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Award: King County 4 to 1 Program

Website:

<https://ash.harvard.edu/news/king-county-4-1-program>

Award video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dOYXD_AQEg

January 1, 1996

INNOVATIONS IN AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AWARDS

- AWARD WON: 1996 Finalist
- AWARDEE: King County 4 to 1 Program
- DESIGNEE: King County, Washington
- JURISDICTION: Washington

The Northwest has long been recognized for its high quality of life, strong economy, and unsurpassed natural beauty. In the 1980s, the population surged. The rapid pace of unmanaged growth and development threatened the very qualities that were sought by new residents and businesses. Taxpayers were subsidizing "leapfrog" development at the expense of existing needs in established urban communities. Open space, natural areas, and rural resource lands were being converted to 2-5 acre lots with large houses. In response to these issues, the Washington State Legislature passed the Growth Management

Act (GMA) in 1990 requiring all urban counties and their cities to develop and adopt comprehensive plans for guiding sustained growth. Following passage of the GMA, King County residents began the hard work of defining a vision of the future that reflected the key qualities of life most commonly valued by its citizens.

King County's 4 to 1 Program offers a unique incentive package for achieving the goals of growth management. The program offers incentives which simultaneously encourage increased efficiency through compact urban development, dedication of a greenbelt of public open space that buffers rural land from urban development, and increased affordable housing opportunities. It seeks to provide public benefit through voluntary measures outside the regulatory framework, while also retaining benefit to the private property owner. The 4 to 1 Program works by allowing for rural zoned land to be redesignated to urban zoning if 4 acres (80 percent) are dedicated to the county as permanent open space for every 1 acre (20 percent) of newly designated urban land (4:1 ratio). An affordable housing incentive provides a 3.5:1 ratio (78 percent: 22 percent). The program reflects King County's commitment to work in a public-private partnership to achieve a win-win approach to managing growth. By adhering to the 4 to 1 rubric, King County has simultaneously realized multiple goals. King County has preserved open space, creating a permanent buffer of forested hillsides, wetlands, wildlife habitat, streams, and other natural areas between urban and rural lands for future generations to enjoy. The county has fostered a quality urban environment by preserving a compact urban pattern and continuing to provide municipal services. In addition, affordable housing has been promoted through added incentives for developers, and public-private partnerships with property owners, governmental organizations, developers, and environmental organizations have been forged.

Conceived as an innovative solution to the constant tug of war between development and preservation along the county's Urban Growth Boundary (UGB), the 4 to 1 Program balances the needs of growth with those of environmental protection. The program is mutually beneficial to the public, private landowners, and developers by providing a creative and effective

approach to managing growth. While allowing some flexibility for landowners and developers, the 4 to 1 Program provides lasting certainty to the UGB through creation of a greenbelt of open space.
