

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

## ANNEXATION

**DISCUSSION**

Urban growth is occurring in many areas of the county which may eventually become a part of Renton. The City is challenged to determine when and where future annexations of these areas will occur. The annexation policies are intended to provide the City with guidance when undertaking decisions about future annexation. They encourage the City to carefully identify, evaluate and conduct annexations that will enhance the quality of life, improve the efficiency of services, protect the environment and promote land use goals.

**Background**

There are three main types of annexations. The first type is annexation of a large urbanized area. This annexation can be instigated by either the City or local residents and is subject to local voter approval. The second type is annexation of smaller urbanized areas and is instigated and approved by local property owners with the consent of the City. The third type is annexation of a small area of vacant land which is in the process of being developed. This type is also instigated and approved by the local property owners with the consent of the City.

Property owners and residents request annexation for reasons usually relating to the differences between City and County development standards. The City also requires the provision of urban services such as sewer and stormwater facilities. Although increased density and cost of urban services can instigate annexation, they also tend to be the primary reasons local residents oppose annexation.

The City is usually interested in annexation to protect environmental quality, control land use and traffic patterns, and increase the efficiency of providing services such as sewers, parks and police and fire protection. Sometimes annexation enhances municipal revenue by expanding the tax base. However, this is not always the case. The cost of providing urban services can exceed the gain in tax revenue. Small annexations can also result in confusing boundaries. These factors sometimes inhibit the City from authorizing annexations.

**Existing Conditions**

In 1901, upon incorporation, the City had a total area of one square mile. Since then, incremental annexations have substantially increased the size of the City. Today the City encompasses approximately 16.7 square miles.

The City has established an urban growth boundary which defines the limits of future annexation. Any or all portions of unincorporated territory within the sphere of influence can be annexed to the City. Annexation requires the approval of the King County Boundary Review Board, the City Council, and, depending upon the method of annexation, the approval of the property owners or voters within the proposed annexation area. The sphere of influence

boundary is still open to negotiation with surrounding jurisdictions and King County. (See City of Renton Comprehensive Land Use Map, Chapter 2.)

### Trends

The City has historically undertaken annexation in response to requests from local property owners. For many years most annexations were of small areas which were already urbanized. In recent years, however, the City has begun to annex more vacant areas which are in the process of being developed. Although the City has considered annexations of large urbanized areas such as Skyway and Soos Creek, there has not been any annexation of this type for many years. The City has recently considered a large scale annexation within the Soos Creek area, however, this annexation proposal is currently on hold. There are currently no guidelines used to evaluate annexation proposals.

Currently, when an area is annexed into the City it is zoned for single family development regardless of its comprehensive plan land use designation. Development of other types of land uses within annexed areas requires rezoning.

### Issues

- \* **Defining Annexation Areas:** The City must define the areas in which future urban growth and annexations will occur. This process will require re-evaluating the sphere of influence and urban growth boundary lines with other local planning agencies.
- \* **City Approach to Annexation:** The City has the option to be aggressive or passive in its pursuit of annexations within urban areas. The City can also establish guidelines to review future annexations or continue without any review criteria. In the past, the City has tended to take a passive approach to annexation without the benefit of any guidelines.
- \* **Timing of Annexation:** Annexation which occurs before an area is ready to be developed can overextend and cause inefficiencies in provision of services. Annexation can also be a catalyst for urbanization and may encourage development before it is appropriate.
- \* **Establishing Annexation Boundaries:** Annexation areas which are small and irregular create problems in efficiently providing City services and utilities to these areas. They can also create confusion among local residents. Annexations of small, incremental areas have led to a very irregular City boundary.
- \* **Inconsistency between County and City Plan:** Urban growth occurring within the county typically does not conform to City plans. Many discrepancies exist between City and County plans and policies. These differences include variations in land use locations, densities and requirements for urban services.
- \* **Treatment of Newly Annexed Areas:** The City must decide how to transition areas from County to City governance. This transition must address inconsistencies between City and County land use patterns, development standards and urban services. The City may wish to

ignore or make allowances for continuation of these inconsistencies or take an active approach to resolve these differences to conform with City plans and policies.

\* **Following Established Plans and Policies:** Previously, the City did not apply comprehensive plan land use designations to newly annexed areas. As part of the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning code update process, the City addressed inconsistencies between comprehensive plan land use designations and zoning within newly annexed areas. Land use designations are indicated for areas within the urban growth boundary.

### Scenarios for the Future

One option for the City is to continue the status quo approach by approving only property owner requested annexations without guidelines. This approach would result in incremental and irregular growth of the City in response to uncoordinated property owner requests for annexation. This policy would allow property owners to act as the primary agent in determining the growth of the City.

The other option available to the City is to take a more systematic approach to annexation using a set of criteria to evaluate and propose annexations of both small and large areas. Annexations would only be allowed if they satisfied the standards established to review potential annexations. Although this approach would still allow property owners to petition for annexation, it would allow the City to serve as the primary agent in determining the growth of the City.

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### POLICIES

**ANNEXATION GOAL:** The City of Renton shall actively pursue annexations.

#### **I. Potential Annexation Areas**

**Objective AX-1.0:** Support annexations of county areas which are urban in character, or are logically served by the City due to drainage basins, boundaries, the location of aquifer recharge areas, community separators, or other environmental constraints.

**Policy AX-1.1:** The City should continue to recognize the area within the sphere of influence boundary as the territory in which the City of Renton has an inherent interest in future land use decisions.

**Policy AX-1.2:** The City should encourage annexation of all territory within the urban growth limit line. Specific annexation proposals should be evaluated against the annexation criteria outlined in Policy AX-1.4.

**Policy AX-1.3:** Areas where the availability of infrastructure and services allows for the development of urban densities should be annexed to the City of Renton. The City of Renton should be the primary service provider of urban infrastructure and services in the resultant area provided that the City can offer such services in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

**Policy AX-1.4:** The immediate areas for annexation to the City of Renton should include the territory contiguous with boundaries of the City such as:

- a. peninsulas and islands of unincorporated land;
- b. neighborhoods where municipal services have been extended;
- c. vacant lands subject to development pressure;
- d. developed areas where urban services are needed to correct degradation of natural resources;
- e. lands which are available for urbanization under county comprehensive plan, zoning, and subdivision regulations; and
- f. aquifer recharge areas.

**Policy AX-1.5:** Establish and maintain an urban/rural boundary line. The following criteria should be the basis of establishing such a line:

- a. location of environmentally sensitive areas;
- b. desired density for future development;
- c. population allocation;

- d. efficient utilization of urban infrastructure, such as sewer, water and roads;
- e. coordination of sewer extension in Water District 90;
- f. adopted plans and policies of the City and King County;
- g. coordination of development standards between jurisdictions; and,
- h. identification of community separator areas.

*Discussion: The urban/rural boundary represents an area within which people may want an opportunity to annex to the City of Renton. Given a number of factors such as topography, existing and planned land uses, population, fiscal concerns, transportation systems, sewer and water utilities, governmental services, and community values, this area may eventually become a part of Renton.*

*Growth boundaries and sphere of influence lines establish the geographic limits of future annexation actions. They mark urban growth areas within the county that could eventually become a part of the City of Renton. Annexations should not occur beyond these boundaries. Annexation proposals within these boundaries will be considered and allowed. Just because a proposed annexation is located within the annexation area, however, does not guarantee its approval. Any annexation proposal is subject to the appropriate review and approval process.*

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## II. Review Criteria for Annexations

**Objective AX-2.0:** Promote annexations which would enhance the quality of life in the resultant City of Renton, making the City a good place to work, live, play and raise families.

**Policy AX-2.1:** Support annexations which would result in future improvements to the resultant City of Renton services through potential enhancements to levels of service or through elimination of duplication by service providers. Services include water, sanitary sewers, storm water drainage, utility drainage basins, transportation, park and open space, library, and public safety.

**Policy AX-2.2:** Encourage annexations of areas in which the City of Renton should logically be the primary provider of urban infrastructure and services.

**Policy AX-2.3:** Support annexations which would facilitate an appropriate balance between the provision of jobs and the availability of housing.

**Policy AX-2.4:** Promote annexations which would simplify governmental structure in annexing areas and/or the resultant City of Renton.

**Policy AX-2.5:** Promote annexations which would include those who already use

City services or who impact City infrastructure.

**Policy AX-2.6:** Support annexations of rural areas which would remain rural in character in order to protect natural resources and/or rural zones to provide community separator areas.

*Discussion: Annexation should only be pursued when it improves the community. These policies state that quality of life in the community can be enhanced through annexation when it improves the efficiency or level of municipal services and infrastructure, when it supports local land use goals, when it will simplify local government, or when it would allow protection of the natural environment. These policies also indicate that areas which already receive or use City services and infrastructure should become a part of the City. These policies establish the general framework for reviewing annexation proposals.*

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## III. Boundaries

**Objective AX-3.0:** Seek boundaries that readily define city and county jurisdiction and correct the existing inconsistencies of the City's borders with future annexation proposals.

**Policy AX-3.1:** The City should encourage annexations that encompass unincorporated islands and peninsulas; furthermore, the City should not support proposed annexations that create islands of unincorporated lands within Renton.

**Policy AX-3.2:** The proposed annexation boundary should be defined by the following characteristics:

- a. annexation of territory that is adjacent to the existing City limits;

- in general, the more land adjacent to the City the more favorable the annexation;
- b. inclusion of unincorporated islands and peninsulas;
  - c. use of boundaries that are readily identifiable in the field, such as waterways, ridges, park property, roads/freeways, and railroads;
  - d. inclusion/exclusion of an entire neighborhood, rather than dividing portions of the neighborhood between city and county jurisdictions; and
  - e. natural corridors should be identified and included as greenbelts or community separators between the City and adjacent jurisdictions.

**Policy AX-3.3:** Logical boundaries for the City of Renton should be made with new annexations. Logical jurisdiction boundaries of a city are defined by two components: 1) physical features, such as a ridge, watershed, or lake, as well as urban elements, such as a road; and, 2) the timing for the provision of public services. Timing for the availability of public facilities and services must be used to evaluate whether boundaries created by an annexation are logical at the time of application.

**Policy AX-3.4:** Existing land uses, development, and redevelopment potential

should be considered when evaluating a proposed annexation.

**Policy AX-3.5:** Annexation proposals should include areas that allow for the control over land uses along major entrance corridors to the City.

**Policy AX-3.6:** Boundaries of individual annexations will not be reconsidered to exclude reluctant property owners if their exclusion is inconsistent with annexation policies that address land use, environmental protection, and the efficient delivery of services.

*Discussion: Existing City boundaries are extremely irregular and confusing. To help create more logical boundaries in the future, the City should approve annexations which improve the configuration of existing city boundaries by eliminating islands and peninsulas of the City. Future annexation boundaries should maximize adjacency to the City, allow for the efficient provision of City services, follow man-made or natural boundaries, and include entire neighborhoods. Annexation boundaries should not be adjusted due to private interests. These policies will promote the creation of a more logical city boundary.*

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#### IV. Environmental Quality and Protection

**Objective AX-4.0:** Protect the environmental quality of Renton by annexing lands where future development and land use activity could otherwise adversely impact natural and urban systems.

**Policy AX-4.1:** Annexation proposals should include environmentally sensitive areas and vacant land where future

development could adversely influence the environmental and land use character of Renton.

**Policy AX-4.2:** Areas of unincorporated King County adjacent to the City's border that are subject to high growth and development pressures should be annexed to the City of Renton.

**Policy AX-4.3:** Shoreline Master Program land use designations, including designations for associated wetlands, should be imposed upon territory within an annexation proposal during the annexation process.

**Policy AX-4.4:** The City should pursue annexations of areas which lie within existing, emerging or prospective aquifer recharge zones that currently or potentially supply domestic water to the City should be pursued.

**Policy AX-4.5:** When annexing areas for resource protection, the City should apply zoning which will protect the resource and preserve the area's rural character.

*Discussion: The City may need to pursue annexation of certain areas to protect the environmental quality of the City and surrounding areas. Annexation would allow the City to alter land use patterns and development standards in these areas to reduce the environmental impacts of growth. The City could take direct steps to protect environmental resource areas. The City could also take steps to regulate and/or mitigate any existing adverse environmental conditions such as erosion or septic tank failure.*

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## V. Emergency and Public Services

**Objective AX-5.0:** Create city boundaries through annexations that facilitate the efficient delivery of emergency and public services.

**Policy AX-5.1:** Annexations should be supported that lead to the efficient provision of services to the City, such as police, fire, water, sewer, and transportation.

**Policy AX-5.2:** To the extent feasible, an annexed territory should receive the same level of service generally provided throughout the City.

**Policy AX-5.3:** The quality of emergency service should be evaluated in terms of the type of equipment, training of personnel, and numbers of responding units, in addition to response time. Other public services (such as sewer, water, library, and

transportation) should add balance to the quality of life in the annexation area.

*Discussion: Municipal service standards and their application to annexed territory will be evaluated in light of land use, growth management implications, and the need for protecting natural resources.*

*These policies are intended to encourage annexation of areas where Renton is or could be the primary provider of emergency and public services. The City should approve annexations where it can efficiently provide urban services at acceptable levels of service. The provision of emergency and public services should improve the quality of life in annexed areas.*

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## VI. Annexation and Intergovernmental Relations

**Objective AX-6.0:** Promote a regional approach for development review through the use of interlocal agreements to ensure that land development policies in King County are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan policies or other City of Renton development standards.

**Policy AX-6.1:** The sphere of influence and urban growth areas boundaries should be implemented through an agreement between King County, adjacent jurisdictions, and the City of Renton.

**Policy AX-6.2:** Urban development within the City's annexation area should not occur without annexation unless there is an interlocal agreement with King County defining land use, zoning, annexation phasing, urban services and design standards, and impact mitigation requirements.

**Policy AX-6.3:** Long-range planning and the development of capital improvement programs for transportation, storm water, water, and sewer services should be coordinated with adjacent jurisdictions, special districts, and King County.

**Policy AX-6.4:** The City's size and jurisdictional boundaries should encompass all areas where future land use and existing development could endanger natural resources, and where land use decision-making authority is best served by the City of Renton.

**Policy AX-6.5:** Interlocal agreements with other jurisdictions should be pursued to develop solutions to regional concerns including, but not limited to water, sanitary sewer, storm water drainage, utility drainage basins, transportation, park and open space, development review, and public safety.

**Policy AX-6.6:** To best serve the economic viability and environmental quality of Renton, the City should actively take part in land use decisions of all territory within the sphere of influence.

*Discussion: Interlocal agreements will specify each agency's area of influence and detail the extent to which each agency may influence the other's actions in those areas. Subjects which should be addressed in such an agreement include special benefit districts, protection of sensitive areas, zoning and land use densities, extension of sewer and water services, annexations, building permits for projects over a specified size, transportation system planning and implementation, and environmental review.*

*The sphere of influence is defined on the City of Renton Comprehensive Plan Map in Chapter 2.*

*The City should work with King County, special districts and other jurisdictions to coordinate land use and infrastructure planning. This will facilitate future annexations and reduce problems caused by discrepancies between County and City land use plans and development standards. Consistency between City and County plans will help reach economic and environmental goals and comply with Growth Management legislation.*

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## VII. Annexation, Utilities, and Infrastructure

**Objective AX-7.0:** Recognize in the annexation process the importance that availability of utilities plays in the development of land, and the implications of annexing substandard infrastructure.

**Policy AX-7.1:** Upgrading of utilities and public infrastructure within the developed portions of newly-annexed areas should not be required unless there is a threat to public health and safety.

**Policy AX-7.2:** The extension of water and sewer services beyond the City's boundary should be prohibited EXCEPT that an extension may be made if it is determined by the City and/or the King County Department of Public Health that a public health emergency exists or is imminent, or if it is determined that existing development is a threat to the City's aquifer.

**Policy AX-7.3:** All property owners of development in unincorporated King County that are granted City utilities should be required to sign a covenant to annex and agree to develop in accordance with the City's development standards.

**Policy AX-7.4:** All lands that have recorded covenants to annex or that receive city water and sewer service should be annexed.

**Policy AX-7.5:** Staged or phased annexation should be initiated by the City within active annexation areas based on planned service extensions or availability of services.

*Discussion: When upgrading of facilities to City standards is required to avoid public health and safety concerns, a local improvement district may be formed to offset public expenses.*

*For a public health emergency situation, either annexation, or a covenant to annex, should be required before City services are extended.*

*The provision of urban services and infrastructure can serve as a catalyst to growth. To prevent premature development and maintain the efficiency of City services, those services and infrastructure should only be upgraded when there is a threat to the public's health and safety. City services should only be extended outside of the City in the case of a public health emergency. Any unincorporated areas which receive City services should become a part of the City.*

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## VIII. City Administration of Annexations

**Objective AX-8.0:** Provide full and complete evaluation of annexation proposals by all departments upon the submission of the annexation proposal.

**Policy AX-8.1:** Appropriate zoning districts should be designated for property in

an annexation proposal. Zoning in the annexation territory should be guided by

the comprehensive plan land use designations. Where lands are developed, non-conforming zoning designations should be avoided except where those uses are determined to be substantially inconsistent with the comprehensive plan land use map and policies.

**Policy AX-8.2:** Development proposals associated with annexation proposals should require separate review from the annexations.

**Policy AX-8.3:** Larger annexations should be encouraged in order to minimize duplication of effort. However, annexation proposals, less than ten acres in size are permissible provided they include peninsulas or islands of unincorporated King County and serve to create a more logical city boundary.

**Policy AX-8.4:** Annexations proposed by the petition method should be expanded to include areas surrounded by the City on three sides and those properties with recorded covenants to annex, provided the expansion does not render the proposal incapable of meeting state guidelines.

**Policy AX-8.5:** The City should ensure that property owners and residents in and around the affected area(s) are fully informed of the obligations and requirements that may be imposed upon them as a result of annexation. The City should respond to community initiatives and actively assist owners and residents with initiating and completing the annexation process.

**Policy AX-8.6:** The administrative staff of the City should work with potential an-

nexation proponents to develop acceptable annexation boundaries.

**Policy AX-8.7:** The administration staff should conduct a fiscal impact assessment of the costs to provide service and of the tax revenues, including bonding capacity, which would be generated in the area. The City recognizes that fiscal impacts are only one of many criteria to be evaluated, and must be balanced with other annexation policy goals such as protection of sensitive areas, providing public service, governmental structure, or infrastructure, and aquifer protection.

*Discussion: The City should evaluate zoning alternatives for the annexation territory in light of existing and anticipated land uses, adjacent land uses, the existing comprehensive plan, King County zoning, and any environmental constraints specific to the area under consideration.*

*Annexation proponents who want to process a development proposal with the City concurrently with an annexation proposal may initiate the development review process after the City Council has held a public meeting on the Notice Of Intent to annex and authorized the circulation of the annexation petition. The City's Hearing Examiner may not hold a public hearing on a development proposal associated with an annexation until after the City Council has held a public hearing and approved the annexation.*

*Acceptance by staff of a notice of intent to annex does not guarantee the City's support of the proposal. Authorization by the City Council to circulate the*

*annexation petition does not commit the City to approve the annexation.*

*These policies establish a framework for evaluating, approving and conducting proposed annexations. Each annexation proposal should be fully reviewed by the City according to these policies. Each review should include a fiscal impact analysis to supplement the evaluation. Annexations which meet the criteria established by these policies should be*

*approved. Once the annexation is approved, the City should coordinate and facilitate the transition between County and City government for annexed residents. This transition process will include establishment of land use and zoning designations, review of pending development proposals, and provide information about City policies and regulations.*

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## **STRATEGIES AND IMPLEMENTATION**

### **Strategies**

The proposed policies set forth a strategy for actively evaluating annexations. Before annexation occurs, the City should carefully review annexation proposals to evaluate their concurrence with several objectives. These objectives include:

- 1. Urban Areas:** The City will define areas in which future urban development and annexation is appropriate. The City will seek annexation of all lands within these areas when they meet the criteria for annexation.
- 2. Quality of Life:** The City will support annexations which enhance the quality of life of residents.
- 3. Boundaries:** The City will seek to create logical and identifiable boundaries that use geographic or topographical features.
- 4. Environmental Quality:** The City will support annexations to protect and preserve environmental quality.
- 5. Provision of Services:** The City will support annexations which promote the efficient delivery of urban services. The City shall coordinate provision of urban services to newly annexed areas and shall annex all areas with City services.
- 6. Coordination with King County:** The City will coordinate determinations of land uses, densities, urban growth areas, urban service requirements. This will help reduce problems created by annexation of county lands which are inconsistent with City plans and policies.

**Implementation**

These strategies will be implemented through:

1. Designation of Urban Growth and Sphere of Influence Boundaries.
2. Consideration of future annexation proposals.