

Urban Growth Boundary (UGB)/ Urban Services Boundary (USB)

An urban growth boundary (UGB) or Urban Services Boundary (USB) is a jurisdictional boundary, set in an attempt to control urbanization by designating the area inside the boundary as higher density and/or designated areas to which public services will be expanded; the area outside the boundary remains lower density rural development and usually does not have expansion of public services planned in the immediate (or even long-term) future.

An urban growth boundary circumscribes an entire urbanized area and is used by local governments as a guide to zoning and land use decisions. If the area affected by the boundary includes multiple jurisdictions a special urban planning agency may be created by the state or regional government to manage the boundary. In a rural context, the terms *town boundary*, *village curtilage* or *village envelope* may be used to apply the same constraining principles.¹

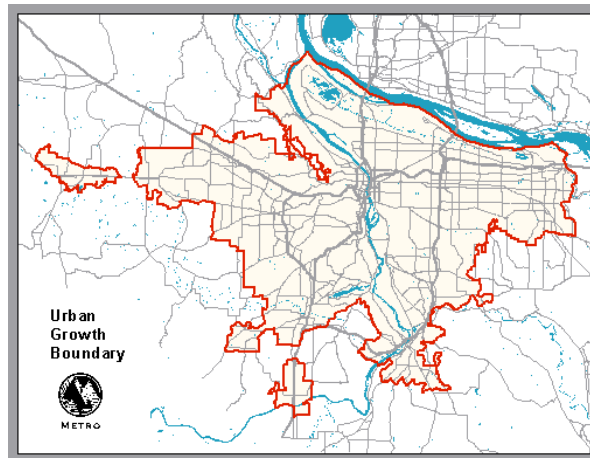
Some jurisdictions refer to the area within an urban boundary as an urban growth area, or UGA. While the names are different, the concept is the same. The boundary controls urban expansion onto farm and forestlands. Land inside the boundary supports urban services such as roads, water and sewer systems, parks, schools, and fire and police protection that create thriving places to live, work, and play. Typically set in 20-year intervals, these boundaries are one of the tools

used to protect farms and forests from urban sprawl and promote the efficient use of land, public facilities, and services inside the boundary.

Other benefits of the boundary include:

- Motivation to develop, re-develop, and infill on land and buildings in the urban core. This helps keep core “downtowns” in business.
- Assurance for businesses and local governments about where to place the infrastructure (such as roads, sewers, and public transportation routes) needed for future development.

- Efficiency for businesses and local governments in terms of how that infrastructure is built. Instead of building roads further and further out as happens in urban “sprawl,” money can be spent to make existing roads, transit service, and other services more efficient.²



Best Practices

The states of Oregon, Washington and Tennessee require cities to establish urban growth boundaries. Notable U.S. cities that have adopted boundaries include Portland, Oregon; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Virginia Beach, Virginia; Lexington, Kentucky; and in Miami-Dade County, Florida. In the San Francisco Bay Area there are several examples. In particular, Livermore and Pleasanton have voter-controlled

¹ Wikipedia.com *Urban Growth Boundary*. Available from: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urban_growth_boundary

² Metro. 2006. *Urban Growth Boundary*. Available from: www.metro-region.org/article.cfm?articleID=277

boundaries as well as their surrounding County of Alameda, creating a robust “double” boundary.

Referring to Oregon’s use of urban growth boundaries, Real Estate Research Corporation, an independent real estate investment consulting firm, recently concluded,



“In reality, the most stable investment markets—the ones that have staying power and hold value—also have growth controls, either government-enacted or enforced by natural geographic boundaries. It’s no coincidence that San Francisco, Seattle, and Boston are hemmed in by water, Chicago

borders a huge lake, and Manhattan is an island. Developers reflexively loathe the regional growth boundaries set by Portland, Oregon, but admit the laws have led to a thriving downtown center as well as a healthy metropolitan area.”¹

Urban growth boundaries were one of the most significant reforms enacted by Oregon in its 1973 state-wide planning legislation. Each locality was required to adopt a UGB as part of its overall planning, a rule that helped Portland maintain its high quality of life over the next 25 years and has preserved 25 million acres of farmland and forests. Some towns, such as Corvallis and Ashland, have actually decided to permanently freeze their boundaries. Kentucky’s growth boundary has preserved the Bluegrass Country around Lexington since 1958.²

¹ 1000 Friends of Oregon. 1999. *Myths & Facts About Oregon’s Urban Growth Boundaries*. Available from: www.friends.org/resources/myths.html

² Bollier, David. 1998. *How Smart Growth Can Stop Sprawl, a briefing guide for funders*. Washington, D.C.: Essential Books.

About 20 years ago, Frederick County was among the first Virginia jurisdictions to create what they termed an “urban development area” (UDA.) The idea was to concentrate development in a zone where it could be cost-effectively served by water, sewer, and roads. Outside the zone, land would be largely preserved for agriculture. This boundary has been indispensable in maintaining the quality of life in Frederick County. Between 1990 and 2000, county population grew 29 percent, making it one of Virginia’s fastest growing jurisdictions, and the population is expected to reach 72,300 by 2010.³ Channeling the growth into the UDA has successfully limited the need to extend utilities and upgrade country roads to serve undesirable patchy development in historically agricultural districts.⁴

Additional Resources:

Rolf Pendall, Jonathan Martin, and William Fulton. August 2002. *Holding the Line: Urban Containment In The United States*. Available from: www.brookings.edu/es/urban/publications/pendallfultoncontainment.pdf

Maryland Office of Planning. 1995. *Models and Guidelines for Managing Maryland’s Growth: Urban Growth Boundaries*. Available from: www.mdp.state.md.us/info/download/Mmg12.PDF

Smart Communities Newtownk. *Land Use Planning Strategies—Urban Growth Boundaries*. Available from: www.smartcommunities.ncat.org/landuse/urban.shtml



³ Bacon, James A. 2006. *Focused Growth*. Available from: www.baconsrebellion.com/Issues06/11-06/Bacon.php

⁴ Ibid.