

CONSIDERATION OF RURAL TOWN DESIGNATION

Background of Rural Town Designation

- King County, a county in Washington State that shares a common border with Kittitas County, has utilized the designation of Rural Town as a land use designation in their comprehensive plan for nearly 20 years. The following is language directly from the adopted King County Comprehensive Plan;

“B. Rural Towns

Rural Towns are unincorporated towns governed directly by King County, but may provide a focal point for community groups such as chambers of commerce or community councils to participate in public affairs.

The purposes of the Rural Town designation are to recognize existing concentrations of higher density and economic activity in the Rural Area, whether by virtue of historical rural settlements or redesignation of an urban commercial center; provide a physical focus for the historic identity of rural communities; and to allow for modest growth of residential and economic uses within these designations if supported by the community and adequate utilities and other public services are available. At the present time, the Rural Towns are Fall City, Snoqualmie Pass, and the Town of Vashon and are recognized as such within the Comprehensive Plan. The county supports the economic vitality of these communities and is offering programs and working with the businesses and residents impacted by these communities in to help ensure their continued economic health.

Although higher-density development in Rural Towns may require public sewers, applying the full range of urban development standards (e.g. for street improvements or landscaping) may not be necessary, and may not be consistent with the historic character of these communities. Although Rural Towns also may in some circumstances develop at densities similar to those in the Urban Growth Area or in rural cities, they are considered part of the Rural Area for purposes of the GMA, do not provide significant growth capacity, and are not subject to the growth targets adopted for the UGA.

R-40((3))4 King County hereby designates the Rural Towns of Fall City, Snoqualmie Pass, and the Town of Vashon as unincorporated Rural Towns. These historical settlements in unincorporated King County should provide services and a range of housing choices for Rural Area residents. The boundaries of the designated Rural Towns are shown on the Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map. Adjustments to these boundaries shall only occur through a subarea planning process, and shall not allow significant increases in development potential or environmental impacts. No new Rural Towns are needed to serve the Rural Area.

R-40((4))5 Commercial and industrial development that provides employment, shopping, and community and human services that

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Submitted by: Chad Bala

strengthen the fiscal and economic health of rural communities should locate in Rural Towns if utilities and other services permit.

R-40((5))6 Rural Towns may contain higher-density housing than permitted in the surrounding Rural Area, and should provide affordable and resource-worker housing if utilities and other services permit. Development density in Rural Towns may approach that achieved in ((R))rural ((C))cities.

The policies in this section apply only to the unincorporated Rural Towns. King County encourages rural cities to adopt land use policies and development standards that protect and enhance their historical character.

R-40((6))7 Rural Towns serve as activity centers for the Rural Area and may be served by range of utilities and services, and may include several or all of the following land uses, if supported by necessary utilities and other services and if scaled and designed to protect rural character:

- a. Retail, commercial and industrial uses to serve the surrounding Rural Area population and to provide support for resource industries and tourism;
- b. Residential development, including single-family housing on small lots as well as multifamily housing and mixed-use developments;
- c. Other commercial and industrial uses, including commercial recreation and light industry; and
- d. Public facilities and services such as community services, churches, schools, and fire stations.

R-40((7))8 Sewers may be allowed in Rural Towns if necessary to solve existing water quality and public health problems which cannot be addressed by other methods, provided that any extension of sewer mains from urban areas to serve a ((r))Rural ((t))Town shall be tightlined systems designed to not serve any intervening lands. All alternatives shall be exhausted before sewers may be allowed. Rural ((t))Towns shall not be enlarged to facilitate provision of sewers.

Rural and urban residents alike value the historic character of King County's Rural Towns. New development can enhance the character and valuable features of Rural Towns through careful design and location.

R-40((8))9 Rural Towns should be compact, promoting pedestrian and nonmotorized travel while permitting automobile access to most commercial and industrial uses. New development should be designed to strengthen the desirable characteristics and the historic character of the town, be supported by necessary public facilities and services, and be compatible with historic resources and nearby rural or resource uses.

New industrial uses should locate where they do not disrupt pedestrian or bicycle traffic in established retail areas of town or conflict with residential uses.”

- The Rural Town concept is part of the Rural Lands element of the King County Plan. This is important in that the rural land element of the King County Comprehensive Plan is often held up as an excellent example by land use planners as a model for rural character and preservation. The Rural Town concept has not been the subject of appeal by either CTED or other GMA watchdog groups including Futurewise despite the fact that it specifically allows for urban levels of development and density including the development of urban services such as sanitary sewer and municipal water systems.
- The Rural Town concept has been successfully implemented by King County including directly adjacent to Kittitas County in the community of Alpentel (Snoqualmie Pass).
- King County's Rural Town of Snoqualmie Pass, located in King County, is served by the Sewer system treatment facility located in the Kittitas County UGN of Snoqualmie Pass.
- King County's Rural Town of Snoqualmie Pass located in King County is served by the same Municipal Group A Water System that serves the Kittitas County UGN of Snoqualmie Pass.
- The differences between the King County's Rural Town of Snoqualmie Pass located in King County and the Kittitas County UGN of Snoqualmie Pass are indistinguishable.
- The King County's Rural Town of Snoqualmie Pass and the Kittitas County Snoqualmie Pass UGN have similar densities, similar business, similar recreation opportunities, and serviced by the same fire district.
- The King County's Rural Town of Snoqualmie Pass and the Kittitas County Snoqualmie Pass UGN are both populated with second homes that serve as housing for the Snoqualmie Pass recreation opportunities.
- Futurewise, a self proclaimed GMA watchdog group and an appellant to the Kittitas County Comprehensive Plan recently had this to say about the King County Rural Lands element of their comprehensive plan following King County's most recent update:

“King County has generally made intelligent repairs to an already good comprehensive plan. The plan contains strong protections for rural areas, positive resources to enhance rural economic development

and good new policies on sustainable economic growth countywide.”

It appears that Futurewise recognizes the need to provide for rural economic development including sustainable economic growth countywide. Further, Futurewise did not provide any negative comment on the Rural Town concept or the increased levels of urban activity within these designations.

Kittitas County Rural Town Recommendation

- Kittitas County Community Development Staff provided a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners dated May 8, 2008 regarding the use of the Rural Town designation for Snoqualmie Pass. We agree with this recommendation subject to the following :
 - a. A Viable option only if the Board of County Commissioners determines not to keep the urban designation, either UGA's or UGN's for Snoqualmie Pass, Ronald and Vantage.
 - b. The Rural Town Designation be applied to the Snoqualmie Pass, Ronald, and Vantage lands that are currently contained within the UGN designation. These areas have substantial investment in existing and proposed infrastructure as a result of their urban designations. These areas are capable of supporting higher levels of density and support a significant tourist industry in Kittitas County.
 - c. The County creates development regulations that provide for densities, uses and design standards consistent with maintaining economically viable development of infrastructure at urban levels of development. It is generally recognized within the planning industry and at CTED higher densities are necessary to provide for sustainability for urban levels of service such as sanitary sewer and municipal water systems

Suggested Findings of Fact for Rural Towns

1. The Board of County Commissioners find that the Rural Town designation is appropriate under the Growth Management Act to recognize existing unincorporated rural towns that represent historic and existing rural town development and that serve the economic viability of Kittitas County.
2. The Board of County Commissioners find that Rural Towns are unincorporated towns governed directly by Kittitas County, but may

¹ From the Futurewise web site - www.futurewise.org

² See CTED publication *Growth Management Questions and Answers*
<http://www.cted.wa.gov/DesktopModules/CTEDPublications>

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provide a focal point for community groups such as chambers of commerce or community councils to participate in public affairs.

3. The Board of County Commissioners find the purposes of the Rural Town designation are to recognize existing concentrations of higher density and economic activity in the Rural Area, whether by virtue of historical rural settlements or redesignation of an urban commercial center; provide a physical focus for the historic identity of rural communities.
4. The Board of County Commissioners find that Rural Towns are intended to allow for modest growth of residential and economic uses within these designations if supported by and adequate utilities and other public services.
5. The Board of County Commissioners find that although higher-density development in Rural Towns may require public sewers as provided for in RCW 36.94, RCW 90.46 or RCW 90.48, applying the full range of urban development standards (e.g. for street improvements or landscaping) may not be necessary, and may not be consistent with the historic character of these communities. Although Rural Towns also may in some circumstances develop at densities similar to those in the Urban Growth Areas, they are considered part of the Rural Area for purposes of the GMA, are not intended to provide significant growth capacity, and are not subject to the growth targets adopted for the UGA.
6. The Board of County Commissioners find that the Rural Town designation is one that has been successfully implemented by King County for similar historic rural towns. One of the King County Rural Towns, Snoqualmie Pass, shares a border with Kittitas County at Snoqualmie Pass and the Kittitas County UGN of Snoqualmie Pass.

Comprehensive Plan Policies to support Rural Towns

Existing Policies

GPO 2.5 Kittitas County should encourage residential and economic growth that will minimize the costs of providing public utilities and services.

GPO 2.100 Kittitas County will act to preserve the viability and integrity of existing business districts within the incorporated and unincorporated county.

GPO 2.109C Encourage an adequate inventory of developable property to accommodate the siting of new, and the expansion of existing industrial uses.

GPO 3.5 Encourage residential development close to employment opportunities and needed services to reduce vehicular traffic and related air quality problems.

GPO 3.17 Provide a sufficient number of housing units for future populations while maintaining the rural character of Kittitas County.

GPO 3.18 Provide sufficient housing units while maintaining environmental quality.

Chapter 7 Snoqualmie Pass Sub-area Plan.

Recommended new policies:

1. Kittitas County hereby designates the Rural Towns of Snoqualmie Pass, Ronald, Vantage, Easton, and Thorp as unincorporated Rural Towns. These historical settlements in unincorporated Kittitas County should provide services and a range of housing choices for Rural Area residents. The boundaries of the designated Rural Towns are shown on the Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map. Adjustments to these boundaries shall only occur through a subarea planning process. No new Rural Towns beyond those designated are needed to serve the Rural Area.
2. Commercial and industrial development that provides employment, shopping, and community and human services that strengthen the fiscal and economic health of rural communities should locate in Rural Towns if utilities and other services permit.
3. Rural Towns may contain higher-density housing than permitted in the surrounding Rural Area, and should provide affordable and resource-worker housing if utilities and other services permit. Development density in Rural Towns may approach that achieved in Urban Growth Areas.
4. The policies in this section apply only to the unincorporated Rural Towns.
5. Rural Towns serve as activity centers for the Rural Area and may be served by range of utilities and services, and may include several or all of the following land uses, if supported by necessary utilities and other services and if scaled and designed to protect rural character or the character of the historical use of the Rural Town:
 - a. Retail, commercial and industrial uses to serve the surrounding Rural Area population and to provide support for resource industries and tourism;
 - b. Residential development, including single-family housing on small lots as well as multifamily housing and mixed-use developments;
 - c. Other commercial and industrial uses, including commercial recreation and light industry; and
 - d. Public facilities and services such as community services, churches, schools,

and fire stations.

6. Sewers may be planned, developed, constructed, and operated in Rural Towns. Any extension of sewer mains from urban areas to serve a Rural Town shall be tightlined systems designed to not serve any intervening lands.
7. Rural Towns should be compact, promoting pedestrian and non-motorized travel while permitting automobile access to most commercial and industrial uses. New development should be designed to strengthen the desirable characteristics and the existing character of the town, be supported by necessary public facilities and services, and be compatible with historic resources and nearby rural or resource uses. New industrial uses should locate where they do not disrupt pedestrian or bicycle traffic in established retail areas of town or conflict with residential uses.