



News

King County Executive
Dow Constantine

Regional task force resolves long-standing dispute over school siting

April 11, 2012

Summary

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Story

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"These are thoughtful recommendations that will help deliver educational excellence for our children without sacrificing the environment of our rural areas," said **King County Executive Dow Constantine**. "Education is the key to our economic future, and I thank the rural residents, elected officials, school superintendents and experts who came together and worked over a period of four months to build consensus around these issues."

The School Siting Task Force evaluated the current inventory of 18 rural properties owned by eight school districts in King County that straddle the Urban Growth Boundary, which was established under the state Growth Management Act to protect rural farms and forests and prevent urban sprawl. The rural properties were purchased with an eye toward future growth by the Northshore, Lake Washington, Issaquah, Snoqualmie, Kent, Tahoma, Auburn, and Enumclaw School Districts.

The Task Force concluded that future schools should be sited in urban areas or rural towns, and made recommendations on whether each of the properties in question was suitable for development, for land swaps, or for public acquisition. The recommendations for the 18 sites reflect the spirit of the Growth Management Act, while considering the investments that school districts made in good faith to plan for growth.

"This question of whether schools should continue to be sited in rural areas has been unresolved for more than a decade," said **Louise Miller**, Chair of the Task Force and a former King County Councilmember. "I'm happy to have been part of its resolution."

"It's been a productive and collaborative process," said **Dr. Chip Kimball**, Superintendent of the Lake Washington School District. "We're pleased to have King County and the cities as partners in supporting academic achievement."

"Bringing all interested parties - including school districts - into the county and regional land use planning and policy discussions has been long overdue," said **Kirkland City Councilmember Bob Sternoff**, who first suggested the idea of the task force. "The foundation has now been laid for thoughtful and coordinated future discussions about planning between cities, counties and school districts."

The Task Force report recommends other strategies to support school districts in their mission and to encourage more integrated planning in the future. Members considered a wide range of technical information in developing their recommendations, including the public health benefits of siting schools closer to homes so that students can walk or bike to school, and demographic trends that show many school-aged populations in rural King County are on the decline.

"Children can do better if they can walk to a neighborhood school rather than being bused to a remote site in the rural area," said **John Chaney**, a rural resident who served on the Task Force. "I'm pleased the Task Force was able to take a comprehensive look at our land use planning and develop solutions that will be lasting."

"Growth management is working," said Task Force member **Cynthia Welti**, Executive Director of the Mountains to Sound Greenway. "The vast majority of new growth is in urban areas. We must site schools where they can become part of walkable communities, and preserve rural character."

The Task Force recommends that school districts be invited to participate in planning bodies like the Growth Management Planning Council (GMPC) and the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC). The recommendations set a course that is consistent with VISION 2040, the regional growth strategy adopted by the PSRC for King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Kitsap Counties.

Formation of the Task Force stems from an agreement between King County, Seattle, Bellevue, and the Suburban Cities Association in November to examine the question of whether sewer lines should be extended into rural areas, to accommodate schools that had planned for the future by purchasing rural property.

"My congratulations and thanks to members of the Task Force for a job well done," said Executive Constantine. "Their unanimous recommendations are a strong statement of our collective desire to set aside differences and focus on sustainable growth and planning for the educational needs of our children."

The Executive will review the task force recommendations and propose new Countywide Planning Policies for consideration by both the GMPC and the Metropolitan King County Council. The GMPC will review the policies in the spring. The County Council is expected to take final action on the new policies in September.

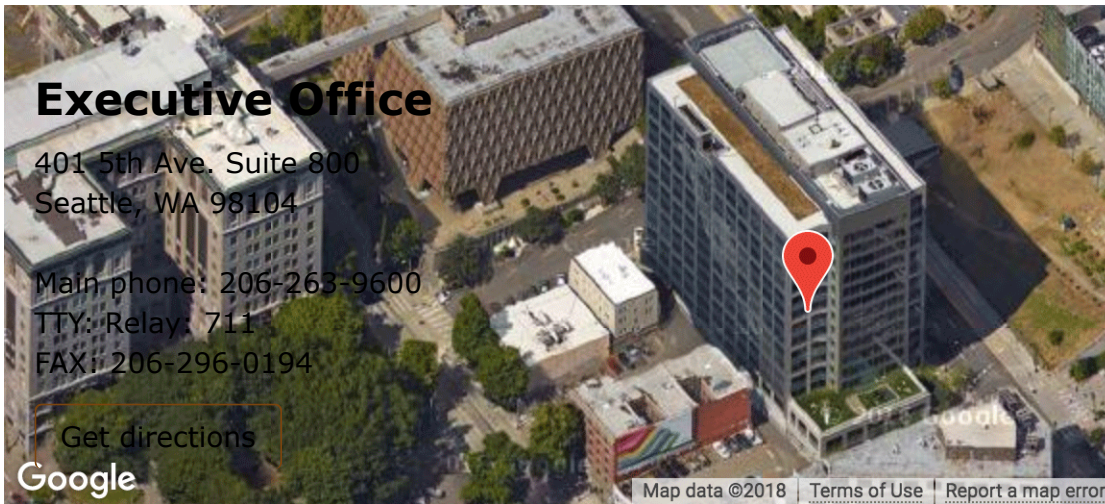
Download the report of the School Siting Task Force, along with site-specific maps for each of the 18 school properties along the Urban Growth Boundary that appear on pages

10 through 41 of the appendix, at:

www.kingcounty.gov/schools

Related Information

View the [School Siting Taskforce Website](#), which includes all related documents.



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Read the Executive's [biography](#)



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