2014-2015 Development Code Docket
A-5: Remove or Modify Maximum Building Coverage Limits in Specific Rural Zones for Schools (Title 20)

Date: June 3, 2015

Public Hearing Date: Tentative Date: July 1, 2015

Prepared by: Mike Kain, Planning Manager

Proponent/Applicant: Tumwater School District; Thurston County

Action Requested: Amend the various zoning districts in the Thurston County Zoning Ordinance (Title 20) to modify maximum building coverage limits for schools.

☐ Map Changes  ☒ Text Changes  ☐ Both  ☐ Affects Comprehensive Plans/documents
☐ Affected Jurisdictions

ISSUE:
Building coverage limits in several zoning districts have created unintended consequences for the provision of academic schools in rural areas. Following is the definition of academic schools in Title 20. “Academic schools means any publicly financed or private or parochial school or facility used for the purpose of school instruction, from the kindergarten through twelfth grade, and college, except commercial, business or trade schools. This definition does not include a private residence in which parents teach their own natural or legally adopted children.”

BACKGROUND:
This is a proposal to amend subsection (3) of Thurston County Codes (TCC) 20.09A.050, 20.09B.050 20.09C.050, and 20.09D.050 to grant academic schools an exemption from the maximum building coverage limits of 6,000 square feet on lots less than 10 acres in size and twenty thousand square feet for parcels over ten acres in size within the RRR 1/5, R 1/10, R 1/20 and UR 1/5 zoning districts of rural Thurston County.

- RRR 1/5 (Rural Residential Resource one dwelling unit per five acres)
- R 1/10 (Rural one dwelling unit per ten acres)
- R 1/20 (Rural one dwelling unit per twenty acres)
- UR 1/5 (Urban Reserve one dwelling unit per five acres)

In August 2007, the Thurston County Development Code was amended by Ordinance 13884 adding several new zoning districts (R 1/10, R 1/20 and UR 1/5) and placing blanket building
size restrictions in the RRR 1/5 zoning district, as well as the newly created districts for many
Special Uses. For lots of five to ten acres in size, this ordinance added a maximum building
coverage of 6,000 square feet for Special Uses for which no building size limit is specified in
TCC 20.54. The intended purpose was to prohibit large urban structures in the rural portions of
the County in an effort to preserve rural character and avoid the need for urban services in rural
areas. Schools are and have always been an integral part of the rural character.

This building coverage limit did not affect any other rural zones such as RR 1/5, MGSA 1/5, or
other residential and commercial zones. Even so the size restriction cast a wide net that placed
significant limits on traditionally rural uses that benefit public health, safety, welfare and the
rural economy.

Staff believes that one of the unintended consequences of this change to the rural development
code was to limit the size of academic schools and fire district facilities in large portions of rural
Thurston County. To partially address this consequence, on July 6, 2010, the Board of County
Commissioners adopted Ordinance No. 14377 to exempt fire district facilities from the blanket
building coverage limit due to the adverse affect this had on fire districts to provide the services
that are expected of them. A specific fire district requested the change. Academic schools,
however, were not addressed at that time. A determination on academic schools was tabled until
a formal request was submitted.

In 2014, Tumwater School District approached the county to request an amendment to remove or
modify the building size limits in rural zones for schools. Most specifically, they are seeking an
expansion of Littlerock Elementary and are unable to expand this facility under the current code.
Their school bond is dependent on their ability to receive a permit from the county. Littlerock
Elementary is currently 35,313 square feet plus portables. The District is proposing to expand it
to approximately 54,500 square feet plus portables. This 11.42 acre property is located in the
Rural 1/20 zoning district. Under the current code they are limited to 20,000 square feet. Thus,
no expansion could be permitted by the county without a code amendment.

DEPARTMENT ANALYSIS:
Prior to the above mentioned 2007 change to the Thurston County Development Code, public
facilities, like schools and fire districts were not specifically limited in size. The size of Special
Uses was determined on a site specific basis, using parcel characteristics, general building
setback requirements, impervious surface limits set by zone, other use specific standards
contained in Title 20, and traffic and aesthetic issues determine through SEPA review.

The proposed amendment would affect potential expansion at the following academic schools:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Parcel Size</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Parcel #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McLane Elementary</td>
<td>R 1/10</td>
<td>8.47</td>
<td>Delphi</td>
<td>12817130302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Littlerock Elementary</td>
<td>R 1/20</td>
<td>11.42</td>
<td>Littlerock Rd. SW</td>
<td>46703200500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin School</td>
<td>RRR 1/5</td>
<td>12.05</td>
<td>Steamboat Is. Rd.</td>
<td>09260029000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rochester primary and high school; Grand Mound Elementary</td>
<td>RRR 1/5</td>
<td>77.13</td>
<td>James Rd. SW</td>
<td>09410001000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lackamas Elementary</td>
<td>RRR 1/5</td>
<td>7.37</td>
<td>Bald Hill Rd SE</td>
<td>22624440000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Planning Department Staff Report 2  
MAXIMUM BUILDING SIZE LIMITS FOR SCHOOLS

May 28, 2015
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Road/Location</th>
<th>Parcel Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Olympia Elementary</td>
<td>RRR 1/5</td>
<td>19.24</td>
<td>Rich Road SLTEER KINNEY RD</td>
<td>39911800000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southbay Elementary</td>
<td>RRR 1/5</td>
<td>13.29</td>
<td>NE SLEATER KINNEY RD NE</td>
<td>11932340200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston Harbor Elementary</td>
<td>RRR 1/5</td>
<td>19.49</td>
<td>ZANGLE RD. NE</td>
<td>12913230300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yelm High school</td>
<td>UR 1/5</td>
<td>15.55</td>
<td>YELM AVE</td>
<td>21711430100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Currently, there are no specific sites identified by the various school districts and made known to the County for which a new school is proposed.

**OPTIONS:**

a) Change the RRR 1/5, R 1/10, R 1/20 and Urban Reserve 1/5 zoning districts in Title 20 to allow the maximum building coverage for academic schools to exceed the square foot limitations through the Special Use and/or SEPA environmental review process.

b) No changes to the Development Code as it relates to public facilities. Keep the square foot maximum building coverage limit for academic schools in the RRR 1/5, R 1/10, R 1/20 and Urban Reserve 1/5 zoning districts.

**Deleted Text:** Strikethrough  Proposed Changes: Underlined
Staff Comments: Italics  Unaffected Omitted Text: (…)

**Alternative a)**

**Text Changes:** Change subsection 3. of TCC 20.09A.050, 20.09B.050 20.09C.050, and 20.09D.050 to read as follows:

3. Maximum Building Coverage. Building coverage for fire district facilities and academic schools (as defined in 20.03.040 TCC) shall be specified through the special use permit process and/or SEPA environmental review process as applicable. For all other special uses with no maximum building coverage specified in Chapter 20.54 TCC, the maximum building coverage shall be six thousand square feet for parcels five to ten acres in size and twenty thousand square feet for parcels over ten acres in size.

**Staff comments:** This alternative would add flexibility of building coverage for academic schools only in the RRR 1/5, R 1/10, R 1/20 and Urban Reserve 1/5 zones. All other Special Uses would be subject to the current building coverage limits within these four rural zones.

**Alternative b)**

The no change alternative.

**Staff comments:** This alternative may negatively affect the ability of academic schools to provide their necessary services in the rural Thurston County.
SEPA:
A SEPA determination has not been made at this time.

NOTIFICATION:
When a public hearing is set by the Planning Commission, written notice of the hearing will be published in *The Olympian* at least twenty (20) days prior to the hearing.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:
Alternative a. would allow the building coverage limit for academic schools to be determined on a project and site specific basis in the RRR 1/5, R 1/10, R 1/20 and Urban Reserve 1/5 zoning districts of rural Thurston County. This change would have a positive effect on the general welfare in the rural environment. Schools could be sized and more easily located based on student population rather than limited for non-academic reasons. Current size limits could result in added costs to build more than one new school to balance the code limitation and the student needs, or to locate a school far from the service population.

The Resource Stewardship Department recommends the Planning Commission set a public hearing on July 1, 2015 at 7:00 pm on Development Code Docket item A-5, Remove or Modify Maximum Building Coverage Limits in Specific Rural Zones for Schools (Title 20).

ATTACHMENT:
2014-15 Official Docket of Development Code Amendments

Q:\LONG RANGE PLANNING\DEV CODE AMENDMENTS 2014 TO 2015\A-5 School Size\PC Staff Report A-5 School Size_5.28.15.doc