

## “Smart Growth” needed to curb sprawl

*Pierce County has room for improvement*

Sprawl is very prominent in Pierce County and is degrading our quality of life. According to a recently released report by Northwest Environment Watch, Pierce County is one of the most sprawling counties in the Pacific Northwest.

The study, released in July 2002, examined growth patterns from the three largest metropolitan areas (Seattle-Tacoma north to Everett) including the most densely populated portions of Pierce, King, and Snohomish County.

In the 1990s, the population of greater Seattle-Tacoma (northern Pierce, western King and southern Snohomish) increased by 461,000 people. The region is expected to grow by another million residents



photo by Kirk Kirkland

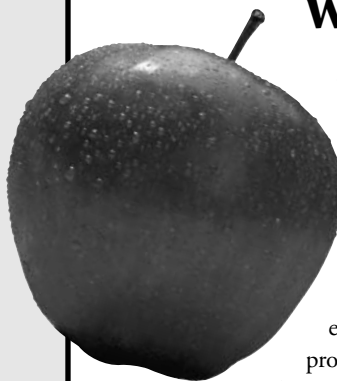
by the year 2025. The greater Seattle-Tacoma area is the most sprawling major metropolis in the Pacific Northwest.

Pierce County grew by 108,000 or twice the number of people in the city of Lakewood. Two-thirds of the growth in Pierce County occurred outside of towns, cities and the Urban Growth Boundaries established in Washington’s Growth Management Act. As a result, Pierce County took first place for the region’s worst sprawl. Only 11 percent of Pierce County residents live in compact

*please see Growth, p.3*

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Join now and receive \$15 discount!	



### Want to live and eat better?

#### Support local farmers

There are many reasons to support local farmers. Doing so reduces urban sprawl, provides fresher and better tasting produce, and prevents further monopolization of our food supply.

After working hard for many years, some farmers sell their land to developers to provide for their retirement. Once developed, the land can no longer produce food. According to Farmland Trust, farms and ranch lands cover

more than 55 percent of landmass in the United States. The United States loses 4 acres of crop or rangeland every minute to development. Locally, Pierce County loses 4.3 acres (equivalent to 9 football fields) of farmland every day to development. The average farmer earns \$23,000 annually, and farming is considered to be one of the most dangerous professions in the country. Large companies control growing, marketing, and distributing of most of the produce you buy in your local market; for example, six grocery chains control over 60 percent of the produce in the United States.

*please see Farmers, p.3*



## VISION

Communities will strive to utilize all planning strategies that balance the elements of environment, equity and economics.

### FPC Board of Directors:

- Position 1: Jim Akers
- Position 2: Vacant
- Position 3: Greg Rabourn
- Position 4: Connie Sue Martin
- Position 5: Bud Rehberg

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### Coming up:

In the next issue, Friends of Pierce County will highlight an environmentally friendly county business.

#### Upcoming feature:

#### How much does new development cost you?

Existing homeowners foot most of the bill for new development. Find out why.

## The real ecologic and economic value of trees

### Property owners benefit economically from left trees

Leave the trees please. That is my first statement to any developer who would like to have a more aesthetically pleasing and economically viable residential or commercial development project.

Retaining trees has significant benefits to fish and wildlife habitat, but the prime beneficiary is the property owner who can see an increase in (or his or her property value).

A recent article in the Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce (DJC), Landscape Northwest (dated April 18, 2002) stated, "To serve a society that determines worth by attributing monetary value, research has been undertaken on the economic benefits of trees and open space." This

research, conducted by the Trust for Public Land, challenged the prevailing notion that it is always more profitable to remove existing vegetation when developing the land than to preserve it.

The report confirmed the importance of trees in a residential setting and assigned economic value to trees in residential and commercial developments. A single, mature tree can account for a minimum of \$10,000 on the resale value of a home. Another study revealed that residents accept increases in density more readily in exchange for mature trees, along with green belts and open spaces.

The DJC article also stated that open vegetated areas and trees planted along streets can save billions of dollars by providing free ecological services, such as flood control, storm water management, and air and water quality improvement.

The loss of trees has resulted in a 35 percent increase in storm water runoff. From 1972 through 1996, local jurisdictions in Puget Sound have spent approximately \$2.4 billion constructing storm water facilities to handle the 1.2 billion cubic feet of water that was once taken up through trees and filtered into the ground water during a peak storm event. Trees could dramatically reduce storm water infrastructure expenses.

An American Forests study (1998) showed a 35 percent decline in tree cover as development has replaced forests in Pierce County from 1972 through 1996. To better protect the environment, and to meet state and federal requirements, Pierce County is currently considering a

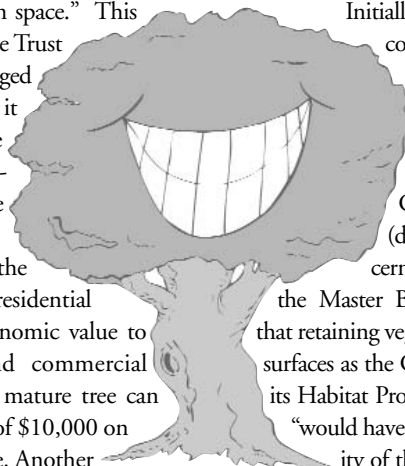
change to its critical area regulations in the proposed Habitat Protection and Restoration Regulatory Package.

The new County regulations propose retaining a total of 60 percent of the existing vegetation when subdivisions are built (planting 30 percent along streets, and another 30 percent along existing lots, open space areas and surface water facilities). The average cost per lot to plant trees is \$800. If smaller trees are used, the cost is significantly less at about \$300 to \$400 per lot. The cost of retaining trees is difficult to determine based on the many different variables involved in site clearing and construction.

Initially, the county council would have considered the package last July, but the process has been delayed due to opposition by the Master Builders Association. In a 125-page letter to the Pierce County Planning Commission (dated May 6, 2002), voicing concerns with the regulation changes, the Master Builders Association maintained that retaining vegetation and limiting impervious surfaces as the County is currently proposing in its Habitat Protection and Restoration Package "would have a devastating impact on the utility of the developable land inventory in Pierce County."

According to County Planner Katherine Brooks, the Planning Commission has tabled the plan to allow more time for staff and the public to work through the concerns that were raised during the public hearing phase. When the comments on the proposal have been worked out, the Habitat Protection and Restoration Regulatory Package should go before the County Council sometime early next year.

Environmental advocates and organizations have shown support for these changes, which they feel will better protect the environment. With research indicating that homebuyers will pay more for homes with mature trees, open spaces, and near green belts, it behooves developers to protect trees as well.



For information on the status of Pierce County's Habitat Protection and Restoration Regulatory Package, contact Katherine Brooks at (253) 798-3181 or see [www.piercecountywa.org/pc/services/home/property/pals/landuse/esa.htm](http://www.piercecountywa.org/pc/services/home/property/pals/landuse/esa.htm).

*Farmers, from page 1*

Given the grim statistics of our future food supply, a few farmers are trying more innovative ways of producing their crops. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) originated in Japan and some farmers are applying the principles locally. Basically, customers pay the farmers upfront to grow their food during the growing season. This allows the farmers to estimate their yield and more accurately plan their crops. Farmers have the money to invest in their supplies without having to borrow it. Customers benefit by getting locally grown, fresh, and flavorful produce. Currently, there are three CSA programs in Pierce County: Terry's Berries, Guadalupe Gardens, and the Tacoma Farmer's Market.

The Pierce County Conservation District has realized the plight of our local farmers and has presented a proposal that would help farmers in several ways. The Resource Conservation Program would protect farmland by: 1) purchasing development rights, 2) providing funding for a policy position for agriculture development and marketing, and 3) assisting farmers who want to be in compliance with water quality regulations.

The purchase of development rights involves farmers committing to using their land solely for agricultural purposes for 30 years. Their land is appraised under two scenarios, under the "highest and best use" versus agricultural use. The Conservation Program would pay the farmer the difference between the two types of operation. The farmer is allowed to stay in operation with capital that can be invested for the future.

Funding for a policy position could provide

for agricultural development and farm planning by increased marketing of local agricultural goods, and stronger outreach to the farming community.

Assisting farmers, who wish to comply with state water quality regulations, includes providing technical and financial assistance to farmers, and other landowners in designing and constructing projects that improve water quality and preserve and restore habitat for fish and wildlife. The proposal also includes over \$7 million to construct 16-20 salmon recovery projects countywide and project monitoring assistance for local jurisdictions and citizen groups for salmon recovery work. It will also fund wetland and wildlife habitat restoration work in 8-16 locations.

To fund the Resource Conservation Program, it will cost taxpayers \$5 per parcel per year on the property tax plus 10 cents per acre for properties an acre or larger. The County is requesting that the fee be enacted for a period of six years, within Tacoma, Fircrest, Puyallup, University Place and unincorporated Pierce County.

The County Council is scheduled to vote on the Conservation Fee in October or November. You can support for local farmers by contacting your county council member and asking her to support the Conservation District's fee proposal.

For more information on the Conservation Fee proposal, see [www.piercecountycd.org](http://www.piercecountycd.org).

*Growth, from page 1*

communities. Given the predicted growth forecast, if people do not opt to live in more compact communities to curb sprawl, development will take over an additional 170,000 acres.

The study showed growth from the region's downtowns consumed significant amounts of rural land and open space. It revealed that residents of lightly populated suburbs were dependant on cars for all their transportation needs, further clogging already crowded roads.

What causes sprawl? David Brooks (The Weekly Standard, Volume 007, Issue 46 8/12/02) states, "The truth, of course, is that suburbia is not a retreat from gritty American life, it is American life." Already, suburbanites make up about half of the country's population (while city people make up 28 percent and rural folk make up the rest 22 percent and America gets more suburban every year.

According to the recent census, the suburbs grew twice as fast as central cities. From 1950 to 1990 Pierce County grew to 450,000 people while Tacoma's population growth was almost stagnant.

In 1979, 74 percent of the office space was located in cities; two decades later; suburban office parks now contain 42 percent of the office space. This is more evident in King County, where Bellevue and Redmond added more jobs than city of Seattle.

In Pierce County 25 percent of workers commute to Seattle or Olympia. Unless this situation changes, the county's tax base will decline as it becomes more dependent on residential property taxes rather than business taxes to fund government services, like police, parks and schools.

In 1994, Pierce County adopted a Growth Management Plan to reverse sprawl. In the last few years it has focused 60 percent of residential growth in suburban areas and allowed 40 percent development in rural areas.

The Northwest Environment Watch study states, "Growth need not mean sprawl." Sprawl can be contained by utilizing Smart Growth principles. Smart Growth is characterized by compact residential communities that contain a mix of commercial and residential land uses, preserved open spaces, and efficient transportation systems.

**Mark Your Calendar**



November 6	FPC Board meeting, 7p.m. Fernhill Library, Tacoma
December 11	FPC group meeting, 7 p.m. Martin Luther King branch of the Tacoma Library

## Join FPC TODAY and receive a discount!

As a member, you will receive the newsletter and regular email updates informing you of countywide issues.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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Send in this form to receive the introductory offer to join for \$25 (regular membership is \$40).

Enclosed is \$25 for my annual membership

Enclosed is a \$ \_\_\_\_\_ donation\*

Send me information about the following volunteer opportunities:

Environmental

Education and Outreach

Fundraising

Membership

Communications

Nominating

Budget/Finance

*\*FPC is in the process of acquiring tax-exempt, nonprofit status with the IRS. Your contributions will become tax deductible when that status is approved.*



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