towns and urban areas where there is sufficient infrastructure and away from low-density rural, agricultural, and forested areas.
- Countywide Planning Policy PF-22 recognizes schools as an essential service and directs jurisdictions and the school district(s) serving the jurisdiction to share information and cooperatively prepare strategies to facilitate the school capacity needed to support existing and projected residential development. A critical component of this review is to determine if there is development capacity and supporting infrastructure to site needed school facilities. This process began in 2016 and occurs on a two-year cycle.
- King County convenes these meetings in the fall of even-numbered years. The cities and county discuss development and permitting trends, demographic information, infrastructure, and other planning issues. The districts discuss enrollment trends and demographics, identified school capacity planning and construction status, and current and future school funding sources. Together, the participants discuss any identified challenges and consider potential collaborative options and solutions.
- Following the completion of the meetings, County staff develop a report that is shared with the Growth Management Planning Council (GMPC)<sup>ii</sup> and its staff group, the Interjurisdictional Team (IJT). The report summarizes the discussions and identifies any emergent issues that could warrant countywide attention, consistent with the CPPs.

### Why is there a School Siting Planning Process?

- The CPPs were updated in 2012, following adoption of VISION 2040 in 2008.<sup>iii</sup> At that time, the GMPC did not reach consensus on policies governing the siting of public facilities and services (including schools), particularly those proposed in the rural area.
- In 2011, the GMPC established a School Siting Task Force which evaluated potential school sites owned by school districts. The Task Force reached consensus in 2012 regarding each of the potential school sites and issued a report and recommendations that were approved by the GMPC.<sup>iv</sup>
- In 2015, the GMPC amended<sup>v</sup> the CPPs to establish an ongoing, collaborative planning process between the parties; this is known as the School Siting process.

## What are the roles for the Cities, the County, and School Districts?

- Like the original School Siting Task Force work, the school siting process is guided by policies that support collaboration and therefore no single entity controls the process.
- As noted previously, the cities, King County, and the districts share information relevant to their planning responsibilities. Attendance is voluntary and some districts decline to meet in a given year for various reasons (e.g., they may already regularly meet with their jurisdictions; there are no current identified needs; etc.). However, participating includes benefits such as early identification of challenges, awareness of other agencies plans, and resource and best practice sharing.
- King County serves as the convenor and a participant, and reaches out to the cities and districts to schedule, host, facilitate and document the meetings. If issues arise related to unincorporated urban areas, the County plays a similar role to cities for its jurisdiction.
- At times, parties such as water and sewer districts may become part of the process.

## What strategies are available to Cities, the County, and School Districts?

- The CPPs<sup>vi</sup> identify a set of potential strategies to help school districts and jurisdictions partner to comply with the policies, while ensuring the districts can meet their mission to educate students. These include, but are not limited to:
  - a) Sharing public facilities such as play fields, parking areas and access drives.
  - b) Allowing schools to locate in additional zones.
  - c) Identifying surplus public properties and private properties for new school sites.
  - d) Adopting school design standards that reduce land requirements (such as allowing multi-story structures).
  - e) Revising development standards and simplifying permitting of schools.
  - f) Considering rural area playfields that have direct access to urban area schools.
  - g) Encouraging programs and investments to support more walking, biking, and transit.

Strategies should recognize the school district's adopted educational program requirements, established and planned school service areas, limited availability of developable sites, and growth patterns and enrollment projections.

---

<sup>i</sup> The King County CPPs were adopted in 2021 and establish a countywide framework within which county and city comprehensive plans are developed. CPPs are part of the state Growth Management Act planning process. [\[LINK\]](#)

<sup>ii</sup> The GMPC is the countywide planning body and is comprised of elected officials from King County, Seattle, Bellevue, the Sound Cities Association, and special purpose districts. [\[LINK\]](#)

<sup>iii</sup> VISION 2040 is the growth management plan for the four-county central Puget Sound region. VISION is adopted by the Puget Sound Regional Council. VISION was updated in 2021 as VISION 2050. [\[LINK\]](#)

<sup>iv</sup> King County School Siting Task Force. [\[LINK\]](#) GMPC approval via Motion 12-1. [\[LINK\]](#)

<sup>v</sup> GMPC Motion 15-1: Outlining a Process for Jurisdictions Working together to identify future. [\[LINK\]](#)

<sup>vi</sup> 2021 CPPs PF-22 and PF-23 are summarized in the FAQ. [\[LINK\]](#)