

Performance Audit

Work in progress: Audit description

Growth Management Act:

County and city compliance with the state's 120-day permitting requirement

The Washington Growth Management Act (GMA) requires fast-growing counties and cities to develop comprehensive plans and regulations to guide future growth and limit the ecological impact of urban sprawl. To ensure public safety and protect the environment, land developers, professional builders and property owners must apply for permits from the jurisdiction where they plan to build. As the number of development regulations and environmental laws has increased, so too has the number of required permits.

When the Legislature passed the GMA, among its goals was to give applicants more predictability on how long it will take to get a permit approved. The Act included two related requirements:

- To establish time periods for the governments' permit review that do not exceed 120 days
- Certain local governments must report annually on performance, such as the annual volume of permits and average processing time

Local governments are allowed to make exceptions to the 120-day rule in two circumstances. They may:

- Establish different timeframes for permit types that are known to take more than 120 days
- Extend the timeframe for specific permits with the agreement of the applicant

Preliminary scope and objectives

This audit will look at a selection of county and city governments' planning and permitting departments. It will examine their permitting processes to see if they are complying with this 120-day rule, and identify any opportunities for improvement. This audit seeks to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are local governments complying with the 120-day rule, including the annual reporting requirement?
2. Are local governments using processes appropriately for project permit reviews that exceed 120 days?



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