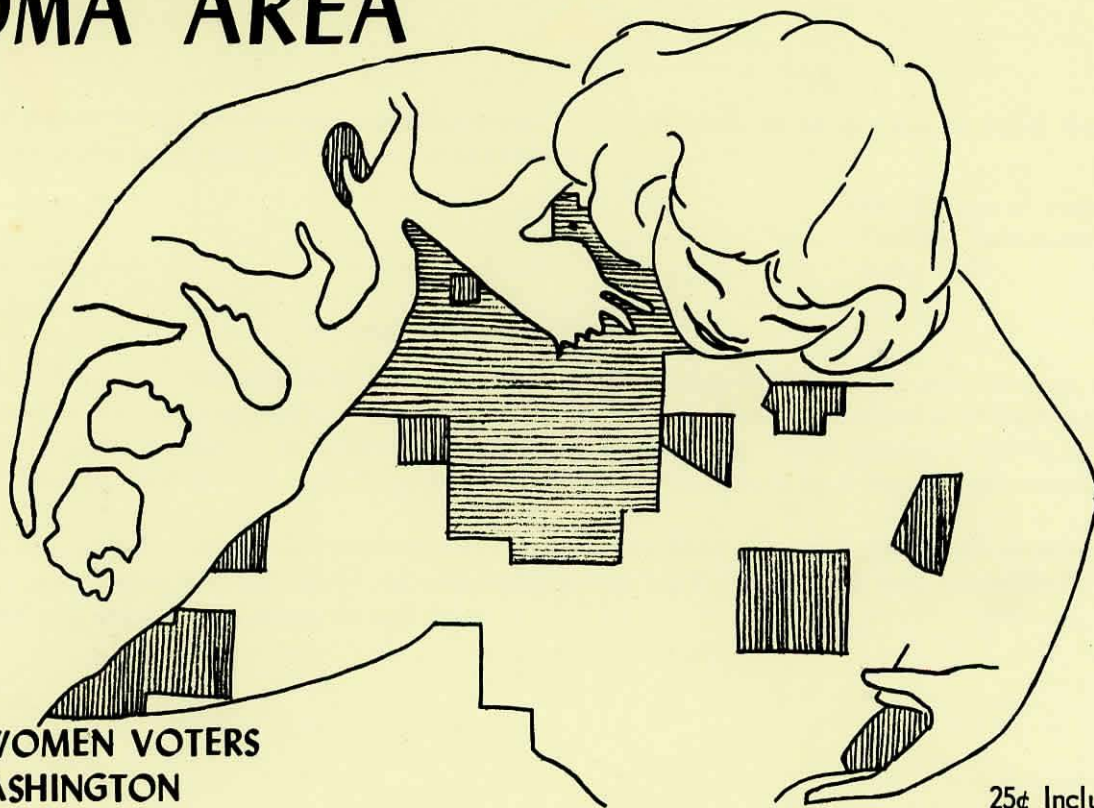


# A LOOK AT THE TACOMA AREA



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS  
TACOMA, WASHINGTON  
APRIL, 1963

25¢ Including Tax

## A LOOK AT THE TACOMA AREA

POPULATION DENSITY - LOCAL GOVERNMENT & ECONOMIC BASE - GENERAL FINANCE

PLANNING & ZONING - PARKS & OPEN SPACE - WATER SUPPLY

STORM DRAINAGE - SEWERS - POLICE PROTECTION

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CONCLUSION

The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan organization whose purpose is to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government.

The League of Women Voters  
Tacoma, Washington  
April, 1963 SK 9-0210

#### A LOOK AT THE TACOMA AREA

Rapid growth of the Tacoma metropolitan area poses serious problems beyond the ability and authority of the city and its suburbs to solve. Our state legislature has passed a number of measures in an effort to solve urban problems such as annexation, special districts, and local agreements to render services. These measures provide limited solutions to localized trouble spots and are inadequate for any metropolitan community as a whole. Long range planning is urgently needed.

This is a brief look at the metropolitan Tacoma scene. Some problem areas are being dealt with, some will deteriorate, and new ones will appear. With far-sighted planning and adequate legislation there is still time to preserve most of the amenities of the city and suburban living we now enjoy.

#### A LOOK AT THE TACOMA AREA

POPULATION DENSITY - LOCAL GOVERNMENT & ECONOMIC BASE - GENERAL FINANCE  
PLANNING & ZONING - PARKS & OPEN SPACE - WATER SUPPLY

## POPULATION DENSITY

So rapid is the spread of the metropolitan areas of Seattle and Tacoma they are merging into a "strip city" from north of Everett to south of Tacoma. If haphazard growth continues we will live in endless rows of streets, houses, and supermarkets sprawling without interruption over once green hills. Some of the most productive soil in Pierce County is already being subdivided for residential housing.

Pierce County increased in population by almost 17% between 1950 and 1960 for a total of 321,000. Within the County, rural areas decreased by 5% while all urban areas (including cities and suburbs) increased by 28%. The City of Tacoma showed only a 3% increase. Population projections indicate the County will more than double in the remaining years of this century to about 675,000 in the year 2000.

There are 19 incorporated cities and towns in Pierce County; of these, 11 (or more than half) are in the Tacoma metropolitan area, as are 75% of the registered voters.

### Incorporated Cities and Towns (April, 1961 census)

Tacoma — Class 1 — 149,000	Puyallup — Class 3 — 12,250	Dupont — Class 4 — 353
Sumner — " 3 — 3,226	Fircrest — " 4 — 3,765	Milton — " 4 — 2,218
Orting — " 4 — 1,550	Steilacoom — " 4 — 1,580	Fife — " 4 — 1,500
Gig Harbor — " 4 — 1,110	Ruston — " 4 — 690	

The metropolitan area also includes these unincorporated areas. Population figures are, of necessity, rough estimates. There are additional densely populated suburbs not listed.

Lakewood — 33,444	Spanaway — 1,889
University Place — 10,803	Midland-Summit — 906
Parkland — 16,648	Browns Point-Dash Point — 1,500
Fife Heights-Valley area — 1,500	Peninsula area — 6,000
Edgemont-Mountain View-Jovita — 4,500	

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ECONOMIC BASE

Matters of government and provision and administration of necessary services are now handled by many independent agencies, specifically; 1 county government, councils of 11 cities and towns, and boards of 57 special districts. In all, there are 69 governmental bodies, many overlapping, and 301 elected officials. Included in the foregoing figures are 14 school districts.

The Tacoma area is a shipping, manufacturing, and commercial center. Historically, lumber and manufacture of wood products were the major industry. In the past 25 years industrial development has come to include chemicals, metallurgical plants, clothing, diversification in use of wood products, commercial fishing, general construction, boat-building, and tourism. Daffodil bulbs, berries, fruit, and vegetable farming and processing have become major industries. An important segment of the area's economy comes from the military services installations.

### GENERAL FINANCE

The County assesses all property, and collects and distributes all taxes to state, cities, towns, and special districts. All governmental functions depend directly on real and personal property taxes for support. The 17th amendment states that the AGGREGATE LEVIES OF ALL TAXING DISTRICTS SHALL NOT EXCEED 40 MILLS ON THE DOLLAR OF ASSESSED VALUATION OF THE PROPERTY. The assessed valuation of the property is to be set at 50% of the true valuation. In 1962 the assessed valuation of property in Pierce County was set at 21.3% of true valuation.

There are other sources of revenue for both incorporated and unincorporated areas which constitute only a small portion of the total.

This is a breakdown of 1962 tax rates throughout the metropolitan area. The millage figure for each city and town is the dollar rate per \$1,000 of assessed valuation.

<u>Cities and Towns</u>	<u>Total Rate</u>	<u>City Rate</u>	<u>School Rate</u>
Tacoma 10	73.33	21.43	35.65
Tacoma 2-10	70.46	18.56	35.65
DuPont	50.25	8.00	27.00
Fife	65.75	15.00	35.50
Fircrest	65.90	15.00	35.65
Gig Harbor	72.25	15.00	42.00

Cities and Towns	(General Finance Continued)		School Rate
	Total Rate	City Rate	
Milton	65.75	15.00	35.50
Orting	67.25	15.00	37.00
Puyallup	55.86	19.11	21.50
Ruston	49.17	19.92	14.00
Steilacoom	54.75	15.00	24.50
Sumner	66.65	16.00	35.40

In addition, the cities and towns pay the state tax rate of 3.08 mills (for welfare), the county rate of 10.17, and the Port rate of 2.00.

Unincorporated areas pay the state tax rate of 3.08 mills (for welfare), the county rate of 10.17, the Port rate of 2.00, and varying levies for schools, fire protection, and other special districts.

#### PLANNING AND ZONING

All of the cities and towns in the metropolitan area have planning commissions with the exception of DuPont. Tacoma is the only city having a paid staff of professional planners. When need arises, smaller towns use a private consultant or the services of the County Planning Department. The Pierce County Planning Commission serves all of the unincorporated areas.

A comprehensive zoning plan for the entire county was adopted on May 8, 1962. It is an interim zoning code which will be amended from time to time for a few years, then "locked tight". The code now places most of the zoned areas in the county on a zoning similar to one they now hold, and classifies all heretofore unzoned areas as general use districts. This code includes permission for practically anything except wrecking or junk yards, and slaughter houses.

One of the basic requirements for orderly metropolitan development is a program for coordinated area-wide planning. Little cooperation now exists between city, town, and county planning boards.

Initial steps towards comprehensive planning of a 60 sq. mile area on the Peninsula have been taken. Officials of Pierce County, Tacoma, and Gig Harbor will be involved in these plans. The study is to prepare a plan for land use of the area on a regional basis (because of expected growth following removal of tolls from the Narrows Bridge). It should also provide the organizational framework for planning coordination between jurisdictions in the metropolitan area.

Experience throughout the country shows that the implementation of area-wide planning is only effective with area-wide authority.

#### PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

Acquisition of parks and recreation sites, and preservation of open land are urgent metropolitan problems. With increasing leisure time, recreational use of land is growing even faster than population.

Pierce County owns 20 parks and several undeveloped areas. Most of these sites are in the Tacoma metropolitan area. Many improvements are secured only through community efforts and funds.

Within Tacoma City limits parks and playgrounds are administered jointly by the Metropolitan Park District and the Tacoma School District. The Metropolitan Park District was established in 1907 as a municipal corporation. The Park District, a separate corporation, is largely supported by city government. Although the City of Tacoma has no jurisdiction over the Metropolitan Park District, in 1962-63 the General Fund supported the District with 3 mills. The District now operates 44 parks with 1,377 acres. Total 1961 attendance at District playgrounds, beaches, pools and all other activities was more than half a million.

Parks in some of the surrounding towns are under the local municipal governments. Many people living in the suburbs do not have park facilities close to their homes. City recreational facilities, especially those near the city limits, are used extensively by children from outside the city limits whose families do not pay city taxes. Children come by the busload from other towns as well as from the suburbs for swimming instructions in Park District pools.

In the Tacoma suburbs concern over parks is rising, but action is slow in coming. Two special levy propositions for parks were defeated in the 1962 primaries. One was for the Metropolitan Park District, the other for Pierce County included \$500,000 for land acquisition.

Land for parks must be acquired early beyond developing areas because land prices rise quickly once subdivision begins. Once development begins, the open land is usually lost for public use. According to a county commissioner, "The county is fast running short of the type of open space needed for recreation and just about at rope's end in regard to appropriating money for parks and recreation." Park acquisition is not keeping pace with population growth in the Tacoma area.

#### WATER SUPPLY

Each of the 11 incorporated cities and towns of the metropolitan area has its own municipally-owned water supply.

Tacoma owns a system of wells as auxiliary supply capable of providing 68,000,000 gallons of water. It is used during emergencies such as fires and when the regular water supply from the Green River is unavailable due to heavy rains. During the summer of 1962 the city's needs for water rose to approximately 100 million gallons a single day.

There are 2 true water districts - Lakewood and North Woodland. The Lakewood District serves 20 sq. miles with 19 wells and North Woodland serves 105 customers. Mutuals and cooperatives serve areas east and south of Tacoma, ex-

cept for the Puyallup Valley. The City of Tacoma wholesales water to some of these mutuals and cooperatives. A number of farm residences are supplied along the gravity pipeline extended to McMillin Reservoir. Private wells owned by individuals or companies serve the Valley, Gig Harbor, Fox Island, and the area south of Collins Road.

The Health Department tests 71 "public water supplies" in the metropolitan area, ranging from 4-customer privately owned companies and mutuals to large cooperatives, companies, districts, and municipally-owned supplies.

There is danger of pollution from surface drainage and county areas which have no sewer systems. Water supply is not uniformly satisfactory in the suburbs. Some areas suffer from inadequate supply and distribution, and are stymied in development by lack of adequate water supply. Charges for water vary widely within the area.

## STORM DRAINAGE

The next few years will see completion of separation of storm and sewer lines in Tacoma. Additional treatment facilities now under way will result in outfalls carrying only treated sewage.

Outside of municipal boundaries there are 8 drainage districts varying in activity. One district takes in southeast Tacoma and drainage problems there must be handled by the district, not the city. Part of another district lies within the city limits of Sumner. Property values and development in this area were at a standstill when high water tables and surface drainage rendered septic tanks ineffective. A bond issue for storm drains was approved in Sumner's Spring election of 1962 but ensuing bids were too high and the project was postponed. A new study has led to a proposal covering storm trunk lines and laterals for the entire city, with the exception of newly annexed areas (about 100 acres). The original drainage system (District 11) was constructed about 50 years ago and is now inadequate for today's needs. In east Sumner an area of 760 acres is draining into an inadequate 36 inch pipe.

Puyallup has storm drainage, sewer, and water supply problems preventing development of certain areas within the city limits and immediate suburbs. A bond issue for comprehensive water utilities improvements has been defeated twice.

The Edgewood-Mountain View-Jovita area lists drainage as one of the items to be included in a University of Washington Bureau of Community Development study.

The drainage areas around Lake Steilacoom and Clover Creek are reaching an acute state in which not even treated sewage can be safely added. The Lakewood area has serious sewage and drainage problems. The State Health Department feels that within 20 years the entire drainage area from Parkland and the Lakes District to the Sound will be saturated past the toleration point for lack of sewers and storm drainage.

## SEWERS

The municipalities of Tacoma, Puyallup, Sumner, and Orting have sewage treatment plants. Pacific Lutheran University and Franklin Pierce High School have their own treatment plants. All provide incomplete sewage treatment. The Fircrest sewer system connects to that of Tacoma, and DuPont connects with the Ft. Lewis system. Steilacoom and Ruston empty trunk lines of untreated sewage into Puget Sound.

There are 11 raw sewage outfalls along Commencement Bay, however a treatment plant is being planned for construction on Ruston Way closing these outfalls. This plant must await completion of separation of combined storm and sanitary sewers in the North End - a 3-year project. The remainder of the metropolitan area is served by septic tanks.

Parkland, with a penniless Sewer District since 1954, again failed to approve a bond issue for sewer construction in 1962. A group in that community wants to dissolve the District. An estimated 9,000 persons live in this District.

Brown's Point has formed a Sewer District but has been unable to secure a vote for funds to install a sewage system.

The cost of expanded water facilities and sewers have been out of reach in Fife because of the town's sprawling growth where the population-land average is one person per acre. A new survey for a sewage system is now underway.

Gig Harbor, in 1962, was unable to secure voters' approval for a sewage treatment plan and outfall sewer, although it had already secured a Federal loan of \$90,900 for a sewer program. "Improper disposal of sewage at Gig Harbor constitutes one of the most unsatisfactory conditions in the State of Washington from a health standpoint."

## POLICE PROTECTION

Being a legal function of county government, police protection has not given rise to any special service districts. In fact, police districts are against the law. This function is shared by the state, county, and the 11 cities and towns of the metropolitan area. The Pierce County Sheriff enforces state and county laws in the unincorporated areas, and he has statutory authority in cities and towns. There are federal law agencies, the Washington State Patrol, the Pierce County Sheriff's staff, and 11 municipal law enforcement agencies. Small cities and towns who cannot afford their own police radio communications center operate through the Pierce County Sheriff's system.

A uniform traffic citation will go into effect in the State of Washington in June of 1963. It is not now financially feasible for all towns and cities to put into effect the standardized traffic code of laws and signals which is recommended.

In 1949 the Washington State Committee on Law Enforcement Training was established by the combined Washington Association of Chiefs of Police and Washington State Sheriff's Association. A training program is carried on with participation of many groups and highly qualified individuals: e.g. the F.B.I., U.S. Bureau of Prisons, U.S. Army, Washing-

A Traffic Control Division has recently been established by the Pierce County Sheriff. Three full time men plus other deputies on a part time basis will emphasize traffic control on county roads.

Increased police protection is sought in the outlying areas.

## FIRE PROTECTION

The cities of Fircrest, Milton, Puyallup, Steilacoom, Sumner, and Tacoma have fire departments. Only the City of Tacoma has all paid personnel.

There are 15 rural fire districts in the metropolitan area. Of these, 6 have paid personnel, others have some paid personnel, and some have token payment volunteers.

There are existing mutual aid agreements between some districts and the following fire departments:

McChord Field Fire Department  
Ft. Lewis Fire Department

King County Fire District #39  
Kitsap County Fire District

Some unincorporated areas have no fire protection whatever. Fire insurance rates vary. Hydrants in some of the districts are surprisingly uneven in number.

Fire district enabling legislation for the metropolitan area was passed in 1937. The first such district was formed in Sumner in 1940. The size of districts varies widely. Some districts are large, and some are small and sandwiched in between other fire districts or city lines. When each district was formed it was considered adequate for the needs of that time. With increasing concentration of population around Tacoma the separate districts have to be used for more frequent and more crucial situations than ever before. Many districts depend entirely on volunteer forces. The volunteers are doing an excellent job but there is no specified or required training. They cannot be as well informed in modern techniques as full time, paid personnel, nor can they be "on hand" at the fire station all the time.

The fire stations must be unlocked at all times and the key to the engine must be in the ignition. There are cases of vandalism and theft of valuable equipment - e.g., one case of draining all the gasoline out of an engine. What if a fire had occurred before this was discovered?

Rural fire districts are supported on a millage basis by a 2 mill tax on the assessed valuation of a district area. There is a possibility of 2 mills more if it is not taken by some other junior taxing district in that area. To meet the expenses, community fund raising events are often held. This is usually inadequate (one engine costs a minimum of \$16,000).

When outside equipment is called from Tacoma, after an official O.K. is secured, the charges run from \$300 to \$500 per hour per unit. All of the rural fire districts operate under mutual aid agreements with each other with no charge for equipment used. They do respond to calls outside their areas when they know lives and buildings are involved.

## AIR POLLUTION

Air pollution grows with population. Conditions creating serious smog have brought about a new "high" in air pollution over the Puget Sound region. "Tacoma's air is slightly more polluted than the national average for urban areas", according to the U. S. Public Health Service in October, 1962.

Tacoma has one part-time air pollution-control employee.

Seattle and Tacoma have modest pollution control ordinances but air does not respect city or county boundaries. Pollution control districts were authorized by the legislature some years ago, but none has been established to date. No authority exists for applying controls within any jurisdiction which does not voluntarily agree.

Legislation does exist authorizing the State Department of Health to do research, provide technical assistance, and set standards for local control. No money has been appropriated for this purpose. The Health Department has asked the Legislature for funds for an exhaustive study of sources, extent, and effect of air pollution in the Puget Sound region with the core of the survey area to be from South Tacoma to North Everett. Such a survey would be the first major step in eventual establishment of an air pollution control program.

## WATER POLLUTION

Detection of pollution in water supplies for the area is handled by the sanitation division of the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department of the State Health Department. The State Pollution Commission and State Health Department are authorities for controlling water pollution in navigable streams and large bodies of water.

Statistics are not available as to degrees of pollution in streams and lakes of the metropolitan area. Pollution does exist in many of these in conjunction with dangerously saturated drainage areas. Raw sewage is still being emptied into the Sound. There is grave danger of pollution in heavily populated areas where the principal water supply is from wells and where there are no sewer systems. Residents of the lake Steilacoom area assess themselves to have the lake chemically treated once a year because of the danger of pollution.

In 1962 the Pollution Control Commission issued new 5-year waste discharge permits to 7 pulp and paper mills. Controversy still exists as to the degree of harm to marine life from industrial wastes. Industries have given grants to a pollution and products research program at the University of Washington. "If, on completion of current state-federal studies, sulphite waste liquor is definitely proved to cause damage to fisheries resource these permits make positive and legal

Before any program can be fully effective there remains the problem of discharge of untreated raw sewage into the Sound (see section on sewers). In addition there is apparent need for sewage treatment plants on boats. Officials are becoming more alarmed with health dangers when large groups of boaters congregate on beaches on weekends because raw sewage finds its way to bathing waters and beaches. "Most any summer weekend from 50 to 500 boats converge on Point Defiance. The debris they cast over rides the waves to somewhere", according to a quote from the Tacoma News Tribune.

New septic tanks are being installed and concentration of effluent in the earth increases. Health authorities repeatedly warn citizens and local officials that action should begin NOW, for once pollution is discovered it will be too late for easy remedy.

As with air pollution, water pollution spreads far beyond metropolitan boundaries. Local regulations can't cope with either. Pollution of air and water is a menacing regional-area problem. Existing controls lack authority and have "no teeth in them".

#### GARBAGE

There are 7 garbage disposal facilities in the metropolitan area. The City of Tacoma has the power to condemn property outside of the city limits for a sanitary fill.

A fee is charged for use of Tacoma's dump by residents outside the city limits. Puyallup-Sumner and Orting operate dumps with the county. The county alone maintains dumps at Starvation Valley, Anderson Island, Fox Island, and Purdy. Private refuse collection agencies are charged for disposal at dumps.

The Puyallup-Sumner dump, filling at the rate of one acre a year, has space for only one more year. Tacoma's sanitary landfill in the Orchard Street area is being expanded, but it is feared by some residents of Fircrest that this will cause pollution of their water source.

#### PUBLIC TRANSIT

FERRIES — Pierce County's sole transportation facility is ferry service between Steilacoom, and Anderson, McNeil, and Ketron Islands. The contract is awarded to a private company at a cost to the county of \$2,800 a month.

TRAINS — Passenger service is not available to any suburban city or town, only to Tacoma.

AIR — The City of Tacoma is building a municipal airport. In the surrounding suburbs there are 10 private airports.

BUS — The City of Tacoma operates a bus system (Tacoma Transit) extending beyond the city limits to serve Fircrest, Parkland, Ruston, Spanaway, and University Place. Seven small, private bus lines serve other areas of the suburbs. Lakewood, Dash Point, and Brown's Point suffer from inadequate schedules.

There are no transfer privileges between the various companies and little or no coordination among the lines serving the metropolitan area. Existing routes have been laid out to carry passengers between the suburbs and downtown Tacoma with no direct service from one suburb to another. Expense and inconvenience promote use of private cars, increasing downtown congestion and building up suburban shopping areas.

The suburban lines, financially near the "break-even point", are in no position to improve their service. The Wood-

land Bus Company went out of business in June of 1962 leaving the communities of Collins, Woodland, Summit, Waller Road, and Midland without any bus service at all. The area of Woodland is nine miles from the nearest Tacoma Transit System line. These communities did have some sort of public transportation for 42 years.

#### ROADS AND HIGHWAYS

All roads are under county jurisdiction except for state highways and streets of incorporated cities and towns.

The Tacoma metropolitan area is acquiring a new freeway. Preliminary "years ahead" professional planning is essential to all aspects of such construction, especially routes, entrances, and exits to be chosen. In all preliminary planning active participation on the local level is desired because of the great expense involved and the dislocation of established homes, businesses, and industries. The plan of specified routes affects the entire area. Such planning and decisions are usually made by federal and state agencies to meet required federal specifications. The 1963 Legislature was requested to pass legislation making it mandatory for the State Highway Commission to consult local governments in planning freeways.

#### LIBRARIES

Tacoma, Puyallup, Sumner, and Milton operate library systems. Tacoma charges a fee of \$5.00 a year for non-residents for use of its facilities, and Puyallup charges \$2.00 annually. Fircrest contracts with the Tacoma Library system for use of its facilities for a specified yearly charge of \$1200.00. Fircrest residents are charged \$2.00 for a city library card instead of the customary \$5.00 fee for non-residents.

Tacoma bookmobile service at some 21 stops within the city will cease at the end of April because of the failure of a millage levy at the polls. About half of the Tacoma bookmobile stops are made near schools, the other half in neighborhoods not served by branch libraries.

Library service outside of Tacoma is provided by the County Library District, co-extensive with county boundaries, excluding incorporated areas. The Rural Library District provides only books and staff. The area served provides housing or building. Incorporated cities or towns may contract with the Library District for service. Gig Harbor, Orting, and Steilacoom have such contracts. The County Library District also operates 2 bookmobiles providing service for 298

## CONCLUSION

City residents tax their property to pay for their police, parks, garbage dumps, and other services, and they are taxed again by the county to furnish some of these urban services, for residents of the unincorporated areas.

Residents of incorporated areas may pay for:

- 2 park departments
- 2 law enforcement agencies
- 2 planning departments
- 2 garbage departments
- 2 civil defense departments

Non-city residents are not taxed for city services they may receive, but city residents are taxed for county services they may not receive. Non-city residents often pay higher rates for services not up to the standard of city services.

One person may be living under as many as 7 local units of government, each with taxing powers.

Present laws prohibit local governments from providing certain types of service in some areas, although the residents may want such service from that local government.

It is NOW that our suburban areas need sewers and parks, that air pollution and water pollution are a menace. It is NOW that subdivisions are being located, through-ways are being planned, and shopping centers are being built. These expensive and important decisions are being made haphazardly and too often with little regard for the overall public good.