

Chapter 18

SITING ESSENTIAL PUBLIC FACILITIES

Introduction

Essential public facilities are usually capital facilities, typically difficult to site, such as airports, state education facilities, state or regional transportation facilities, state and local correctional facilities, solid waste handling facilities, and in-patient facilities including substance abuse facilities, mental health facilities, group homes, and secure community transition facilities (RCW 36.70A.200).

The County and the cities may also identify additional public facilities that are essential to providing services. Whatcom County is in the process of determining what, if any, additional public facilities should be considered essential. An Essential Public Facilities Advisory Committee has been established and is working with Planning Department staff to make these determinations.

The following outlines a process for determining where essential public facilities could be located and what development standards are appropriate. This process is intended to avoid duplication in approval process, consider the long-term as well as short-term costs of alternative siting criteria, provide for effective public review, major facility location, and emphasize reasonable compatibility with neighboring land uses.

Locational Considerations

The following locational issues should be taken into consideration when essential public facilities are proposed to be sited in the Birch Bay area:

1. Equitable distribution of public facilities should occur so that no one jurisdiction assumes more than their fair share.
2. Siting issues among Cities, the County, the State, and between the County, State and federal agencies, need to be coordinated to eliminate untimely reviews and delays.
3. The siting of some essential public facilities is limited by the nature of the facilities' operational requirements and the siting requirements of state and federal agencies which need to be taken into account prior to

and during the public review process. Specific siting needs for each type of facility and a need to identify design requirements and standard mitigation techniques should be stated as part of any siting decision.

4. Future expansion of a facility is often determined by the initial siting and design decisions, which need to be acknowledged in the public review process.

Public Review Process

It is essential that the public will be given an opportunity to review and comment on proposed location, construction and operation of essential public facilities. The following is a list of issues to be addressed in the public review process:

1. Affected public shall be consulted in preparing recommendations and shall be given the opportunity for effective review and comment.
2. Notice and opportunity to review and comment on draft recommendations shall be given to affected public.
3. Proposals for siting essential public facilities shall contain rationale for why that facility is needed.
4. Recommendations for essential public facilities shall contain a rationale for why the facilities listed need to be located in the Birch Bay area.
5. When identifying essential public facilities with siting difficulties, the characteristics of the facility that make it difficult to site shall be indicated.

Evaluation Information

For the public to be able to review and comment on proposed essential public facility location, construction, and operation, a certain amount of quantifiable information needs to be in the hands of the public. The following is a suggested minimum list of information needed. More detailed and specific information is needed depending on the type of essential public facility proposed.

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1. Evaluation criteria shall be consistent in the treatment of siting essential public facilities and should recognize the need for compliance with County wide policies and criteria.
2. Evaluation criteria shall consider more than one site.
3. Siting criteria shall be based on the following and consider the impacts on:
 - a. Natural features and critical areas
 - b. Existing land use and development in adjacent and surrounding areas
 - c. Existing Community Plan designations for surrounding areas
 - d. Present and proposed population density of surrounding areas
 - e. Environmental impacts and opportunities to mitigate environmental impacts
 - f. Effect on critical areas and designated open space areas
 - g. Spin-off (secondary and tertiary) impacts
 - h. Effect on the likelihood of associated development being induced or precluded by the siting of the facility.
 - i. Cumulative impacts essential public facilities taken as a group.

Goals and Policies

GOAL: Assure that essential public facilities sited in the Birch Bay area take into consideration the provisions in the Community Plan.

Policies:

1. When siting essential public facilities, the proposal shall take into account the Birch Bay Community Plan, particularly the land use, housing, transportation, utilities, critical areas, shoreline, and parks and open space elements.

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2. Ensure that the siting of essential public facilities will include and provide for a public process with quantifiable information.
3. Ensure that the essential public facilities siting process provides adequate data necessary to evaluate the siting of the proposed facility.