CHAPTER 2

LAND USE

# I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter of the Comprehensive Plan depicts the future pattern of public and private land uses in unincorporated Thurston County and serves as both the Land Use and Rural Elements as they are defined by the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA).

The Land Use Chapter includes county-wide population projections and the methodology used to derive these projections, population densities, and future land use designations, as well as the process and criteria for making those designations. The Land Use Chapter works in concert with the other chapters of the Comprehensive Plan to meet the requirements of the GMA.

Growth Management Requirements

The Growth Management Act requires a Land Use Element:

*“…designating the proposed general distribution and general location and extent of the uses of land, where appropriate, for agriculture, timber production, housing, commerce, industry, recreation, open spaces and green spaces, general aviation airports, public utilities, public facilities, and other land uses. The land use element shall include population densities, building intensities, and estimates of future population growth. The land use element shall provide for protection of the quality and quantity of ground water used for public water supplies. The land use element must give special consideration to achieving environmental justice in its goals and policies, including efforts to avoid creating or worsening environmental health disparities. Wherever possible, the land use element should consider utilizing urban planning approaches that promote physical activity and reduce per capita vehicle miles traveled within the jurisdiction, but without increasing greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere in the state. Where applicable, the land use element shall review drainage, flooding, and stormwater runoff in the area and nearby jurisdictions and provide guidance for corrective actions to mitigate or cleanse those discharges that pollute waters of the state, including Puget Sound or waters entering Puget Sound. The land use element must mitigate the risk to lives and property posed by wildfires by using land use planning tools, which may include, but are not limited to, adoption of portions or all of the wildland urban interface code developed by the international code council or developing building and maintenance standards consistent with the Firewise USA program or similar program designed to reduce wildfire risk, reducing wildfire risks to residential development in high risk areas and the wildland urban interface area, separating human development from wildfire prone landscapes, and protecting existing residential development and infrastructure through community wildfire preparedness and fire adaptation measures.”*

RCW 36.70A.070(1)

Some land use topics are covered more fully in other chapters of the Comprehensive Plan:

* Public utilities are covered in Chapter 7 – Utilities
* Review of drainage, flooding, and stormwater are covered in Chapter 7 – Utilities and Chapter 9 – Environment
* Measures protecting water quality and quantity are covered in Chapter 9 – Environment
* Measures reducing risks to residential development from wildfire in Chapter 9 –Environment
* Measures promoting physical activity are covered in Chapter 11 – Health

The Plan contains a Rural Element, including:

* Lands not designated for urban growth, agriculture, forest, or mineral resources
* Land uses that are compatible with rural character … and provide for a variety of rural densities
* Measures to protect rural character by:
  + Containing or otherwise controlling rural development
  + Assuring visual compatibility of rural development with the surrounding area
  + Reducing the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development
  + Protecting critical areas, and surface, and groundwater resources
  + Protecting against conflicts with the use of agriculture, forest, and mineral resource lands
* Limited areas of more intensive rural development

RCW 36.70A.070(5)

The Land Use Chapter also identifies the location of urban growth areas (UGAs) around incorporated cities and towns. This chapter does not include land use designations for the UGAs which live in the respective city/county joint plans. Likewise, the Grand Mound Subarea Plan contains the future land use map for the Grand Mound UGA.

# II. URBAN GROWTH AREAS & SubAreas

### A. History and Purpose of Thurston County’s Urban Growth Areas

In 1983, Thurston County, along with the cities of Olympia, Lacey, and Tumwater, blazed the trail for growth management in Washington State by signing an inter-local government agreement called the “Urban Growth Management Agreement.” That early agreement included an Urban Growth Management Boundary around the three cities to serve as a limit for the cities’ expansion for 20 years.

The purposes of the county’s original growth areas remain relevant today:

To provide for higher intensity development around the county’s incorporated cities and towns and unincorporated community centers in order to concentrate development in areas where minimal impact to the environment, natural resources, and rural atmosphere will occur.

To minimize public costs and conserve energy by using services and facilities efficiently through concentration of development and integration of jobs, shopping, services, and housing.

To phase urban growth and infill with the provision of urban public services and facilities.

One of the main effects of an urban growth area is to provide a limit for the extension of urban utilities, especially sewer service. To that end, overall residential density in urban growth areas should be high enough to support urban public services and to provide affordable housing choices. There should be a variety of housing types, with most densities ranging from 4 to 16 dwelling units per acre.

Map I-1 identifies the urban growth areas for each city or town in Thurston County. The UGAs must accommodate the urban growth projected over the next 20 years including a reasonable market factor. Policies and actions emphasize the provision of urban land uses and services and include provisions specifically aimed at reducing low density residential sprawl. Joint plans established with each city and town include planning policies for each UGA. Joint plans are contained in separate documents but are incorporated as part of the Thurston County Comprehensive Plan.

Detailed land use designations for all UGAs around cities and towns are provided in the following joint plans (Map I-1 is keyed to the numbering below):

1. Olympia/Thurston County Joint Plan

2. Lacey/Thurston County Joint Plan

3. Tumwater/Thurston County Joint Plan

4. Yelm/Thurston County Joint Plan

5. Rainier/Thurston County Joint Plan

6. Tenino/Thurston County Joint Plan

7. Bucoda/Thurston County Joint Plan (not recently updated as there is currently no UGA for Bucoda)

### B. Growth Management Act Requirements for Urban Growth Areas:

The following points summarize the GMA requirements for urban growth areas (36.70A.110 RCW):

* For each city or town, the county must designate an urban growth area, within which urban growth shall be encouraged and outside of which growth can occur only if it is not urban in nature.
* An urban growth area may include territory outside of a city or town only if the territory already is characterized by urban growth or is adjacent to territory already characterized by urban growth.
* The urban growth areas in the county must be sufficient to permit the urban growth that is projected to occur in the county over the next 20 years.
* Urban growth areas must permit urban densities and include open spaces.
* Urban growth should be located first in areas already characterized by urban growth that have existing public facility and service capacities to serve such development, and second in areas already characterized by urban growth that will be served by a combination of both existing public facilities and services and any additional public facilities and services needed.
* At least every 10 years, the county must reevaluate Urban Growth Areas and the densities permitted within them.

In addition to these requirements, the GMA required all jurisdictions in the county to jointly develop a set of County-Wide Planning Policies to guide joint planning between the county and cities for urban growth areas. The policies in this chapter are consistent with the County-Wide Planning Policies.

### C. Market Factor

Pursuant to RCW 36.70A.110(2), the Growth Management Act allows counties to include a “reasonable land market supply factor” when sizing urban growth areas.

RCW 36.70A.110(2). An urban growth area determination may include a reasonable land market supply factor and shall permit a range of urban densities and uses. In determining this market factor, cities and counties may consider local circumstances. Cities and counties have discretion in their comprehensive plans to make many choices about accommodating growth.

The county will require cities to bring forward evidence to justify that this “market factor” is to account for land that is not likely to be available during the next 20-year period. A “market factor” is not a substitution for population projections, which are addressed separately in [Section III](#_III._POPULATION_and).

### D. Water Availability

* See *Chapter 9 – ENVIRONMENT, RECREATION, AND OPEN SPACE* FOR MORE INFORMATION ON WATER AVAILABILITY

In 2018, Senate Bill 6091 established responsibility for local governments to ensure that potable water is legally available to serve new development prior to issuing permits. Water is not legally available if a new well would impact a protected river or stream, or an existing senior water right. New development must connect to an approved water system or create new permit exempt wells.

SB 6091 also requires local jurisdictions to ensure that new permit exempt well construction does not reduce instream flows. The law requires implementation of projects that will offset the consumptive impact of new permit exempt domestic water use. To meet this requirement, watershed plans were developed under the standards of SB 6091—primarily codified under RCW 90.94—to define projects that achieve these offsets. Approved plans are available in two of Thurston County’s four water resource inventory areas (WRIAs) while two remain in the rulemaking process under Department of Ecology review as watershed plans are being developed.

### E. Subarea planning

Subarea planning is used in Thurston County to study and plan for distinct unincorporated communities within the county. The county maintains active subarea plans for the communities of Rochester, Grand Mound, and the Nisqually Valley. These plans are incorporated by reference into the Comprehensive Plan.

The Rochester Subarea Plan was updated in 2020, Grand Mound Subarea Plan in 2023, and Nisqually Valley Subarea Plan was in review at the time of this periodic update.

# III. POPULATION and Growth Trends

### A. Population Allocation and Forecast

The GMA requires the county to plan to accommodate the population projected by Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM). The County-Wide Planning Policies direct the Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC)[[1]](#footnote-2) to develop small-area population projections based on the framework of the county-wide population projection provided by OFM (see [Table 2-1](#Table21)). These small-area projections are often referred to as “population distributions” because they split up the projected population growth, distributing it among the county’s cities, towns, and rural areas. TRPC derives its own county-wide population projections using a computer model that includes analysis of employment trends and more up-to-date population changes than what OFM uses.

Table 2-1. Population Allocation and Forecast by Thurston County Jurisdiction, 2020-2045

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2020 Population | 2045 Population Forecast | Change, 2020-2045 | Percent Change |
| Thurston County Total | 297,793 | 383,500 | 85,707 | 29% |
| Incorporated Cities | 137,030 | 197,190 | 60,160 | 44% |
| Lacey UGA | 35,470 | 59,040 | 23,570 | 66% |
| Olympia UGA | 12,270 | 16,770 | 4,500 | 37% |
| Tumwater UGA | 3,320 | 8,960 | 5,640 | 170% |
| Yelm UGA | 1,390 | 5,630 | 4,240 | 305% |
| Rainier UGA | 110 | 640 | 530 | 482% |
| Tenino UGA | 15 | 110 | 95 | 633% |
| Grand Mound UGA | 1,325 | 1,990 | 665 | 50% |
| Total UGAs | 53,900 | 93,140 | 39,240 | 73% |
| Rural county | 85,220 | 101,930 | 16,710 | 20% |
| Total Unincorporated[[2]](#footnote-3) Thurston County | **137,050** | **184,080** | **55,190** | **39%** |

Source: Thurston Regional Planning Council Population and Employment Forecast, 2019. The Baseline population forecast was Revised during the Regional Housing Allocation Process to reflect city boundaries as of Sept. 1, 2023. A decrease in UGA population over the planning period is likely due to annexation.

The population distributions are intended to ensure that each city and town’s Comprehensive Plan and any applicable Joint Plan accommodates the projected population growth. These population distributions are individually discussed in each of the Joint Plans adopted by the county. TRPC updates its population and land supply forecasting data under the GMA-required Buildable Lands Program. Numbers reflected in this plan should be treated as a point-in-time accounting of population distribution, and more current information may be obtained from TRPC.

As shown in [Figure 2-1](#Figure21), almost two-thirds of the projected population growth between 2020 and 2045 is likely to be located within incorporated cities, and just 30% in designated urban growth areas. Within the county’s jurisdictions, the Lacey UGA is set to receive the largest proportion of population growth, in part because it is the largest UGA with the most developable area.

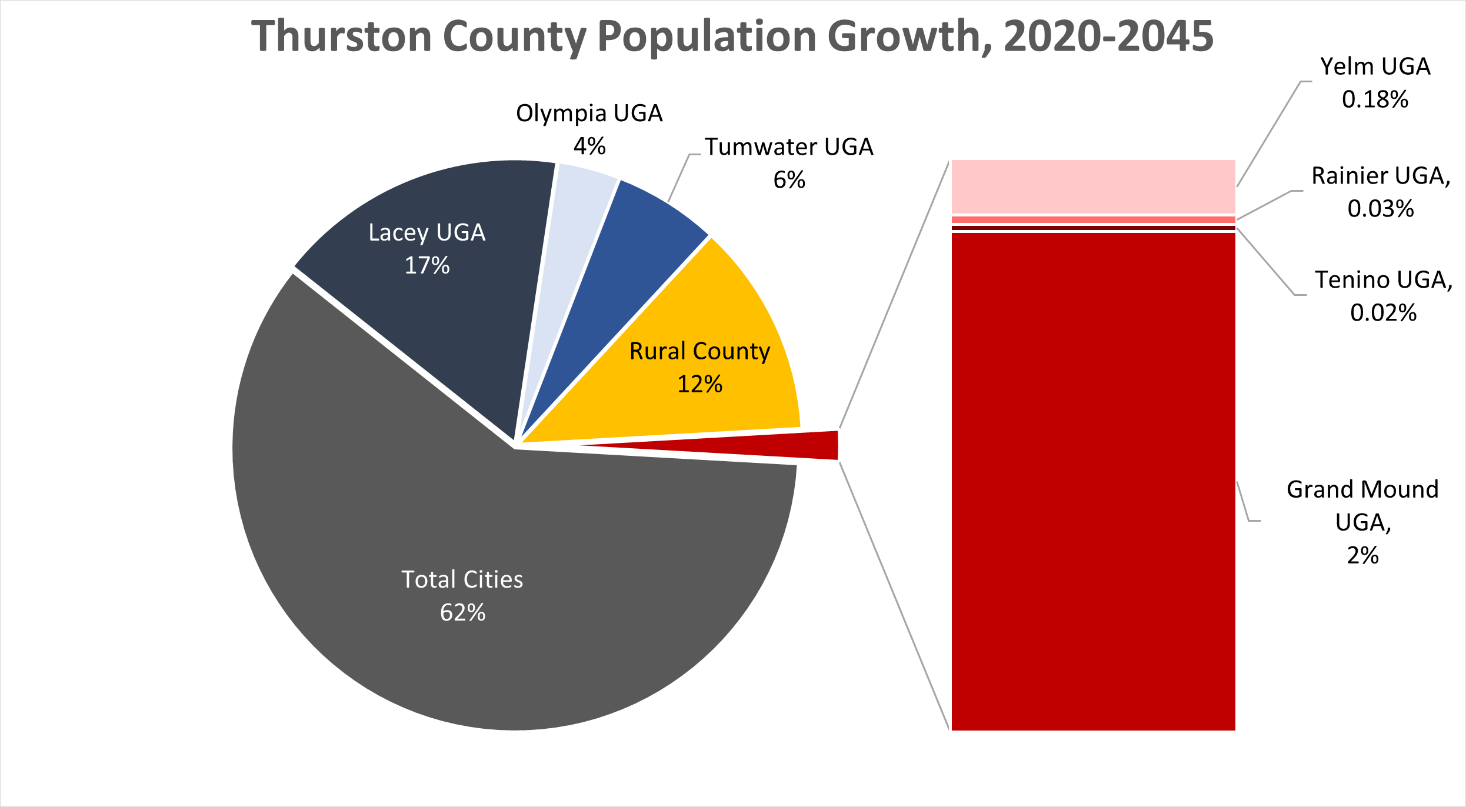


Figure 2-1. Thurston County Population Growth, 2020-2045: Proportion by Jurisdiction

RCW 36.70A.215 establishes a “Buildable Lands Program” requiring jurisdictions to track their ability to accommodate population growth. TRPC is the lead agency in Thurston County for the Buildable Lands Program, and provides data to the county for comprehensive and joint plan amendments required by RCW 36.70A.130 (1) and RCW 36.70A.130(3). The 2021 Buildable Lands Report found that there is sufficient land supply to accommodate projected population growth (to year 2040) in Thurston County’s urban areas (cities plus unincorporated urban growth areas), both overall and within each urban jurisdiction ([see Table 2-2](#Table22)). Even considering the number of new dwelling units projected to be built over the 20-year planning period, the excess capacity falls within the established regional market factor of 10% to 25%.[[3]](#footnote-4)

Table 2-2. Residential Capacity in Urban Areas of Thurston County

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2020 Dwelling Units | Future Demand 2020-2040 | Future Supply 2020+ | Excess Capacity |
| **Bucoda** | 250 | 220 | 350 | 37% |
| **Lacey & UGA** | 36,820 | 13,820 | 17,560 | 21% |
| **Olympia & UGA** | 30,520 | 13,460 | 16,880 | 20% |
| **Rainier & UGA** | 910 | 530 | 750 | 29% |
| **Tenino & UGA** | 780 | 800 | 1,200 | 33% |
| **Tumwater & UGA** | 12,150 | 8,600 | 11,010 | 22% |
| **Yelm & UGA** | 3,820 | 7,200 | 10.310 | 30% |
| **Grand Mound UGA** | 430 | 310 | 430 | 28% |
| **TOTAL Urban Areas** | **85,680** | **44,940** | **58,490** | **23%** |

Source: Buildable Lands Report for Thurston County, TRPC, 2021.

**The county recognizes that boundaries of urban growth areas, although showing sufficient land availability for forecasted population growth as of the 2025 periodic update, may be reviewed and revised in future Comprehensive Plan or Joint Plan Updates to address patterns of development resulting in pressures that exceed available and developable lands within the UGA, protect critical areas, address areas that may be difficult to sewer or provide water services to, or otherwise (RCW 36.70A.130(3)(c). Any revisions to the UGA to accommodate identified patterns of development and development pressures cannot result in an increase to the total surface area of the existing UGA.**

### B. Density & Building Intensity

The most densely built areas of the county are, by design, the urban growth areas and cities. According to the 2021 Buildable Lands Report, the average density of residential development approved in urban areas of the county from 2015 to 2019 increased to 10.6 dwelling units per acre – up from 8.9 units per acre in the period from 2010 to 2014. Density is generally higher in incorporated cities than in UGAs, but varies across jurisdictions. Among UGAs, development in the Lacey UGA is achieving the highest average density at 9.0 units per acre, while Grand Mound averaged 5.0 units per acre. The UGAs for Yelm, Tenino, and Rainier are zoned for lower densities. According to the 2021 Buildable Lands Report (TRPC, 2021):

“While achieved densities in the urban areas have increased overall, the change has varied by type of dwelling unit. Apartments (buildings with five or more units) have achieved the biggest increase in density, from about 16.7 units per acre in the 2000-2004 time period to over 25 units per acre since 2015. Trends for other types of multifamily homes have been less conclusive. This includes duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, townhomes (attached single-family homes), and condominiums (owner-occupied multifamily units), which combined made up less than eight percent of new housing since 2000. Density for single-family homes increased over the 2000-2014 time period but declined slightly since then.”

Outside designated urban areas, density of new development is typically 1 unit per 5 acres or less. An exception to this standard are rural portions of the county 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). A second exception is cluster-type developments that allow for smaller individual lots in exchange for greater area conserved for open space or resource use. 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 L-1). Mineral lands of long-term commercial significance are designated on a separate map (Map N-2), and open space lands are shown on Map E-3. Additionally, the county has an Open and Green Space Corridor Map (Map E-4) that shows areas that could be considered important for wildlife movement and habitat connectivity across Thurston County and between Urban Growth Areas. More information is in Chapter 9. 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 L-1) 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 community preferences. Rural land use and zoning considerations and accompanying land use policies balance several competing interests like community needs, environmental protection, carbon sequestration and climate mitigation, rural character, natural resource industries, economic growth, and more. The following table describes the general guidelines used to make designation decisions, broken into locational criteria guidelines, and other general decision-making guidelines:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Location Criteria** | |
| Land Capability/ Environmental Constraints | 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.  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).  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 stormwater 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. |
| Natural Resources | 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. |
| Public Services | 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. |
| Existing Land Uses | 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. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **General Decision-Making Guidelines** | |
| Community Preference Identified through Public Process | Desires of the broader community for certain types of land uses over other types should be an important consideration in making land use decisions. Community 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(35) 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. The rural county also contains pockets of higher density development, some of which are designated as LAMIRDs and allow 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 2-3](#Table23), below, for the percentage of land allocated to different rural uses.

Table 2-3. Percentage of Land Allocated for Rural Uses[[4]](#footnote-5)

| **Land Use Category** | **Total Acres** | **Percent Designated** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Designated resource use (designated agriculture, forestry, and mineral lands)[[5]](#footnote-6) | 155,179  *(with mineral lands overlay: 296,507)* | 39.7%   (*75.8%*)[[6]](#footnote-7) |
| Rural (residential density 1 dwelling unit per 20 acres) | 14,119 | 3.6% |
| Rural (residential density 1 dwelling unit per 10 acres) | 4,974 | 1.3% |
| Rural resource and residential (residential density 1 unit per 5 acres) | 177,314 | 45.4% |
| Urban Reserve (residential density 1 unit per five acres) | 1,716 | 0.4% |
| Limited Areas of More intensive Rural Development (LAMIRDs) (densities greater than 1 dwelling unit per 5 acres) | 10,059 | 2.6% |
| Public Parks, Trails, and Preserves and Educational Institution Lands | 8,354 | 2.1% |
| Military Reservation | 18,371 | 4.7 % |
| Rural commercial and industrial use | 857 | 0.2% |
| Totals | 390,943 | 100%  (*136.2%)* |

The actual use of land may be different than the use for which it is designated. For example, nonconforming residential uses may exist in commercial or industrial areas, agriculture is a permitted use in all rural residential areas, and some designated mineral land is not yet mined. Existing land uses are shown in map I-3. The designation categories are described in detail, below.

1. Rural resource and low density residential designations

About 90 percent of rural Thurston County is designated for resource and low density residential uses appropriate for maintaining rural character (see Table 2-3). These areas include designated forestry and agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance (see Chapter 3 for further discussion of designated resource lands and other natural resource uses). Other lands allow for rural residential uses. Low density residential designations can include lands that have soil composition and other characteristics suitable to support forestry, farm, and mining operations, and allow for natural resource activities such as agriculture, forestry, and mining. The purpose, characteristics, and location guidelines for each rural resource and low density residential category are described below.

| **FORESTRY** | |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | * To conserve forest lands of long-term commercial significance. * To maintain and enhance resource-based industries. * To discourage residential encroachment and other incompatible development from long-term forest lands. * To promote and protect forestry and its dependent rural community through the enhancement, protection, and perpetuation of the ability of private and public landowners to grow and harvest timber. |
| Definition and Characteristics | This designation includes lands meeting the Growth Management Act definition for forest lands of “long-term commercial significance.” They are lands characterized by existing commercial resource production and have soils and other physical characteristics that are especially suited for timber production. Existing designated forest lands include much of the Bald Hills in southern Thurston County and the Black Hills in the western part of the county. Within designated forest lands, residential densities are limited to one unit per 80 acres, except for smaller ownerships (less than 640 acres in size) where residences, if clustered, can achieve a density of one unit per 20 acres. Additionally, legal lots from 10 to 39.99 acres in size, under the same ownership since August 23, 1993, may be divided one time into a maximum of two lots. |
| Locational Guidelines | The criteria for locating designated forest lands are based on the physical growing conditions of the land as well as the proximity to population areas and the possibility of more intense uses of the land. The full set of criteria is listed in Chapter 3 - Natural Resource Lands. |

| **AGRICULTURE** | |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | * To conserve agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance that are or can be used for the production of crops, livestock or other agricultural products. * To discourage residential encroachment and other incompatible development from long-term agricultural lands. * To encourage the continued viability of agriculture. * To encourage property owners to maintain property in agriculture uses. * To promote and protect agriculture and its dependent rural community through the enhancement, protection, and perpetuation of the ability of the private sector to produce food and fiber. |
| Definition and Characteristics | This designation includes lands meeting the Growth Management Act definition for agricultural lands of “long-term commercial significance.” They are lands characterized by existing commercial resource production or lands that may be used for commercial resource production and have soils and other physical characteristics that are especially suited for agricultural production. Existing designated Agriculture areas include portions of the Nisqually, Chehalis and Skookumchuck River Valleys, among other areas. Within the designated lands in the Nisqually Valley, residential densities are limited to one unit per 40 acres, unless residences are clustered, allowing a density of one unit per five acres. Within all other designated agricultural lands, residential densities are limited to one unit per 20 acres. |
| Locational Guidelines | The criteria for locating designated Agriculture areas are based on the Washington State Department of Commerce’s guidelines for the classification and designation of resource lands, as well as existing county policies and an analysis of local conditions. The full set of criteria is listed in Chapter Three - Natural Resource Lands. |

| **NISQUALLY AGRICULTURE** | |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | * To conserve agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance used for the production of crops, livestock or other agricultural products, particularly those close to an urban growth area. * To discourage residential encroachment and other incompatible development from Nisqually agricultural lands. * To encourage the continued viability of agriculture within the Nisqually Subarea. |
| Definition and Characteristics | This designation includes lands meeting the Growth Management Act definition for agricultural lands of “long-term commercial significance.” It specifically applies to lands within the Nisqually Subarea that were in agricultural production at the time this category was developed, and lie between the McAllister Bluff and Nisqually Cut-Off road south of I-5.  Many of these lands include lands that are sensitive to flooding. To retain agricultural use, many lands in this category had their development rights purchased. There are limitations on the properties where the density has been purchased. Where residential density has been purchased or transferred, no residential units may be constructed on the parcel. Otherwise, density varies from 1 unit per 40 acres, to 1 unit per 5 acres with clustered housing. |
| Locational Guidelines | The criteria for locating designated Agriculture areas are based on the Washington State Department of Commerce’s guidelines for the classification and designation of resource lands, as well as existing county policies and an analysis of local conditions. The full set of criteria is listed in Chapter Three - Natural Resource Lands.  This category is specific to the Nisqually Planning Area where development rights were previously purchased. |

| **RURAL – ONE DWELLING UNIT PER TWENTY ACRES** | |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | * Protect public health and safety by minimizing development and avoiding incompatible uses in environmentally sensitive and hazardous areas such as the Black River Corridor, the Nisqually Bluff, and parcels completely covered by critical areas. * Provide greater opportunities for protecting critical areas and creating open space corridors. |
| Definition and Characteristics | Primary land uses are open space, outdoor recreation, residential, agriculture, forestry and compatible mineral extraction approved through a special use process. Residences are allowed at a density of one dwelling unit per twenty acres but they may be further limited due to physical constraints and natural hazards, including the presence of critical areas. |
| Locational Guidelines | Land Capability and Environmental Characteristics. This designation is appropriate for lands that are within the Black River Corridor, along the Nisqually Bluff or severely constrained by environmentally sensitive or hazardous areas.  Natural Resources. The area may contain forests, mineral deposits, critical areas and soils suitable for agriculture.  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.  Existing Land Uses. The majority of the land is comprised of parcels twenty acres or larger in size, although some smaller parcels may be present. Residences, agriculture, forestry, mineral extraction, open space, or undeveloped land may be present. |

| **RURAL – ONE DWELLING UNIT PER TEN ACRES** | |
| --- | --- |
| Purposes | * To minimize flooding and development at risk of flooding in the Salmon Creek Basin. * To avoid increasing saltwater intrusion in areas underlain by aquifers with elevated chloride levels. |
| Definition and Characteristics | Primary land uses are resource-oriented (e.g., agriculture, forestry, or mineral extraction approved through a special use process), 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. |
| Locational Guidelines | 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.  Natural Resources. The area may contain forests, mineral deposits, soils suitable for agriculture, and critical areas.  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.  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. |

| **URBAN RESERVE – ONE DWELLING UNIT PER FIVE ACRES** | |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | * To protect areas adjacent to existing urban growth areas, cities and towns from premature land division and development until such time as the areas are included in urban growth areas (UGAs) and urban utilities and services become available. |
| Definition and Characteristics | Primary land uses are agriculture and forestry, open space, and low density residential. Permitted uses and development options are limited so as to avoid interfering with potential conversion of the area to urban use. |
| Locational Guidelines | Land Capability and Environmental Characteristics. This designation is appropriate for lands that located adjacent to an urban growth area or city that appear to be capable of supporting urban development. Some critical areas or other minor physical constraints to development may be present.  Natural Resources. The area may have moderate potential for agriculture, forestry, or mineral extraction. However, the area should not include long-term agriculture or forestry lands.  Public Services. Allowed uses do not require provision of urban utilities and services. Public utilities and services should be feasible to extend upon inclusion of the area within a UGA.  Existing Land Uses. Scattered residences, agriculture, forestry, mineral extraction, open space, or undeveloped land may be present. |

| **RURAL RESIDENTIAL AND RESOURCE -- ONE UNIT PER FIVE ACRES** | |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | * To maintain the rural character of the county. * To buffer environmentally sensitive areas and resource management areas from incompatible activities. * To maintain a balance between human uses and the natural environment. |
| Definition and Characteristics | 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. |
| Locational Guidelines | 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.  Natural Resources. The area has potential for farming, moderate potential for forestry management, or may be adjacent to long-term resource lands.  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.  Existing Land Uses. The land is generally in parcels five acres or larger in size. |

| **RURAL RESIDENTIAL -- ONE UNIT PER FIVE ACRES** | |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | * To maintain the rural character of the county. * To maintain rural resource industries and provide for rural residential uses. * To protect public health in areas with severe soil limitations, limited water supply, aquifer recharge areas and floodplains. |
| Definition and Characteristics | Primary land uses in the one unit per five acre area are low-density residential and agricultural (farming, forestry). Residential use may be limited due to physical land capability constraints, including severe soil limitations, water supply limitations, aquifer recharge and floodplains, and more. This is the largest land use category within the Nisqually Subarea. It is located along the McAllister Bluff, Nisqually Reservation, and Nisqually Valley adjacent to agriculture. Innovative zoning techniques like clustering are allowed. |
| Locational Guidelines | 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 or are over sensitive aquifers.  Natural Resources. The area has moderate potential for farming or forestry management or may be adjacent to long-term resource lands.  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.  Existing Land Uses. The land is generally in parcels five acres or larger in size. |

| **MCALLISTER GEOLOGICALLY SENSITIVE AREA** | |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | To maintain areas of rural living where the natural environment is in balance with human use.  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 groundwater aquifer and potable water source of great importance to the general public. |
| Definition and Characteristics | 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. |
| Locational Guidelines | This designation is limited to lands within the McAllister Springs recharge area outside of the north county Urban Growth Area boundary. |

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 (2.6%) 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 2-3), 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.

| **RESIDENTIAL LAMIRD – ONE DWELLING UNIT PER TWO ACRES** | |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | * To recognize residential development in the rural county that was predominately developed at a density of one dwelling unit per two acres prior to July 1, 1990. * To minimize and contain these areas of more intensive rural development to prevent new patterns of low-density sprawl. |
| Definition and Characteristics | These areas are characterized by residential development at a density of approximately one dwelling unit per two acres. A limited amount of undeveloped land may exist within the logical outer boundary. |
| Locational Guidelines | New or expanded areas of this designation should be avoided (see the following Goals and Policies section). Areas designated in this category meet the following criteria:  Natural Resources. The area has low resource management potential, although small farms and forestry activities may be present nearby.  Public Services. Uses do not require extension or provision of urban services. The area may be served by a community water system.  Existing Land Uses. The area has existing residential developments at a density of approximately one dwelling unit per two acres. There may be some larger residential lots to allow for limited potential for infill development. |

| **RESIDENTIAL LAMIRD – ONE DWELLING UNIT PER ACRE** | |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | * To provide for residential development in rural areas that was predominately developed at a density of one dwelling unit per acre prior to July 1, 1990. * To minimize and contain these areas of more intensive rural development, to prevent new patterns of low-density sprawl. |
| Definition and Characteristics | These areas are characterized by residential development at a density of approximately one dwelling unit per acre. A limited amount of undeveloped land may exist within the logical outer boundary. |
| Locational Guidelines | New or expanded areas of this designation should be avoided (see the following Goals and Policies section). Areas designated in this category meet the following criteria:  Natural Resources. The area does not have highly productive resource management potential, although small farms and forestry activities may exist nearby.  Public Services. Uses do not require extension or provision of urban services. The area may be served by a community water system.  Existing Land Uses. The area has existing residential developments at a density of approximately one dwelling unit per acre. There may be some larger residential parcels to allow for limited potential for infill development. |

| **RESIDENTIAL LAMIRD – TWO DWELLING UNITS PER ACRE** | |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | * To recognize residential development related to marine and/or freshwater shorelines in rural areas that was predominately developed at a density of approximately two dwelling units per acre prior to July 1, 1990. * To minimize and contain these areas of more intensive rural development to prevent new patterns of low-density sprawl. |
| Definition and Characteristics | These areas are characterized by residential development at a density of approximately two dwelling units per one acre. A limited amount of undeveloped land may exist within the logical outer boundary. These areas may have some existing commercial or resort-related land uses. |
| Locational Guidelines | New or expanded areas of this designation should be avoided (see the following Goals and Policies section.) Areas already designated in this category meet the following criteria:  Natural Resources. Area does not have farm or forestry management potential and is not within the uplands adjacent to an aquaculture management district.  Public Services. Uses do not require extension or provision of urban services. Although, the area may be served by a community water system.  Existing Land Uses. The area has existing residential shoreline development at a density of approximately two dwelling units per acre. There may be some larger residential parcels to allow for limited potential for infill development. Current land uses may include seasonal and year-round residences and resort/recreational activities. The area may be a marine or freshwater shoreline, including lakefront. |

3. Public land designations

Publicly-owned land designations, including parks, major institutions, and the Joint Base Lewis-McChord Military Base, make up about 7 percent of the rural area. Additional publicly-owned and public purpose facilities are inventoried in Map E-2 and are discussed below.

| **PUBLIC PARKS, TRAILS AND PRESERVES** | |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | To identify and protect unique and outstanding examples of publicly owned fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas or unique geologic features.  To identify publicly owned (federal, state, and county) parks and trails that may be used for passive and active recreation.  To acknowledge the ongoing responsibility of the county, state and federal government to protect critical areas and other resource values and provide for public recreation on lands within this designation. |
| Definition and Characteristics | The public preserves designation comprises two types of lands: publicly owned conservation lands and publicly owned parks and trails. Conservation lands are owned by a federal, state or county governmental entity and are maintained as closely as possible to their natural state. The resources present on these lands are unique or rare, and are at risk of loss or damage. Parks and trails may include conservation lands, but also include areas of both passive and active public recreation. |
| Locational Guidelines | Land Capability/Environmental Constraints. Lands within this designation have unique or rare resource values and are publicly-owned conservation areas, or provide opportunities for public recreation.  Natural Resources. The resource values of conservation lands within this designation include important fish and wildlife habitat and unique geologic features.  Public Services. These areas are too far from the urban area to enable cost effective provision of public services. Uses do not require extension or provision of urban services.  Existing Land Uses. The primary use of conservation lands is resource preservation, not public recreation. Examples of such lands include wildlife refuges, and state and county natural area preserves. The primary use of parks and trails may be public recreation, although some sites may also include conservation areas. Uses are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan for Parks and Recreation. |

| **MILITARY RESERVATION** | |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | To recognize the Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM) military base and its military mission of training and national defense. |
| Definition and Characteristics | This designation comprises that portion of the JBLM military base located in Thurston County. These lands are owned by the federal government for the purpose of military training and national defense. Secondary uses are timber production and open space. |
| Locational Guidelines | This designation should include only those lands within the boundaries of the JBLM military base. |

| **MAJOR EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION** | |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | To recognize major colleges, universities, and educational facilities in rural areas of the county, and encourage development on existing campuses that are planned, designed and managed in a way that minimizes impact on the adjacent area. |
| Definition and Characteristics | This designation covers educational facilities and their supporting uses within the county. Unincorporated county currently has one major educational facility: The Evergreen State College (TESC). Additional development within this designation may occur if it meets the overall purposes above. |
| Locational Guidelines | This designation is intended for major educational institutions within the county. |

4. Commercial and industrial land designations:

The rural area contains limited commercial and industrial land uses (.2%) that provide economic opportunity and services to rural area residents.

| **NEIGHBORHOOD CONVENIENCE COMMERCIAL** | |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | To provide for the location of very small businesses that serve nearby residents with everyday convenience shopping goods and services. |
| Definition and Characteristics | Neighborhood convenience areas are characterized by a high degree of compatibility with surrounding residential areas. Compatibility is achieved through the use of small buildings, small overall area devoted to commercial use, and design and layout which screens residential areas from lights, storage and parking areas.  Typical neighborhood convenience uses are small groceries, gas stations and other small-scale businesses, including residences in conjunction with such businesses.  Most neighborhood convenience areas will consist of only one business. However, the various types of neighborhood convenience uses serving a given area should be clustered together in small planned centers or around existing single businesses to avoid the development of commercial strips or many small businesses strung out along arterial roads.  Land use designations of neighborhood convenience in rural areas should generally not exceed one to two acres for the individual parcel size. It is preferred to cluster small areas of neighborhood commercial together into a small, planned center to prevent strip development, and in cases where parcels are clustered together, they should be contiguous and generally not exceed five to six acres total. Neighborhood convenience areas are intended to serve a local nearby population of less than 5,000.  Examples of neighborhood convenience stores or centers include Gull Harbor, and Meridian Road at Yelm Highway. |
| Locational Guidelines | Land Capability and Environmental Characteristics. The area should have minimal environmental constraints and be capable of supporting commercial development. Land should be relatively level and free of critical areas.  Natural Resources. The area has minimal natural resource management potential. Development of the area will have little detrimental impact on nearby agriculture, forestry, aquaculture, mineral deposits or other natural resource uses.  Public Services. Neighborhood convenience commercial areas should be located on collector or arterial roads. New designations should be sited at intersections and at locations that are or can be freed of congestion problems resulting from topography or poor road design. Their siting should not result in significant traffic impacts on local streets serving residential areas. Utility service, including on-site, should be at a level appropriate to serve the intensity of proposed commercial activity.  Existing Land Use. For the siting of new neighborhood convenience businesses, there should be residential development in the area not served by such businesses. In rural areas, neighborhood convenience uses may be located as needed for convenience, and should be more widely separated than in urban growth areas. New neighborhood convenience businesses to serve areas where one or more such businesses already exist should be located adjacent to the existing businesses in small centers or clusters, rather than having businesses strung out along major roads. |

| **RURAL COMMERCIAL CENTER** | |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | To provide for the commercial needs of an identified rural community.  To provide for redevelopment and infilling of rural commercial areas in a unified center configuration, not as strip commercial development.  To provide for limited expansion of a commercial center to serve the growth of the surrounding rural community over time, contained within the logical outer boundary of the commercial center. |
| Definition and Characteristics | Rural Commercial Centers serve an identified rural community and have a range of uses to meet the everyday needs of the community. Development within these centers shall be functionally and visually compatible with the surrounding rural area and uses in order to protect the rural character. Typical uses in Rural Commercial Centers are small offices, retail sales, grocery stores, drug stores, video stores, garden supplies, nurseries, hardware, lumber sales, service stations, taverns, boat and auto sales, mini-storage facilities, and public facilities and services.  The Rural Commercial Centers within the county vary in size, based upon the size of the rural community served. Existing Commercial Centers include Rochester, South Bay/Schinke Road, Steamboat Island Road interchange at Highway 101, among others. Expansion of a Rural Commercial Center is addressed in the goals and policies section below. |
| Locational Guidelines | Land Capability and Environmental Characteristics. The boundaries of Rural Commercial Centers should be logical (see policy below), and the area should have minimal environmental constraints and be capable of supporting commercial development. Land should be relatively level and free of critical areas.  Natural Resources. The area has minimal natural resource management potential. Development of the area will have little detrimental impact on nearby agriculture, forestry, aquaculture, mineral deposits or other natural resource uses.  Public Services. Rural Commercial Centers should be located at major crossroads within the rural community that they serve and should take direct access off of collector or arterial roads. Expansion of Centers should only take place where traffic congestion will not result from topography or poor road design and where traffic will not have significant impacts on the surrounding rural area and uses. Utility services, including on-site septic systems and community water systems, should be at a level appropriate to serve the proposed uses.  Existing Land Use. Uses within the Rural Commercial Center designation shall be compatible with rural character, which includes both functional and visual components. The functional component describes land put to uses that are dependent on a rural setting. For example, localized commercial uses that serve a rural population or other rural activities are dependent upon a rural location close to their constituencies. On the other hand, a commercial business that is oriented to a larger than rural market or service area is not dependent upon a rural location. If a proposed commercial business will interfere with the surrounding rural area or uses by significant traffic, light, noise, etc., then that business is incompatible with rural character.  The visual component describes the visual attributes of the traditional rural landscape. If the visual character of the rural landscape is unduly disrupted or altered by a proposed commercial use, then that use is incompatible with rural character. |

| **HIGHWAY COMMERCIAL** | |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | To provide for the location of facilities and services needed by the traveling public (food, gas, lodging). They are to be located at or in the vicinity of major highway and freeway interchanges. |
| Definition and Characteristics | Uses typical of highway commercial areas are motels, gas stations, restaurants, travel trailer parks, and convenience stores for the traveling public. They should be located where they can be reached conveniently and safely at major highway and freeway interchanges. Existing Highway Commercial locations in rural areas include the south side of the Mud Bay/Highway 101 interchange and Martin Way/I-5 interchange in the Nisqually Valley. |
| Locational Guidelines | Land Capability and Environmental Characteristics. The area should have minimal environmental constraints and be capable of supporting commercial development. Land should be relatively level and free of critical areas.  Natural Resources. The area has minimal natural resource management potential. Development of the area will have little detrimental impact on nearby agriculture, forestry, aquaculture, mineral deposits or other natural resource uses.  Public Services. The area has state highway or freeway interchange access and is or can be freed of congestion problems resulting from topography or poor road design. Siting should not result in significant traffic impacts on streets serving residential areas. Utility service is available or can be provided to the level required by proposed uses.  Existing Land Use. In most cases, the area may already be committed to commercial use. For proposed new Highway Commercial areas, the land should be undeveloped or largely undeveloped. |

| **RURAL RESOURCE INDUSTRIAL** | |
| --- | --- |
| Purpose | To provide areas for natural resource based industrial uses, located near agriculture, forest and mineral resource lands.  To provide areas where industrial uses may locate that involve the processing, fabrication, wholesaling and storage of products associated with natural resource uses.  To provide areas where industrial uses may locate that are functionally and visually compatible with the character of the rural area. |
| Definition and Characteristics | This industrial designation applies within the rural area of the county. A wide range of natural resource-related uses may be accommodated which are dependent upon agriculture, forest practices or mineral extraction or industries that are dependent upon a rural setting. Industrial areas and development shall be functionally and visually compatible with the surrounding rural area and uses in order to protect the rural character. (Note that additional industrial areas are located in the Rochester-Grand Mound area, as well as the Yelm Urban Growth Area. These areas are described in the corresponding Subarea or Joint Plan.)  Industrial uses typically unrelated to natural resource industries, like assembly and fabrication, storage buildings, warehouses, and distribution facilities may be allowed in certain circumstances, provided they meet specific locational criteria listed in the Thurston County Code and will not require urban services or facilities. These areas should be limited across the rural county and if sited in rural areas should be appropriately clustered so not to create sprawling intensive industrial uses across the rural county. |
| Locational Guidelines | Land Capability and Environmental Characteristics. Land should be capable of supporting industrial development with minimal environmental constraints. Particularly important is the ability to support uses without significant adverse effects on surface or ground water. Land should generally be level and free of critical areas.  Natural Resources. The area should be located so that development will not detrimentally impact agriculture, forestry, aquaculture or other natural resource uses. The area to be designated industrial should itself have minimal potential for natural resource management/utilization.  Public Services:  Utilities. Utility services should be at levels appropriate to serve the rural area and the intensity of proposed industrial activity. Industrial development will be limited to uses not requiring public sewer and where the land can support the industrial uses with on-site septic systems and water without adversely affecting surface or groundwater.  Transportation. Rural industrial areas should rely either on rail service or be within close proximity of a freeway interchange or state highway. Such areas shall have direct access to arterial or collector roads and shall not result in significant adverse traffic impacts on surrounding rural areas and uses.  Existing Land Use. Uses within this designation shall be compatible with rural character, which includes both functional and visual components. The functional component describes land put to uses that are dependent on a rural setting. For example, sawmills should be close to forest lands. An industry that has no orientation to rural or resource-based activities is not dependent upon a rural location – if sited in rural areas, non-resource based industrial uses should be appropriately clustered so not to create sprawling intensive industrial uses across the rural county. If rural lands and/or rural uses on those lands will be interfered with by the traffic, light, noise, etc. from a proposed industrial use, then that use is incompatible with rural character.  The visual component describes the visual attributes of the traditional rural landscape. If the visual character of the rural landscape is unduly disrupted or altered by a proposed use, then that use is incompatible with rural character. Site design, landscaping, design and construction of internal and access roads and building scale should reinforce the set boundaries and rural nature of the industrial area to further discourage future industrial expansion beyond the industrial boundary. |

# V. LANDS FOR PUBLIC PURPOSES

The GMA requires the county to identify lands useful for public purposes, such as utility corridors, transportation corridors, landfills, sewage treatment facilities, stormwater management facilities, recreation, schools, and other public uses [RCW 36.70A.150]. These areas are described throughout the Comprehensive Plan, and in more detail as follows:

The Transportation Chapter (Chapter 5) identifies the type and quality of county roads, bike paths, railways, and other transportation corridors;

Capital Facilities (Chapter 6) inventories and prioritizes acquisition of public purpose lands, and identifies needs for shared facilities with other jurisdictions;

The Utilities Chapter (Chapter 7) identifies major utility providers; and

The Environment, Recreation and Open Space Chapter (Chapter 9) includes a map (Map E-4) of important open and green spaces and addresses stormwater and waste management.

In addition, the county identifies and plans for public recreation facilities in the Comprehensive Parks, Open Space and Trails Plan 2020, which is adopted separately from this Comprehensive Plan. See Appendix C for a list of the other planning documents that address public facility planning in Thurston County.

The current location and distribution of major public purpose lands in the rural area are inventoried on Map E-2. Some of these lands are designated and/or zoned for specific public purposes, such as parks and public preserves. Other public lands are identified for planning purposes, as the location of lands owned by other agencies, jurisdictions, or private companies may change over time. Joint Plans further identify public purpose lands in the UGAs.

### A. Essential Public Facilities

The Thurston Regional Planning Council provided the Interjurisdictional forum for developing the required process for identifying and siting essential public facilities. A process endorsed by the Thurston Regional Planning Council in January 1994 is included in the Special Use Chapter of the Thurston County Zoning Ordinance and below:

**Designation of Essential Public Facilities:**

Essential public facilities are public facilities and privately owned or operated facilities serving a public purpose that are typically difficult to site. They include:

1. State education facilities; state or regional transportation facilities; prisons, jails and other correctional facilities; solid waste handling facilities; airports; and inpatient facilities such as group homes, mental health facilities and substance abuse facilities; sewage treatment facilities; and communication towers and antennas.
2. Facilities identified by the State Office of Financial Management as essential public facilities, consistent with RCW 36.70A.200; and
3. Facilities identified as essential public facilities in the county's zoning ordinance.

**Siting Essential Public Facilities:**

Essential public facilities may be allowed as permitted or conditional special uses in the zoning ordinance. Essential public facilities identified as special uses in the applicable zoning district shall be subject, at a minimum, to the following requirements.

1. County classification of essential public facilities as follows:
2. Type One: Multi-county facilities. These are major facilities serving or potentially affecting more than one county. These facilities include, but are not limited to, regional transportation facilities, such as regional airports; state correction facilities; and state educational facilities.
3. Type Two: These are local or inter-local facilities serving or potentially affecting residents or property in more than one jurisdiction. They could include, but are not limited to, county jails, county landfills, community colleges, sewage treatment facilities, communication towers, and inpatient facilities (e.g., substance abuse facilities, mental health facilities, and group homes). [NOTE: Such facilities which would not have impacts beyond the jurisdiction in which they are proposed to be located would be Type Three facilities.]
4. Type Three: These are facilities serving or potentially affecting only the jurisdiction in which they are proposed to be located.

In order to enable the county to determine the project's classification, the applicant shall identify the approximate area within which the proposed project could potentially have adverse impacts, such as increased traffic, public safety risks, noise, glare, emissions, or other environmental impacts.

1. Early notification and involvement of affected community members and jurisdictions as follows:
2. Type One and Two facilities. At least 90 days before submitting an application for a Type One or Type Two essential public facility, the prospective applicant shall notify the affected public and jurisdictions of the general type and nature of the proposal, identify sites under consideration for accommodating the proposed facility, and identify opportunities to comment on the proposal. Applications for specific projects shall not be considered complete in the absence of proof of a published notice regarding the proposed project in a newspaper of general circulation in the affected area. This notice shall include the information described above and shall be published at least 90 days prior to the submission of the application.

The Thurston Regional Planning Council may provide the project sponsor and affected jurisdiction(s) with their comments or recommendations regarding alternative project locations during this 90-day period.

(The purpose of this provision is to enable potentially affected jurisdictions and the public to collectively review and comment on alternative sites for major facilities before the project sponsor has made their siting decision.)

1. Type Three facilities. Type Three essential public facilities are subject to the county's standard notification requirements for special uses.
2. Essential public facilities shall not have any probable significant adverse impact on critical areas or resource lands, except for lineal facilities, such as highways, where no feasible alternative exists (adapted from County-wide Policy 5.2(a)).
3. Major public facilities which generate substantial traffic should be sited near major transportation corridors [adapted from County-wide Policy 5.2(b)].
4. Applicants for Type One essential public facilities shall provide an analysis of the alternative sites considered for the proposed facility. This analysis shall include the following:
5. An evaluation of the sites' capability to meet basic siting criteria for the proposed facility, such as size, physical characteristics, access, and availability of necessary utilities and support services;
6. An explanation of the need for the proposed facility in the proposed location;
7. The sites' relationship to the service area and the distribution of other similar public facilities within the service area or jurisdiction, whichever is larger; and
8. A general description of the relative environmental, traffic, and social impacts associated with locating the proposed facility at the alternative sites that meet the applicant's basic siting criteria. The applicant shall also identify proposed mitigation measures to alleviate or minimize significant potential impacts.
9. The applicant shall also briefly describe the process used to identify and evaluate the alternative sites.
10. The proposed project shall comply with all applicable provisions of the comprehensive plan, zoning ordinance, and other county regulations.
11. In acquiring and developing parks, trails and other recreation facilities, the county should explore every opportunity to create revenue centers within the park system to generate funding for ongoing park maintenance and operation needs.

### B. Olympia Airport Area

The Olympia Regional Airport is located within the Tumwater UGA, and its development and the use of adjacent areas is primarily guided by the Tumwater/Thurston County Joint Plan and accompanying development regulations for the Tumwater Urban Growth Area. However, airport approach and departure areas influence lands outside the Tumwater UGA, creating an airport hazard overlay area addressed in this Comprehensive Plan. The guidance provided below gives direction as to the types and intensities of land uses most compatible with the noise effects and safety concerns of a growing municipal airport. This section of the Plan is also intended to identify those uses most compatible with the safety needs of low flying aircraft. The airport area is designated for the following purposes:

* To identify areas around the Olympia Airport where high concentrations of people should be discouraged for health and safety reasons and where uses compatible with high noise levels are encouraged.
* To enable future development of the Olympia airport and air service to Thurston County without major disruption or incurring safety hazards.

#### 1. Definitions and Characteristics

The “airport hazard overlay area” includes those lands within the airport approach areas and the airport traffic pattern area (see Map L-3). These lands are directly within the immediate sphere of influence of the Olympia Airport, both in terms of immediate operations and long-range development plans.

The airport hazard overlay area should be characterized by land uses that are compatible with an airport or its activities. Such land uses outside the Urban Growth Area include agriculture, open space oriented recreation, low intensity residential (densities of 1 dwelling unit per 2 acres or lower), and low intensity commercial. High to moderate levels of noise will occur and, therefore, land uses compatible with such noise impacts are encouraged in airport areas. Uses that require tall structures, which produce extensive visual pollution through smoke, glare or dust and which may create hazards for low overflying aircraft are incompatible with the airport area.

#### 2. Guidelines for Development in Airport Hazard Overlay Areas

Land underlying the airport approach areas should be kept in very low intensity uses, including very low residential density (not to exceed 1 dwelling unit per 2 acres) to protect against possible accidents.

Preferred zoning in the airport area (outside of the Urban Growth Area) should be that which permits uses of the land that are best able to coexist with potential noise problems. Agriculture and open space uses are most desirable in this area

No radio interference or obstructions should penetrate air navigation surfaces. Such penetrations include smoke emissions, steam or glare that would cause safety hazards.

Final plats within 2 miles of the airport hazard overlay area, should contain statements notifying prospective purchasers the property may be affected by airport operations (see [Figure 2-2](#Figure22)).

New, non-residential uses that would involve a concentration of people (e.g., recreational facilities, schools, child and adult care facilities, hospitals, and other types of gathering places) should not be located within the Inner and Outer Approach/Departure Zones and Inner Turning Zone (Zones 2, 3 and 4 in [Figure 2-2](#Figure22)) in the rural area.

Structures and trees within the airport hazard overlay area should not penetrate airspace surfaces as defined by Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 77, except as necessary and incidental to airport regulations.

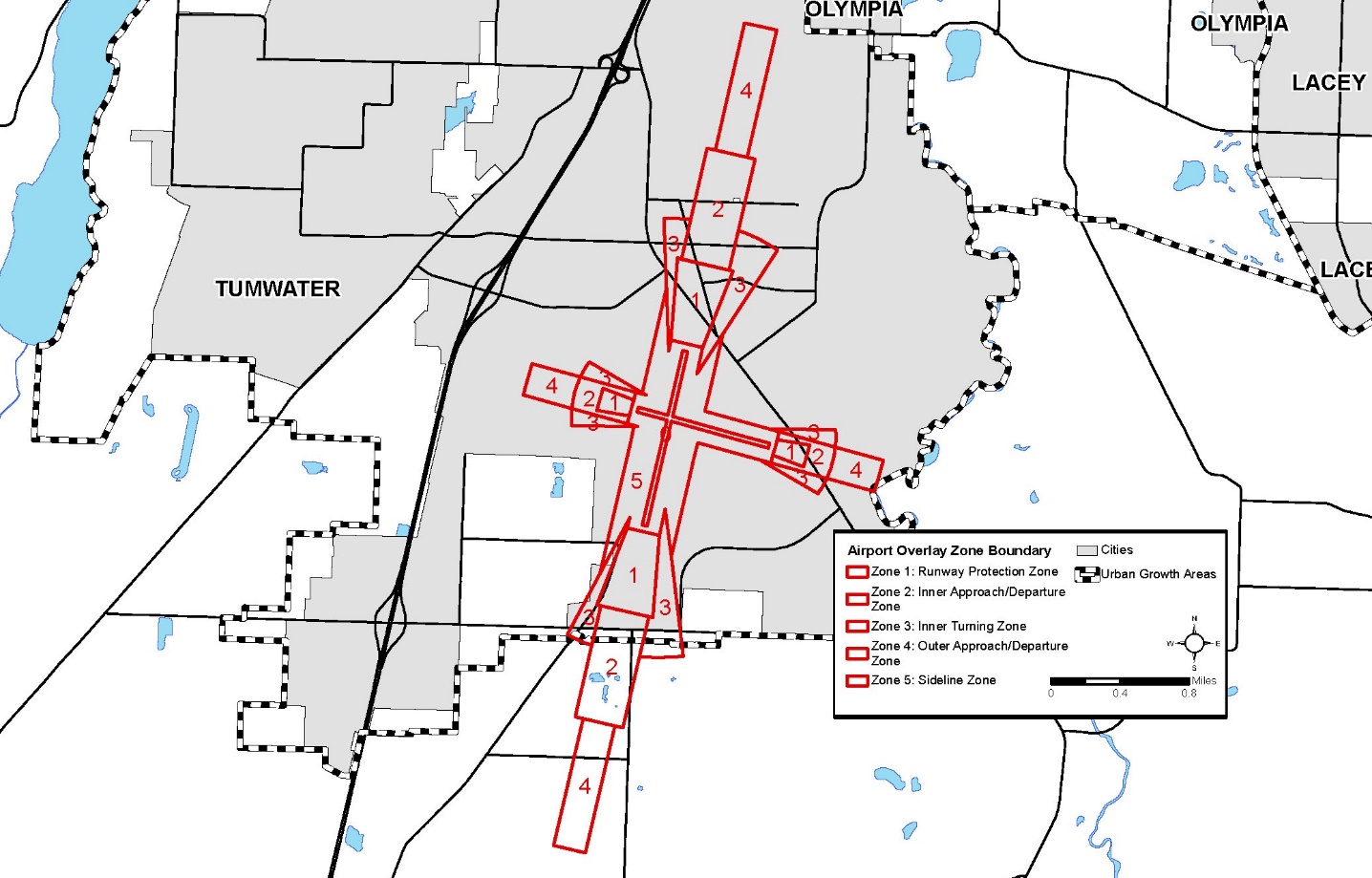


Figure 2-2. Olympia Airport – Airport Overlay Hazard Zone (Implemented through the Airport Hazard Overlay Zone in Thurston County Code, Titles 20 and 22)

### C. Joint Base Lewis-McChord

Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), the largest military installation on the west coast, is located east of Lacey and north of Yelm, straddling the Thurston and Pierce County boundary. JBLM was established in 2010, with the combination of Fort Lewis and McChord Air Force Base into a single unit. The base encompasses over 90,000 acres, approximately one-fifth of which is located within Thurston County. The base has a significant impact to Thurston County and the broader surrounding communities. Of a JBLM population of 54,531, nearly 87% of the JBLM workforce lives off-base in the surrounding areas, impacting regional economic conditions, transportation and utility infrastructure, housing, land use development, public and emergency services, health care, childcare, and more[[7]](#footnote-8).

While most of JBLM’s infrastructure, including the McChord Airfield, is located in Pierce County, areas of the base within Thurston County are used for training operations, including overnight training operations. Some land within the county near JBLM is regularly exposed to noise levels that may be incompatible to some land uses (see Map L-3).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Noise Zone[[8]](#footnote-9) | Decibel Level (dBA) | Land Use Recommendation |
| I | < 65 | Generally acceptable with any residential or noise sensitive uses. |
| II | 65-75 | Normally not recommended with residential or noise-sensitive uses. |
| III | > 75 | Not recommended for residential or noise-sensitive uses. No areas of Zone III in Thurston County. |

Overnight training operations can be impacted by light pollution that comes with growing development, particularly in the areas of the Nisqually Valley, Yelm, Rainier, and areas south. Most of the land adjacent to JBLM in Thurston County is in the unincorporated rural county, and is designated for low density residential or resource use, which is generally compatible with these operations. Open space, agriculture, and low-density uses adjacent to military activities can provide a buffer that protects surrounding areas from the nuisance and safety risks of military operations while maintaining a compatible environment for training operations.

In 2022, the South Sound Military & Communities Partnership (SSMCP) released the 2022 Joint Base Lewis-McChord Growth Coordination Plan. This plan is the result of a collaborative effort among local, regional, state, federal, and tribal partners and updates the 2010 Growth Coordination Plan. This document is the guiding document to support the SSMCP’s mission of addressing issues that affect military and civilian communities around JBLM and to foster outcomes that are mutually beneficial for the South Puget Sound region.

Strategies of the 2022 Growth Coordination Plan include supporting off-base housing development, supporting I-5 corridor improvements, improve resiliency planning, communicate economic benefits of JBLM on the region, facilitate connections between JBLM and childcare providers, prioritize initiatives that expand behavioral health services for the military and their family members, enhance resiliency planning and monitoring of environmental impacts, continue pursuing land use compatibility measures, and more. Military compatibility strategies are referenced throughout the plan, and those specific to land use are referenced in Goal 1, Objective C of this chapter.

# VI. LAND USE DECISION-MAKING

The process used to determine major land use policies and decisions can be as important as the decisions themselves. In making land use decisions, one of county government’s ongoing challenges is to balance the various special interests of the community within the context of protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the community at large. Often times these can be competing balances, like economic development and conservation of natural environments.

The kinds of plans prepared by a local government and the degree of coordination between them can make the difference between land use decisions that seem to go in one direction through one planning process and another way through other plans. One of the objectives in this chapter deals with how plans are to be related and which plan provides the framework for the others.

Another important aspect of the land use decision making process is how land use plans are coordinated with permit and regulatory requirements and other programs.

An additional consideration is how to achieve balance between being able to rely on land use plans to direct future development for a reasonable length of time into the future, yet keeping them updated as conditions change.

Related to the issue of reliability of plans is coordination between the county and other jurisdictions so that all are working toward common goals for future development. This is particularly important within county areas subject to annexation by cities.

The last section of the goals, objectives and policies in this chapter provides direction for five aspects of decision-making:

1. How community members participate;

2. What kinds of plans the county will prepare to guide its physical development and how they are interrelated;

3. How to keep the comprehensive land use plan and its implementing documents up to date, understandable and reliable;

4. How governments should coordinate, particularly for lands around the cities and towns where future annexations will occur; and

5. How counties implement and report on progress in implementing their comprehensive plans.

# VII. GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES[[9]](#footnote-10)

## **GOAL 1:** TO PROVIDE FOR RURAL AREAS THAT:

## MAINTAIN A SUSTAINABLE BALANCE BETWEEN HUMAN USES AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN ORDER TO PROTECT RURAL CHARACTER;

## MAINTAIN THE LAND AND WATER ENVIRONMENTS REQUIRED BY NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES, FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITATS, RURAL LIFESTYLES, OUTDOOR RECREATION, AND OTHER OPEN SPACE; AND

## DEVELOP AT LOW LEVELS OF INTENSITY SO THAT DEMANDS WILL NOT BE CREATED FOR URBAN LEVELS OF PUBLIC SERVICES AND FACILITIES.

**OBJECTIVE A**: **Rural Land Use and Activities -** County development requirements and programs provide for a balance between human uses and the natural environment in rural and resource areas, the conservation of rural resources, and for low levels of demand for public services and facilities.

POLICIES:

1. Rural area land uses will be low-intensity and resource-industry based like farms, forestry and mining areas, outdoor recreation and open space or park areas, scattered residences, and rural residential developments.

2. Allow residential development on lands that can physically support it and at densities that will not require urban levels of service or significantly impact rural character or environmental quality. Densities will be low enough to discourage leapfrogging of UGA development, and not undermine the natural environment or natural resource management.

3. Minimize and contain residential areas of more intensive rural development to avoid additional low-density sprawl in the rural area. Those areas of higher density development that meet the statutory criteria established in RCW 36.70A.070(5)(d) should be designated as limited areas of more intensive rural development (LAMIRDs). The criteria for designating LAMIRDs include establishing boundaries that:

a. Ensure preservation of the character of the existing neighborhood and community;

b. Follow physical boundaries such as water bodies, streets and highways, and land forms;

c. Prevent abnormally irregular boundaries;

d. Ensure that public facilities and services are provided in a manner that does not permit low-density sprawl; and

e. Shall not extend beyond the logical outer boundary of the July 1, 1990 built environment, with limited ability for additional infill.

4. Develop residential uses near designated long-term agriculture or forestry areas, designated mineral lands, and other natural resource lands in a manner that minimizes potential conflicts and reduces unnecessary conversion of farm and forest land. When mechanisms such as clustering and buffering are used, these mechanisms should be scaled, located, and designed to maintain rural character and environmental quality.

5. Accommodate agriculture and forestry on rural lands in addition to designated long-term resource lands. The development of rural areas for residential uses should not preclude the use of land for agriculture or timber production. Mineral extraction consistent with the provisions of this plan should be permitted through a special use process.

6. Allow for home-based occupations and industries throughout the rural area provided they do not adversely affect the surrounding residential uses or rural character.

7. Isolated commercial and industrial businesses in the rural area, legally established on or before July 1, 1990, that may not be principally designed to serve the existing or projected rural population and nonresidential uses, but do provide job opportunities for rural residents, should be allowed to expand or change use provided the expansion or conversion does not constitute new urban development in the rural area, is contained on the same lot as the existing use, is visually compatible with the surrounding rural area, and detrimental impacts to adjacent properties will not be increased or intensified.

8. New industrial uses in rural areas (other than small scale home-based industries) will generally be those appropriate to the lower densities and land uses of rural areas, such as:

a. Industries related to and dependent on natural resources of agriculture, aquaculture, timber, and minerals and

b. Industries that are functionally and visually compatible with the character of the rural area and dependent upon a rural setting.

9. Non-resource based industrial uses should be appropriately clustered so they do not create sprawling intensive industrial uses across the rural county.

10. Permit neighborhood convenience commercial uses throughout rural areas, located at road intersections and taking access from collector or arterial roads. Generally, other types of commercial uses should locate in the urban area, the rural towns, or in rural commercial centers.

11. Rural commercial centers should be designated as limited areas of more intensive rural development (LAMIRDs) using the criteria established in RCW 36.70A.070(5)(d). Rural commercial centers should be designated only for identified rural community areas, like Rochester and Steamboat Island Road at Highway 101. These centers should serve a larger rural community than neighborhood convenience and have a greater variety of uses, while maintaining a rural character.

12. Do not extend municipal sewer utilities into rural areas except to protect basic public health and safety, and the environment.

13. Locate buildings and roads on sites in ways that minimize the need for cutting, grading or the removal of native plant material.

a. Clearing, grading, and development activities should respect natural features, processes and wildlife habitat.

b. Neighboring properties, stormwater drainage facilities and surface water bodies should be protected from sedimentation and increased runoff during and after construction.

c. As much natural vegetation as possible, especially large trees, should be preserved as development occurs.

14. Identify and protect archaeological and historic to the greatest extent possible.

15. For special uses permitted in the rural area, limit their size and scale to maintain rural character. The primary purpose of special uses should be to serve the rural area residents of Thurston County.

16. To the extent possible, consider availability of water rights and an adequate water supply when reviewing future land use designations and changes, as directed through the streamflow restoration watershed planning process identified in RCW 90.94.

17. Maintain open space corridors between urban growth areas and areas of more intensive rural development to prevent sprawl and to preserve corridors for habitat protection and wildlife movement through a variety of mechanisms.

18. Discourage incompatible uses adjacent to general aviation public use airports. Incompatible land uses may include residential, multi-family, height hazards, uses that attract large concentrations of people, and special uses such as schools, day cares, hospitals and nursing homes, and explosive/hazardous materials.

19. Consult with the Washington State Department of Transportation Aviation Division when amending policies or regulations that would affect public airports.

20. Develop approaches to forecast domestic and natural resource water demands and respective impacts to groundwater resources through the twenty-year planning period and beyond.

21. Develop approaches to evaluate water quantities and project types needed for mitigation and offsets of existing and new groundwater withdrawals for domestic and natural resource water use through the twenty-year planning period and beyond.

**OBJECTIVE B: Housing and Residential Densities in Rural Areas -** County requirements and programs for housing in rural areas should encourage residential development that is compatible with small scale as well as commercially-significant farming, forestry, aquaculture, open space, outdoor recreation, rural service levels, and generally with the rural character where human use does not overbalance the natural environment. Use of innovative techniques in addition to zoning designations provides a variety of densities in rural areas.

POLICIES:

1. Provide a variety of rural densities to accommodate the wide variety of rural land uses that comprise the rural character.

2. Thurston County may not expand beyond the logical outer boundary that existed in 1990 or intensify beyond the 1990 rural residential land use designations or zoning districts that permit densities greater than 1 dwelling unit per 5 acres. Areas of more intensive rural residential development shall be minimized and contained to avoid additional low-density sprawl that is not compatible with rural character and service levels.

3. Within rural areas, proposed new residential development should not negatively affect land based and marine aquacultural activities and farm and forestry activities. Aquaculture activities should not be considered a nuisance if they are operating in a reasonable manner and within applicable regulations. In addition, buffers between the residential uses and aquaculture districts should be provided by the residential development.

4. Residential development adjacent to agriculture or forestry uses should be designed in a manner that minimizes potential conflicts and reduces unnecessary conversion of farm and forest land. Such mechanisms as clustering and buffering should be employed to reduce potential conflicts.

5. Individual septic systems should be the method for handling residential sewage in rural areas. Only in areas of identified health hazards or water quality problems should sewer systems be permitted. In such cases, the county should be the sewer and water provider.

6. Community water systems are required in unsewered areas where residential density exceeds one unit per acre, and for densities of one unit per two acres in areas of excessive porosity.

7. Urban governmental services, as defined in the Growth Management Act, should generally not be extended outside urban growth areas, except in those limited circumstances shown to be necessary to protect basic public health and safety and the environment and when such services are financially supportable at rural densities and do not encourage urban development. This policy does not apply to rural governmental services as defined in the Growth Management Act, including domestic water supply, fire and police protection services, transportation and public transit services, and other public utilities associated with rural levels of development.

8. Protect residential neighborhoods from incompatible land uses.

a. Neighborhood identity should be preserved by maintaining natural boundaries and recognizing significant archaeological and historic resources.

b. Vegetated buffers should be provided between arterials and residential developments, and between residential and non-residential land uses.

9. Protect significant archaeological and historic resources through cluster development, overlay zoning, transfer of development rights, tax incentives, and other appropriate mechanisms.

10. Rezoning of any parcel with a rural designation to a different designation should only occur when one or more of the following apply:

a. Circumstances have substantially changed since the current land use designation/zoning was adopted and the definition, characteristics or locational guidelines for the current district no longer apply.

b. The rezone would promote the general welfare of the affected community.

c. The rezone would maintain or enhance environmental quality.

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.

12. When considering new, major land use changes, consider the land use changes impact on forecasted permit exempt wells over the planning period.

13. Consider the increase to risk or the reduction and mitigation to risk of lives, property, health and safety when considering land use changes, including risk posed by flooding or wildfire.

**OBJECTIVE C: Compatibility with Joint Base Lewis-McChord –** Ensure future development minimizes risk to life, property, and the well-being of county residents from military training operations, and maintains compatibility with current and future missions at JBLM.

**POLICIES:**

1. Partner with JBLM and the South Sound Military and Communities Partnership to anticipate and meet population growth and service demands related to military missions.

2.

3. Discourage siting of incompatible uses adjacent to Joint-Base Lewis McChord by limiting uses that could interfere with military training and operations, such as uses that concentrate people like high-density commercial, residential, schools and hospitals, and noise sensitive uses like residential and schools.

3. Review development and infrastructure proposals located near Joint Base Lewis-McChord for potential compatibility challenges with training operations, including: noise sensitive uses in areas of known exposure to aviation and range noise; physical infrastructure that could interfere with low-level flight operations; light pollution impact to night training operations; and sources of electrical emissions that could interfere with military communications or navigation systems.

4. Wherever feasible, use open space and conservation planning to buffer surrounding uses from nuisance and safety risks associated with military operations, and support the recovery of Endangered Species Act-listed species that would otherwise limit the scope of training on JBLM lands.

5. Partner with JBLM to make information on the potential impacts of training operations available to residents.

6. Work with JBLM to ensure ongoing, mutual communication about mission or operational changes that could affect the surrounding community, or about infrastructure or development projects that could affect training operations.

7. Support efforts of the SSMCP that advocate for military-related land use compatibility policies within the Thurston County County-wide planning policies.

## **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 community preferences.

6. The county will 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 must 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[[10]](#footnote-11) must ensure that the area can be served by municipal sewer, and South county jurisdictions[[11]](#footnote-12) 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 three 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; or

c. There are shown patterns of development that create pressure in areas that exceed the available and developable lands within the urban growth area boundary.

9. The area that is designated for the expansion of any urban growth area must be contiguous to an existing urban growth boundary.

10. Reductions in any urban growth boundary must 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. Provide a variety of densities and housing types 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. Ensure expansion or reduction of any urban growth area is compatible with the use of designated natural resource lands, designated archaeological and historic resources, and with critical areas.

13. The designation of or change to urban growth areas must be consistent with the Thurston County County-wide Planning Policies.

14. 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 in order to protect the supply of adequate water to rural area residents and natural resource industries.

**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. Jointly adopt and maintain compatible level of service standards for public services and facilities among jurisdictions within urban growth areas.

3. 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. Coordinate planning and development regulations for urban growth areas with the respective cities.

**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. Include a variety of housing types of residential development in UGAs. 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. Preserve open space lands that contribute to the livability of UGAs, including those providing scenic amenity, community identity and buffers within and between urban and rural areas.

11. Ensure that reductions in any urban growth boundary 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. Protect and preserve significant archeological and historic resources contributing to the sense of place, providing links to our past, and enhancing quality of life.

13. 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 subarea 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 urban growth areas of cities and towns.

2. Encourage annexations of unincorporated islands, and discourage creation of new unincorporated islands.

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

POLICIES:

1. The development and amendment of the Comprehensive Plan, including subarea plans and joint plans with cities shall involve community members of the affected area in the drafting of the plans.

2. Collect and consider the opinions of community members in advance of decision-making on major land use issues.

3. Meetings should be held in the neighborhoods affected by a given major land use issue whenever possible.

4. Invite community participation in the development of new land use policies and regulations, and reflect community interests and preferences.

5. Provide adequate staff support to help persons seeking development permits and participating in permit review processes.

6. Process development permits in a timely and fair manner to ensure predictability.

7. Facilitate open and transparent communications between the county and community groups by providing information on programs, regulations, and development projects impacting various areas of the county.

8. Provide opportunities for early and continuous community engagement throughout the process of developing and amending plans and regulations.

9. Maintain lists of individuals, neighborhood groups, organizations and professional groups interested in planning to send notification of proposed programs, issues and actions . Persons and groups should be advised of the listing service and given opportunity to participate.

10. Include vulnerable populations and overburdened communities in the planning process and ensure coordination among different stakeholder groups to attempt to reconcile conflicts.

11. Engage with Tribes during the planning process and coordinate planning efforts.

**OBJECTIVE B: Plans and Programs for the County’s Physical Development** - A system of coordinated plans should direct the county’s physical development and provide the framework for a variety of implementing mechanisms.

POLICIES:

1. The Comprehensive Plan is the guiding policy document to the county’s physical development, use of land, and the preparation of the county’s subarea plans, joint plans and plans for special services, functions or issues.

Notify the public when the Comprehensive Plan is being prepared, revised or amended. The Comprehensive Plan should be prepared with participation by interested individuals and groups.

2. Subarea plans can be used to identify the area-specific land use and transportation plans for geographic subareas of the county. Developed subarea plans consistent with the Comprehensive Plan as needed to accommodate unique features or needs of a discrete portion of the rural area, using the following principles:

a. Involve property owners and residents of the subarea, as well as any other interested persons and groups, in the preparation of subarea plans.

b. Base the future land use pattern and transportation system prepared for subareas on and consistent with, the goals, policies, and guidelines for land use and transportation planning established in the Comprehensive Plan.

c. Work with interested community members to prepare the subarea plans. The Planning Commission will review the draft plans for consistency with the Comprehensive Plan’s framework and guidelines, and for compatibility with neighboring areas.

d. Periodically review existing subareas, and develop new subarea plans as needed.

3. In joint plans between the county and incorporated cities and towns, promote consistency and certainty about how the area will be planned and developed in the future. The plans should be prepared and used according to the following principles:

a. Involve community participation in Joint Plan preparation of the city/town, affected unincorporated area.

b. Adopt Joint plans as part of the comprehensive plans of the cities, towns and county.

c. Honor the future land use pattern and transportation systems identified in joint plans as development in the county and annexations to the cities/towns take place.

d. Joint plans should provide for phasing of development and the orderly extension of city/town services and annexations.

4. Special function plans related to the county’s physical development should be prepared for issues, services or functions provided by or subject to approval of county government. They should be developed according to the following principles:

a. Base special function plans (e.g., plans for parks, sewage, solid waste, stormwater management, etc.) on the framework for the county’s physical development established in the Comprehensive Plan and joint plans. The goals, objectives, and policies set forth in the Comprehensive Plan should be followed; as should the intensity levels and location of land uses and transportation networks in subarea plans still in effect and in joint plans; and

b. Special function plans may be prepared for the county as a whole, or for parts of the county, with boundaries to be based on the scope of the issue or service.

5. Continue to evaluate and periodically update subarea boundaries and plans for consistency with the Comprehensive Plan and the GMA.

6. Any action that expands an Urban Growth Area, a LAMIRD, establishes a new fully contained community, or creates a master planned resort shall have an effective date 60 days after the public notice of adoption of the comprehensive plan or development regulation amendment, or if a petition for review to the Growth Management Hearings Board is filed, upon the Board’s final order, consistent with RCW 36.70A.067.

**OBJECTIVE C: Implementation of the Comprehensive Plan -** Implement the Comprehensive Plan through county programs and regulations.

POLICIES:

1. Review, evaluate, and revise the Thurston County Comprehensive Plan periodically and as changing circumstances require. Such review includes an annual amendment process and the ten-year periodic review required under the GMA [RCW 36.70A.130(5)(b)].

2. Provide an implementation progress report consistent with RCW 36.70A.130(9)(a) five years after the review and revision of its comprehensive plan.

3. Land use decisions should conform to adopted Comprehensive and Subarea Plans still in effect.

4. Promote certainty, understanding, and efficiency of the permitting process.

5. Minimize the granting of variances from development regulations.

6. Monitor regulations to determine whether they are accomplishing their intended purposes.

7. Consider non-regulatory approaches, such as public education, in addition to regulation when exploring remedies to problems.

8. New planning policies and implementing regulations should reflect the need or problems they are intended to address.

9. Provide budgetary support to ensure that regulations are adequately administered and enforced, including investigation and prosecution of violations; implementation of permit conditions, zoning and other requirements; and coordination among county departments in the administration of permit conditions and other requirements.

10. Policies and procedures for civil enforcement should precede implementation of criminal enforcement.

**OBJECTIVE D: Intergovernmental Cooperation -** Systems to promote and ensure intergovernmental awareness and cooperation on county-wide goals should be instituted and maintained.

POLICIES:

1. Cooperate with all governmental jurisdictions, including the Commander of the Joint Base Lewis-McChord military base, Indian Tribes within the county, and neighboring counties so that county-wide goals are achieved.

2. Land use decisions involving county lands adjacent to other jurisdictions must take into consideration the current land use and long-range goals of the neighboring jurisdictions. The county should provide adequate notification and opportunity to comment to adjacent jurisdictions prior to final action on a Comprehensive Plan or development regulation amendment. At a minimum, the county should provide notification to state agencies as listed by Department of Commerce, and the Joint Base Lewis-McChord Base Commander, at least 60 days prior to final action on a Comprehensive Plan or development regulation amendment.

1. The Thurston Regional Planning Council is a 20-member intergovernmental board made up of local government jurisdictions within Thurston County, plus the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation and the Nisqually Indian Tribe. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Includes portions of Nisqually and Chehalis Indian Reservations in Thurston County. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Smaller jurisdictions tend to have higher market factors due to the statistical difficulties in estimating supply and demand for small areas. For more information on how market factors and excess capacity is calculated, refer to the *2021 Buildable Lands Analysis for Thurston County* (TRPC, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Excludes all lands within Urban Growth Areas, areas covered by water, public and railroad rights-of-way. Source: Thurston County Geo Data & Buildable Lands Work Program, Thurston Regional Planning Council. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Low density residential uses are permitted in some of these areas, at densities ranging from 1 unit per 20 acres to 1 unit per 80 acres. Note that agriculture, forestry, and mining activities occur throughout the county, not just on land dedicated for these purposes. See Chapter 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Accounts for mineral lands designation, which is an overlay on other land use designations. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Source: 2022 Growth Coordination Plan. South Sound Military Community Partnership. (2022) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Source: Air Installation Compatible Use Zone Study (2014) and JBLM Joint Land Use Study, Existing Conditions Report (2015) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Additional Goals, Objectives, and Policies throughout this Plan further elaborate on rural land use issues. For example, resource protection is discussed in Chapters 3 and 9, housing is discussed in Chapter 4, utilities and public services are discussed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, and economic development in the rural area is discussed in Chapter 8. All the policies within this Plan are internally consistent. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. “North county jurisdictions” refers to growth areas around Lacey, Olympia, and Tumwater [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. “South county jurisdictions” refers to growth areas around Yelm, Rainier, Tenino, Bucoda, and the Grand Mound Urban Growth Area. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)