

Attachment F:  
Excerpt from  
Thurston County  
Comprehensive Plan  
Chapter 2 Land Use

**A. Growth Trends and Density**

The most densely built areas of the County are, by design, the urban growth areas and cities. In new subdivisions the cities achieved an average net residential density of over 7.6 dwelling units per acre, where the unincorporated urban growth areas achieved 6.0 dwelling units per acre (between the years 2000 and 2004). This was a substantial increase over the previous five years (1995-1999), where net residential density was 6.2 units per acre in the cities, and 3.6 units per acre in the unincorporated growth areas. This was an increase of 24% in the cities, and 65% in the unincorporated growth areas.

The rural portion of the county contains areas designated as limited areas of more intensive rural development (LAMIRDs). The LAMIRDs accommodate small lot development and subdivisions that occurred prior to the adoption of the Growth Management Act in 1990 (e.g., around lakes, along some marine shorelines or at crossroads), as well as cluster-type developments. The goals and policies in this plan seek to maintain rural character and resource uses as well as minimize and contain existing areas or uses of more intensive rural development in the rural area while directing urban growth to appropriate areas.

**IV. LAND USE DESIGNATIONS**

This section of the Land Use Chapter describes each of the land use designations depicted on the Future Land Use Map (Map M-15). Mineral lands of long-term commercial significance are designated on a separate map (M-43), and open space lands and corridors are shown on Map M-31. Parks and trails owned by the County are also identified in the Thurston County Parks Plan, which is maintained as a separate planning document. The policies in Section VII provide further guidance in determining the appropriate land use designations for lands in rural areas. Development of lands within UGAs around cities and towns are guided by the land use designations within the adopted city/county joint plans.

In interpreting this plan, the following descriptions of the land use designations and the associated policies in Section VII of this chapter should be given the greatest weight and importance. The accompanying Future Land Use Map (Map M-15) is intended to be a visual representation of the descriptions and policies. Where there are apparent inconsistencies between the text and the map, the text shall control.

**A. General Land Use Guidelines:**

Determining how and where to designate land uses throughout the county is a complex process that involves an evaluation of geographic and scientific information, legal and social parameters, and citizen preferences. The following table describes the general guidelines used to make designation decisions:

<b>Location Criteria</b>	
Land Capability/ Environmental Constraints	<p>This guideline describes the characteristics of the land and its ability to support development at the intensity of use associated with each of the land use designations. It includes consideration of such factors as topography, permeability and stability of soils, geologic hazards, flood proneness and hydrologic conditions.</p> <p>When the term "environmental constraints" is used under this guideline, it refers to the presence of natural features of the land that would either: (1) limit an area's ability to accommodate development (e.g., flood hazards, geologic instability); or (2) be very sensitive to development or be destroyed by development (e.g., wetlands, Mima Mounds, eagle habitat, sensitive aquifers, public drinking water supplies or other critical areas).</p> <p>Technology can moderate the effects of some constraints. For example, building foundations may be constructed on unstable grounds, and sensitive resources such as oyster growing waters may be protected from the impacts of development by controlling pollutants from entering storm water and keeping sewage drainage away from these waters. Generally, however, the presence of widespread constraints or important sensitive areas should indicate caution in making certain land use designations. Caution is needed because the potential intensity level of the classification may not be able to be achieved due to constraints posed by the natural feature or condition; or the natural feature or condition could be lost or degraded.</p>
Natural Resources	<p>This guideline describes the kinds of natural resources that may exist on lands in each designation, or indicates when a certain designation may be inappropriate if important natural resources exist on the land or if it is too close to and may adversely impact a nearby natural resource area, such as agriculture, forestry, aquaculture, or mineral deposits.</p>
Public Services	<p>This guideline describes the levels or types of public services associated with each land use designation are described under this guideline. It also addresses any special public service needs or impacts to be avoided in association with each land use designation.</p>
Existing Land Uses	<p>This guideline describes the types and levels or intensities of land uses that should exist (or not exist) in or near areas being considered for each land use classification.</p>

<b>General Decision-Making Guidelines</b>	
Citizen Preference Identified through Public Process	Desires of the citizenry for certain types of land uses over other types should be an important consideration in making land use decisions. Citizen preference is important, for example, when deciding to give weight to one factor over another, or in deciding among conflicting factors.
Impacts on Economy, Employment, Tax Base	A variety of factors associated with these impacts should be considered when making land use designation decisions. For example, a county-wide balance should be maintained between residential and industrial/commercial/agricultural/ forestry areas in order to enhance and provide diversity to the county's tax base and employment opportunities
Easy to Identify Boundaries	The boundaries of land use designations should follow easily identified features on the land, such as utility corridors or observable terrain changes. When areas with severe limitations for development (e.g., soils, geology, flooding) do not coincide with such identifiable landmarks, the boundaries should be drawn with land capability in mind.

**B. Rural Area Designations**

The purpose of rural areas as defined by the County in compliance with the GMA is:

To support the rural aspects of Thurston County.

To protect areas with environmental constraints and preserve and buffer natural resource areas of agriculture, forestry, aquaculture, mineral deposits and fish and wildlife habitats from encroachment by or irreversible conversion to more intense uses.

To allow low intensity residential uses which do not require a high level of public services and facilities.

To protect and promote natural resource-based industries.

To protect “rural character” as defined in RCW 36.70A.030(14) as “the patterns of land use and development established by a county in the rural element of its comprehensive plan:

- (a) In which open space, the natural landscape, and vegetation predominate over the built environment;

- (b) That foster traditional rural lifestyles, rural-based economies, and opportunities to both live and work in rural areas;
- (c) That provide visual landscapes that are traditionally found in rural areas and communities;
- (d) That are compatible with the use of the land by wildlife and for fish and wildlife habitat;
- (e) That reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development;
- (f) That generally do not require the extension of urban governmental services; and
- (g) That are consistent with the protection of natural surface water flows and ground water and surface water recharge and discharge areas.”

Rural areas are characterized by a balance between the natural environment and human uses with low density residential dwellings, farms, forests, mining areas, outdoor recreation and other open space activities. Commercial uses will be small in scale and will provide convenience services to the rural neighborhood. Industrial uses will generally be those that are related to and dependent on natural resources such as agriculture, timber or minerals. Home-based occupations and industries will be allowed throughout the rural area provided they do not adversely affect the surrounding residential uses. Rural area residential densities will commonly be one dwelling unit per five, ten, or twenty acres. As previously noted, the rural county also contains pockets of higher density development. Some of those areas have been designated as LAMIRDs, which allows additional limited higher density development. Specific densities for each area designated in the Comprehensive Plan are implemented through the Official Zoning Map of Thurston County and the Thurston County zoning code and other development regulations, which are consistent with this plan. Rural area lands are designated according to the land use guidelines above. See Table 2-1A, below, for the percentage of land allocated to different rural uses.

<b>RURAL – ONE DWELLING UNIT PER TEN ACRES</b>	
Purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To minimize flooding and development at risk of flooding in the Salmon Creek Basin.</li> <li>• To avoid increasing saltwater intrusion in areas underlain by aquifers with elevated chloride levels.</li> </ul>
Definition and Characteristics	<p>Primary land uses are resource-oriented (e.g., mineral extraction approved through a special use process, agriculture and forestry), open space, and residential. Additional compatible uses that support or rely upon agriculture, forestry, mineral extraction, and open space may be allowed. Residential densities are limited to one dwelling per ten acres but may be further limited due to physical constraints and natural hazards, including the presence of critical areas.</p>
Locational Guidelines	<p>Land Capability and Environmental Characteristics. This designation is appropriate for lands that are environmentally constrained, such as lands that are underlain by aquifers contaminated with chloride and lands within the flood prone Salmon Creek Basin.</p> <p>Natural Resources. The area may contain forests, mineral deposits, , soils suitable for agriculture, and critical areas.</p> <p>Public Services. Allowed uses do not require provision of urban services or utilities. However, the area may be located along arterials, within areas containing pre-existing small-lot development, and/or relatively close to existing centers of employment and/or personal services.</p> <p>Existing Land Uses. The area is predominantly in parcels ten acres or larger in size, although some smaller and some larger parcels may be present. Residences, agriculture, forestry, mineral extraction, open space, or undeveloped land may be present.</p>

<b>RURAL RESIDENTIAL AND RESOURCE -- ONE UNIT PER FIVE ACRES</b>	
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To maintain the rural character of the county.</li> <li>• To buffer environmentally sensitive areas and resource management areas from incompatible activities.</li> <li>• To maintain a balance between human uses and the natural environment.</li> </ul>
Definition and Characteristics	<p>Primary land uses in the one unit per five acre areas are resource-oriented (farming, forestry, mineral extraction), open space, and low density residential. Residential use may be limited due to physical land capability constraints, including the presence of critical areas. Innovative techniques are used by the County to provide a variety of rural densities within this designation.</p>
Locational Guidelines	<p>Land Capability and Environmental Characteristics. This designation is appropriate for lands that may have severe soil limitations, critical areas and/or very limited ground water. Lands subject to this designation may be located within the adjacent uplands to an aquaculture management district or "natural" shoreline under the Shoreline Management Program.</p> <p>Natural Resources. The area has moderate potential for farming or forestry management or may be adjacent to long-term resource lands.</p> <p>Public Services. The area is too far from the urban area to enable cost-effective provision of public services. Uses do not require extension or provision of urban services.</p> <p>Existing Land Uses. The land is generally in parcels five acres or larger in size.</p>

<b>MCALLISTER GEOLOGICALLY SENSITIVE AREA</b>	
Purpose	<p>To maintain areas of rural living where the natural environment is in balance with human use.</p> <p>To provide for residential, commercial, and agricultural uses of a type and density which will minimize the potential for contamination or significant loss in recharge capacity of a vulnerable ground water aquifer and potable water source of great importance to the general public.</p>
Definition and Characteristics	<p>That portion of the McAllister Springs recharge area outside the urban growth area boundary. These lands are characterized by natural resource-based uses, such as agriculture and forestry, residential uses at a density of one unit per five acres, and limited home-based industries and home occupations.</p>
Locational Guidelines	<p>This designation is limited to lands within the McAllister Springs recharge area outside of the north county Urban Growth Area boundary.</p>

2. Limited areas of more intensive rural development (LAMIRD) designations

Under the GMA, zoning districts allowing residential densities in the rural area greater than one dwelling unit per five acres are generally considered to promote sprawling, low-density development inconsistent with the Goal 2 of the GMA. To recognize existing residential development in the rural areas that is too intensive to be considered rural, in 1997, the Washington State Legislature adopted amendments to the GMA that provided for “limited areas of more intensive rural development”, or LAMIRDs. (RCW 36.70A.070(5)(d)).

Areas that meet the requirements established by the GMA can retain their higher density zoning. Areas that do not qualify for designation as a LAMIRD must be designated for a rural density of no more than one dwelling unit per five acres.

RCW 36.70A.070(5)(d)(i) defines LAMIRDs as:

“Rural development consisting of the infill, development, or redevelopment of existing commercial, industrial, residential, or mixed-use areas, whether characterized as shoreline development, villages, hamlets, rural activity centers, or crossroads developments.”

When designating residential LAMIRDs, the GMA requires the County to establish logical outer boundaries that contain the development that existed as of July 1, 1990 (the date Thurston County was initially required to plan under the GMA). This “built environment” may include structures located above or below ground, such as buildings and water and sewer lines. Residential LAMIRDs also may include limited undeveloped lands that are located within the logical outer boundary, but they should not allow a new pattern of low density sprawl. Thurston County used the LAMIRD criteria adopted by the Washington State Legislature in 1997 to designate LAMIRD boundaries. Data used to establish these boundaries included aerial photographs from 1990, building permits, and water service systems that were in place by July 1, 1990.

A relatively small percentage (3.2%) of rural Thurston County is designated as residential LAMIRDs. These areas, which allow residential land use at densities greater than 1 unit per 5 acres (see Table 2-1A), accommodate lots developed prior to July 1, 1990, and provide some limited infill potential as allowed under the GMA. These areas of more intensive rural development include unincorporated communities such as Boston Harbor and Rochester, crossroads communities, neighborhood developments, areas around rural lakes, and some marine shoreline areas. The purpose, characteristics, and locational guidelines for each LAMIRD category are described below.

- c. the rezone would maintain or enhance environmental quality; or
  - d. Thurston County pursues a legislative rezone.
11. If rezoning is requested for a portion of a land use designation:
- a. the impact of a proposed rezone on landowners remaining in the original designation should be evaluated and considered;
  - b. the proposed rezone should only be allowed if there is projected to be minimal adverse impact on neighboring landowners and on the continued use of a rural district for natural resource-based industries or conservation purposes;
  - c. regular, easily definable boundaries should be maintained; and
  - d. the rezoning should not increase the demand for urban levels of service.

**GOAL 2:** TO DESIGNATE URBAN GROWTH AREAS THAT CUMULATIVELY PROVIDE AREA AND DENSITIES SUFFICIENT TO PERMIT THE URBAN GROWTH THAT IS PROJECTED TO OCCUR IN THE COUNTY OVER THE SUCCEEDING 20 YEARS.

**OBJECTIVE A: Designating Urban Growth Areas** - Include in urban growth areas territory that is located outside of a city or town only if such territory is already characterized by urban growth or is adjacent to territory already characterized by urban growth.

**POLICIES:**

1. Urban growth areas should contain areas characterized by urban growth.
2. Urban growth areas should be served by or planned to be served by municipal utilities.
3. Urban growth areas should contain vacant land near existing urban areas that is capable of supporting urban development.
4. Urban growth areas should be designated so as to be compatible with the use of designated natural resource lands and critical areas.
5. Urban growth areas should follow logical boundaries and consider citizen preferences.
6. The county should attempt to reach agreement with each city and town on the location of an urban growth area within which the city or town is located.

7. Expansion of an urban growth boundary should ensure provision of transportation, municipal water and an adequate water supply for the succeeding 20 years in a manner that does not degrade the Puget Sound or waters flowing into it. North County jurisdictions<sup>14</sup> must ensure that the area can be served by municipal sewer, and South County jurisdictions<sup>15</sup> must demonstrate that the expansion area can be served by sewage disposal methods that provide for the effective treatment of waste water in a manner that does not degrade waters flowing into the Puget Sound in the succeeding 20 years.
  8. Expansion of an urban growth area boundary should meet one of the following two criteria:
    - a. There is insufficient land within the existing urban growth area to permit the urban growth that is forecast to occur in the succeeding 20 years; or
    - b. There can be shown an overriding public benefit to public health, safety and welfare by moving the urban growth boundary.
  9. The area that is designated for the expansion of any urban growth area should be contiguous to an existing urban growth boundary.
  10. Reductions in any urban growth boundary should ensure that sufficient land will remain within the reduced urban growth area to permit the urban growth that is forecast to occur in the succeeding 20 years including a reasonable market factor.
  11. A variety of densities and housing types should be provided in urban growth areas, with planned densities of four units per acre or higher, except where limited by physical constraints. The exact locations of housing densities are to be determined by joint plans or subarea plans.
  12. Expansion or reduction of any urban growth area should be compatible with the use of designated natural resource lands, designated archaeological and historic resources, and with critical areas.
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<sup>14</sup> "North county jurisdictions" refers to growth areas around Lacey, Olympia and Tumwater

<sup>15</sup> "South county jurisdictions" refers to growth areas around Yelm, Rainier, Tenino, Bucoda, and the Grand Mound Urban Growth Area.

13. The designation of or change to urban growth areas should be consistent with the Thurston County County-Wide Planning Policies.
14. In order to protect the supply of adequate water to rural area residents and natural resource industries, the County should consider mitigation methods for rural area water supplies that are purchased or transferred from the rural area for use in a city or urban growth area.

**OBJECTIVE B: Planning Framework for Urban Growth Areas** - Adopt and maintain a joint plan for each urban growth area around a city or town. For urban growth areas around unincorporated centers, the policy framework for urban growth should be embodied either in this Comprehensive Plan or subarea plan.

**POLICIES:**

1. The adopted joint plans will serve as the basis for County planning decisions and as the pre-annexation comprehensive plans for the cities to use when annexations are proposed within urban growth areas.
2. Compatible level of service standards for public services and facilities should be jointly adopted and maintained among jurisdictions within urban growth areas.
3. The County should support development consistent with joint plans.
4. For those UGAs that include incorporated and unincorporated areas, growth management agreements between the county and the municipalities should establish common standards for roads and utilities. The agreements should also establish that land use patterns adopted within the joint plan will be honored for a mutually agreeable period following adoption of the plan or annexation.
5. The County should coordinate its planning and development regulations with the cities for urban growth areas.

**OBJECTIVE C: Accommodating Projected Growth** - Concentrate medium and higher-intensity residential, commercial and industrial development in urban growth areas in a way that ensures livability and preservation of environmental quality, open space retention, varied and affordable housing, and high quality urban services at the least cost.

**POLICIES:**

1. Encourage infilling in areas already characterized by urban growth that have the capacity and provide public services and facilities to serve urban development.
2. Through the Buildable Lands Program, the County should ensure that average residential densities in urban growth areas are sufficient to enable the county as a

- whole to accommodate its 20-year population projection including a reasonable market factor.
3. Where urban services and utilities are not yet available, require development to be configured so urban development may eventually infill and become urban.
  4. Consider the use of innovative development techniques within urban growth areas, such as cluster housing and the transfer of development rights.
  5. Land use plans within UGAs should balance change with recognition of the distinct identities of neighborhoods and support variety and choice in living and working environments.
  6. Residential development in UGAs should include a variety of housing types. Overall densities should be high enough to support efficient public services and provide affordable housing choices, but there should be a variety of densities based on land capability, environmental sensitivity, and constraints in providing services. In areas where urban growth and sewer extensions are scheduled to take place later, residential development should be kept at very low densities for the short-term or developed in a manner that will not preclude later infilling at higher densities.
  7. Mining, forestry, farming, and related natural resource industries may occur in urban growth areas, but in the long-term can expect to be replaced by more intensive urban land uses and activities.
  8. Industrial and commercial development of all types may occur in urban growth areas, particularly the larger and more intensive types of development which require higher levels of public services and facilities. Within the urban growth areas around the incorporated towns, the industrial and larger commercial development should take place inside the towns themselves in order to support their roles as the economic centers of their areas.
  9. The highest levels of public services and facilities should be provided in urban growth areas, but may be provided at lesser levels in the smaller towns' urban growth areas. Some services and facilities may only be provided after areas incorporate or are annexed to adjacent cities or towns. These urban services and facilities may include water supply; sanitary and storm sewers; police and fire protection; paved streets with curbs, sidewalks and street lights; and public transit and bicycle paths. Other services may include community and neighborhood parks, government offices, libraries, medical facilities, manned fire stations, and animal control.
  10. Open space lands contributing to the livability of UGAs should be preserved, including those providing scenic amenity, community identity and buffers within and between urban and rural areas.

11. Reductions in any urban growth boundary should ensure that the reduced urban growth area will include effective sewer and water and transportation service areas, and will retain the ability to accommodate projected population growth for a 20-year period including a reasonable market factor.
12. Significant archeological and historic resources contributing to the sense of place, providing links to our past, and enhancing quality of life should be protected and preserved.
13. The County should weigh the need to accommodate projected growth in a particular area against the potential impacts of that growth on critical areas. Some areas of the County are not appropriate for urban growth due to the occurrence and/or sensitivity of critical areas or the possibility of creating a public safety hazard.

**OBJECTIVE D: Annexations and Incorporations** - The county should review annexations and incorporations for consistency with this Comprehensive Plan, effective sub-area plans and impacts on county land use, traffic circulation, public services and facilities and integrity and continuity of service areas and boundaries.

**POLICIES:**

1. Annexations should be supported within designated short-term urban growth areas of cities and towns, where short-term urban growth boundaries exist.
2. Annexations of unincorporated islands should be actively encouraged and creation of new unincorporated islands should be discouraged.
3. Annexations may not occur outside of designated urban growth areas.
4. Cities and towns may require an annexation commitment as a condition of utility service within designated short-term urban growth areas.
5. New city and town incorporations should provide adequate facilities and services for urban growth consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

**GOAL 3:** LAND USE PLANNING AND DECISION MAKING SHOULD ENSURE THE HIGHEST DEGREE OF PUBLIC HEALTH, SAFETY, AND GENERAL WELFARE WITHIN A QUALITY LIVING ENVIRONMENT WITHOUT UNDULY JEOPARDIZING THE RIGHTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL.

**OBJECTIVE A: Citizen Participation in the Planning Process** - An effective system to ensure participation by individuals and groups in planning and decision making should be maintained.