

Chapter Two LAND USE

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OVERALL LAND USE - INTRODUCTION

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ISSUES, GOALS, AND POLICIES

Issues for this section were drawn from those identified in the Whatcom County: Next Generations Visioning Process. Numerous meetings, surveys and other methods were used to identify what was important to people in Whatcom County.

Accommodating Growth

Community Value Statements encourage concentrating growth into urban areas. This allows for efficient provision of services and preservation of rural areas as quiet, open spaces where development pressures are not such that extraordinary regulations must be imposed. A distinct boundary is also encouraged between rural and urban areas, discouraging sprawl, maintaining desired rural lifestyles, and conserving agricultural land.

GOAL 2A: Ensure provision of sufficient land and densities to accommodate the growth needs of Whatcom County and protect the qualities that make the county a desirable place to live.

Policy 2A-1: Concentrate urban levels of development within designated urban growth areas.

Policy 2A-2: ~~Draw~~ a distinct boundary between urban and rural uses.

Deleted: Where existing development does not already prohibit it, draw

Policy 2A-3: Provide a range of land uses which considers locational and market factors as well as required quantities of land.

Policy 2A-4: Designate land uses that reflect the best use of the land.

Policy 2A-5: Provide predictability to property owners in land use designation.

Policy 2A-6: Allow appropriate development in existing small self-contained communities through the use of the "~~Rural Center~~" land use designation.

Deleted: Small Town

Policy 2A-7: Provide sufficient and appropriately located residential, commercial, and industrial lands.

Policy 2A-8: Include business/industry parks, tourist/resort areas and allowance for existing crossroads commercial areas within urban growth areas or limited areas of more intensive rural development.

Deleted: in commercial lands designations

Policy 2A-9: Retain existing rural and heavy industrial areas in the northwestern region of the county within urban growth areas or limited areas of more intensive rural development.

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Resort Communities and Master Planned Resorts

The County's resort areas are important to tourism and provide numerous and varied recreational opportunities for county residents and visitors. Historically important resort areas include Birch Bay, Point Roberts, the Resort Semiahmoo and West Semiahmoo areas, and the Mount Baker winter recreational area. New developments, including the Point Roberts Golf and Country Club have expanded the role of the resort communities in providing recreational and employment opportunities for residents.

GOAL 2B: Encourage the continued viability of existing resort communities and allow the development of new Master Planned Resorts in the future.

Policy 2B-1: Support the economic viability of the County's tourist industry by permitting master planned resorts in places with significant natural amenities within urban growth areas through the planned unit development process.

Policy 2B-2: New large-scale resort development in rural areas outside of UGAs and outside established resort areas, should only be permitted as Master Planned Resorts and only when substantially in compliance with these policies.

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Policy 2B-3: Work with property owners in the resort communities to develop an understanding of the unique needs of these areas and evaluate land use regulations for their responsiveness to these needs.

Policy 2B-4: New resort development and Master Planned Resorts should be developed consistent with the development regulations established for critical areas.

Policy 2B-5: No new urban land uses should be allowed in the vicinity of Master Planned Resorts, except in areas otherwise designated for urban growth under the Comprehensive Plan.

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Regions of Whatcom County

Whatcom County is a large and diverse county. People living in different parts of the county have different priorities and understanding of what constitutes rural and urban lifestyles. It is important to citizens to emphasize these regional differences.

GOAL 2L: Recognize the important regional differences within Whatcom County.

Policy 2L-1: Use the subarea planning process to identify and support distinctions among different areas of the county.

Policy 2L-2: Retain and periodically update the adopted Subarea Plans (Lummi Island, Cherry Point-Ferndale, Lake Whatcom, Urban Fringe, Lynden-Nooksack Valley, Chuckanut-Lake Samish, Birch Bay-Blaine, Foothills, Point Roberts, South Fork Valley, and Eliza Island). ~~Subarea Plans represent a long history of plan development in Whatcom County and provide the foundation for the county's first Growth Management comprehensive plan adopted in 1997. However, the plans adopted prior to the 1997 Comprehensive Plan have not been reviewed for compliance with the Growth Management Act. In the event there is an inconsistency~~ between a Subarea Plan and the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan shall prevail.

Deleted: To the extent that they are consistent with the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, they remain valid in the detail they provide for specific areas. Where

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Policy 2L-3: Emphasize forestry uses with some provision for rural and agricultural uses in the south and southeastern regions of the county.

Policy 2L-4: Expand the rural economic base by supporting natural resource, forestry, fishing, and agriculture, as well as allowing for ~~cottage and light industries, recreation and tourism, and other rural commercial uses contained within limited areas of more intensive rural development,~~ in appropriate regions of the county.

Deleted: cottage, and light industries,

Deleted: some Small Towns

Policy 2L-5: Emphasize agriculture in the north central regions of the county.

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RURAL LANDS – INTRODUCTION

Purpose

~~This section establishes direction in the form of goals and policies to guide land use decisions in the rural area of Whatcom County consistent with the Growth Management Act's allowance of development in the rural area, including "limited areas of more intensive rural development."~~

Deleted: The purpose of the Rural Lands section is to provide direction for land use decisions in the rural areas of Whatcom County.¶

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The issues, goals, policies, and action plans of the Rural Lands section were derived from the public input gathered and synthesized by the *Whatcom County: The Next Generations* Visioning Committee.¶
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GMA Requirements

The state Growth Management Act requires counties to include a Rural element in their comprehensive plan in accordance with RCW 36.70A.070. GMA defines rural lands as those that are located outside urban growth areas and which do not include designated agriculture, forestry, or mineral resource lands of long-term commercial significance. Agriculture, forestry and mineral resource lands are addressed separately in *Chapter 8: Resource Lands*.

Rural Vision - What is Rural?

The rural areas of Whatcom County in 2031 will promote rural values and will be characterized by peaceful, quiet, low-density development with a preserved natural environment. The rural areas of Whatcom County will continue to provide an important transition between the urban areas and the resource areas of the County, including commercial agriculture and forestry uses. The rural areas are characterized by a mixture of low-density residential, historic rural communities, pasture, agriculture, woodlots, home occupations, and cottage industries.

Rural Character and Lifestyle

Whatcom County residents value the character and the lifestyle of the rural areas of the County. In particular, people value the natural environment, clean water and air, agriculture, forested lands, and parks, trails, and open space.

The GMA (RCW 36.70A.030(15)) defines “rural character” as “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 government services; and
- (g) That are consistent with the protection of natural surface water flows and ground water and surface water recharge and discharge areas.”

GOAL 2DD: Retain the character and lifestyle of rural Whatcom County.

Policy 2DD-1: Recognize rural lands as an important transition area between urban areas and resource areas.

Policy 2DD-2: Protect and value clean water and air, the natural environment, forested lands, small-scale agriculture, parks, trails, and open space that provide for a high-quality rural lifestyle.

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Background Summary¶**

¶ Maintaining the rural character and lifestyle is very important to Whatcom County residents. Typical uses in the rural areas include a mixture of low-density residential, pasture, agriculture, woodlots, home occupations, and cottage industries. The distribution of rural land use is adjacent to agricultural, forestry, and urban land uses and often provides a buffer between urban areas and commercial agriculture and forestry uses.¶

¶ The population growth for Whatcom County from 2000 to 2022 is projected to be 68,103 for a total 2022 population of 234,917. This represents an increase of approximately 4,328 people in the areas of Whatcom County that are currently unincorporated and outside of permanent UGAs. A study of the potential subdividable land in the areas of the County zoned Rural one dwelling/five acres (R5A) found that out of 85,588 acres inventoried, about 2/3 of the acreage was in parcels 10 acres or larger in 2002. This indicates that there is potential for future land division in the rural portions of the county under current zoning regulations. Conceivably, the rural landscape could look different in the future if the current rural zoning is retained. ¶

¶ People in Whatcom County, through the Visioning Process, defined rural character as a variety of low densities, open spaces, privacy, peace and quiet with less traffic noise and congestion than found in urban areas. Retaining a sense of community and maintaining local control in land use decisions were also components of rural identity.¶

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RURAL LANDS – ISSUES, GOALS, AND POLICIES¶**

¶ **Rural Character and Lifestyle¶**
County residents describe rural character and lifestyle as open space, quiet areas/privacy, largely agricultural and forestry orientation, peacefulness, sense of community, low-density population, less noise and congestion than found in urban areas, natural landscape, and greater self-determination of property use. With a rapidly increasing population in Whatcom County, maintaining the rural lifestyle currently enjoyed by county residents becomes more challenging. County residents ... [1]

Policy 2DD-3: Encourage property owners to conserve forested areas, agricultural land, and open space by utilizing current-use taxation provisions (RCW 84.34).

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Policy 2DD-4: Conserve open space, park land, and trails for recreational use, as well as to protect essential habitat such as riparian areas and wetlands.

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Policy 2DD-5: Allow home-based occupations and cottage industries throughout the rural area provided they do not adversely affect the surrounding residential uses or rural character.

Policy 2DD-6: Maintain the historic character and cultural roles of existing rural communities.

Policy 2DD-7: Recognize Rural Centers that support the rural areas with public and commercial services and employment opportunities.

Policy 2DD-8: Assure economic prosperity for rural areas and allow rural property owners reasonable use of their land by continuing to allow legal nonconforming uses.

Policy 2DD-9: Coordinate and plan public facilities, services, roads, and utilities to ensure that rural areas have appropriate and adequate rural levels of service necessary to maintain a rural lifestyle.

Rural Development

With a rapidly increasing population in Whatcom County, maintaining the rural lifestyle currently enjoyed by county residents becomes more challenging. The rural character is perceived to be threatened by residential development, commercial development, environmental degradation, and increased vehicular traffic. Preventing urban sprawl is therefore important to preserving the rural values of the County.

Whatcom County seeks to retain its rural character by encouraging development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist or can be provided in an efficient manner, and by reducing the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawl development.

Existing rural communities in rural Whatcom County serve an historic and cultural role in the rural character of the County, allow for the clustering of services needed to serve the surrounding rural areas, and provide employment opportunities for rural residents. Rural Centers allow for infill development but are contained by distinct boundaries.

Goal 2EE: Support rural development patterns that prevent sprawl and contain growth.

Policy 2EE-1: Provide a variety of residential choices at very low densities which are compatible with farming, fishing, and timber management.

Policy 2EE-2: Manage development in rural areas through density requirements (5-acre lots or larger) that protect and maintain existing rural character, natural resource lands, open space, critical areas, significant cultural resources, and water resources and that will minimize the demand and cost of public services and infrastructure improvements.

Policy ~~2EE-3~~: Rezones from one dwelling unit per ten acre (R-10A) zoning districts to one dwelling per five acre (R-5A) zoning districts should be discouraged.

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Policy 2EE-4: Prevent urban or suburban levels of residential and commercial development, increases in traffic and noise, and the degradation of the natural environment that threaten the rural character of Whatcom County.

Policy 2EE-5: Minimize potential conflicts of rural residential development near designated natural resource lands to prevent the conversion of farm and forest land to non-resource uses.

Policy 2EE-6: Establish Rural Center, Rural Tourism, and Rural Business land use designations as limited areas of more intensive rural development (per RCW 36.70A.070(5)(d)) that minimize and contain uses and densities that are more intensive than those generally considered rural in nature.

Policy 2EE-7: Prevent the approval of conditional use permits in any rural land use designation unless the proposed use is consistent with the area and is similar in use, scale, and intensity to surrounding uses.

Policy ~~2EE-8~~: Adopt mandatory and incentive programs, such as purchase of development rights, transfer of development rights, and tax deferrals, to achieve desired land use policies in rural areas and in areas where there are compelling reasons to do so, and allocate sufficient resources to achieve the desired outcome.

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Policy ~~2EE-9~~: Provide landowners with incentives and options to develop their property at densities that may be less than the underlying zone.

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Policy 2EE-10: Ensure that flexible development patterns such as cluster subdivisions effectively preserve open space and agricultural land and do not create the need for more intensive rural services.

Policy ~~2EE-11~~: Use an "Agriculture Protection Overlay Zone" designation in certain Rural zoned areas as a way to help achieve the goal of conserving and enhancing Whatcom County's agricultural land base.

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Policy ~~2EE-12~~: In the "Agriculture Protection Overlay Zone" on parcels 20 acres and larger with Rural 5 acre and Rural 10 acre zoning, require non-agriculturally related development to be clustered on a maximum of 25 percent of the available land with the remainder available for open space and agricultural uses. Development standards shall provide flexibility to achieve development potential in cases of natural limitations.

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~~Policy 2EE-13: Allow development in rural areas only when a minimum level of necessary services is provided but urban services are not required.~~

Rural Services

~~Development in rural areas should not receive urban levels of service, but services should be coordinated to ensure that rural areas receive a standard level of service including law enforcement protection, fire protection, and emergency services. The Whatcom County Public Works Department maintains county roads. Most of the residential development in rural areas uses individual on-site septic systems. Some drinking water is provided by on-site wells and in other cases it is provided by water districts.~~

GOAL ~~2FF~~: Ensure that rural areas are provided with services consistent with the rural character and that development patterns do not encourage an increased service level or degrade water quality.

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Policy ~~2FF-1~~: Recognize domestic water systems, volunteer fire protection, emergency services, law enforcement protection, transportation, public transit services and public utilities typically associated with rural development as appropriate services in designated rural areas. Rural services do not include storm or sanitary sewers.

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~~Policy 2FF-2: Coordinate with rural service providers to ensure efficient and effective service to rural areas.~~

~~Policy 2FF-3: Pursue opportunities for implementing concurrency fees to help pay for critical rural services such as fire and emergency service.~~

~~Policy 2FF-4: Prohibit extension or expansion of public sewer systems outside urban growth areas or LAMIRDs except where it is necessary to protect public health and safety and the environment, and when such services are financially supportable at rural densities and do not permit urban development.~~

Policy ~~2FF-5~~: Ensure that adequate on-site wells and on-site sewage and septic systems are properly installed, monitored, and maintained. Provide technical assistance to property owners, and require necessary improvements when needed to protect health, safety and environmental quality.

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Policy 2FF-6: Promote better land use practices and protect water quality by encouraging landowners and developers to investigate and implement innovative subdivision, septic system designs, and stormwater management.

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Policy 2FF-7: Prioritize public investment in rural areas to maintain or upgrade existing facilities, services, and utilities to serve existing development at rural service standards. New facilities, services, roads, and utilities which support planned rural development shall meet rural service standards.

Policy 2FF-8: Ensure county coordination with service providers to determine if new or infill development will have necessary services. Require concurrent review of new development to ensure adequate level of service at rural standards are available at the time of development.

Policy 2FF-9: Ensure all standards and plans for structures, roads and utility systems, and other public services and facilities are consistent with rural densities and uses. Such facilities and services shall be designed, constructed, and provided to minimize the alteration of the landscape and the impacts to rural residents and community character, to preserve natural systems, to provide for continuing agricultural or woodlot use, to protect critical areas, to protect important land features such as ridgelines, to retain historic and cultural structures/ landscapes, and scenic amenities.

Policy 2FF-10: On-site wastewater systems are preferred to treat and dispose of effluent in rural areas. Community on-site systems or decentralized treatment systems may be used to serve limited areas of more intensive rural development (LAMIRDs).

Policy 2FF-11: Limit the size of a community or large on-site sewage system for a designated LAMIRD to the build-out potential of all development within the LAMIRD's designated boundaries unless expansion is necessary to protect public health and safety and the environment, and when such services are financially supportable at rural densities and do not permit urban development.

Policy 2FF-12: Prohibit community or large on-site sewage systems for land divisions outside LAMIRDs except where necessary to protect public health and safety and the environment, and when such services are financially supportable at rural densities and do not permit urban development.

Rural Employment Opportunities

Many residents in rural Whatcom County depend on cottage industries, home occupations, small businesses, and natural resource-based jobs for their livelihood. These types of businesses support the local economy and are compatible with the rural lifestyle desired by county residents.

Light industry is another important contributor to the local economy. Currently, most light industry is located along Guide Meridian, along the Interstate-5 corridor, or in urban areas.

GOAL 2GG: Provide employment opportunities in the rural parts of Whatcom County.

Policy 2GG-1: Support small businesses, cottage industries, home occupations, resource-based and other appropriate light industry contained within limited areas of more intensive rural development in the rural areas of Whatcom County.

Policy 2GG-2: Support resource-based industries that require only rural services, conserve the natural resource land base, and help maintain the rural character and lifestyle of the community. Assure adequate facilities, mitigation and buffers through development regulations.

Policy 2GG-3: Ensure that business operations do not adversely impact neighbors, compromise water quality and quantity, or infringe on productive agricultural and forest land.

Policy 2GG-4: New rural commercial and industrial uses should be located principally within designated commercial areas to avoid the proliferation of commercial businesses throughout the rural area. However, certain limited commercial uses, resource-related uses, home occupations, cottage industries and other nonresidential uses may be permitted if carefully reviewed, conditioned and found to be compatible with rural areas. To encourage efficient use of the land, the broadest range of commercial and industrial uses should be allowed in areas already accommodating such use and development, with greater limitations placed upon such uses within areas devoted predominantly to residential use. Commercial and industrial uses located in the unincorporated portions of the county fall within the Rural Center, Rural Business, Rural Tourism, or Master Planned Resort Comprehensive Plan designations.

Policy 2GG-5: Public services and public facilities necessary for rural commercial and industrial uses shall be rural in nature, limited to those necessary to serve the use, and provided in a manner that does not permit low-density sprawl. Uses may utilize urban services that previously have been made available to the site.

Deleted: Expanding light industry in other parts of the county would generate revenue for local school districts and increase the tax base. Results from the Visioning Process encourage the establishment of a Business/Light Industrial Park or Rural Industrial areas in the eastern part of the county where appropriate as long as the industry does not negatively impact surrounding uses, the environment, or water quality. The intent is to provide job opportunities close to unincorporated urban growth areas and small towns.

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Deleted: 2GG-2: The use, scale, and intensity of businesses contained within limited areas of more intensive development designations should be similar to the existing uses in those areas.¶

Deleted: Policy 2FF-3: Limit strip development and the size and number of Crossroads Commercial businesses to avoid traffic problems. ¶

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Deleted: Locate resource-based industries near small towns or crossroads communities. Resource-based industries with up to fifty employees may be approved by conditional use, provided that the industry processes agricultural or forestry products that are predominantly locally grown.

Deleted: ¶ Policy 2FF-5: Retain existing tourist/resort/small town commercial designations throughout Whatcom County.¶

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RURAL LANDS – LAND USE

Limited Areas of More Intensive Rural Development (LAMIRD)

RCW 36.70A.070(5)(d)(i) through (iii) allows (but does not require) counties to designate limited areas of more intensive development (LAMIRDs) for three types of development patterns in the rural areas:

- Type I: “Rural development consisting of the infill, development, or redevelopment of existing commercial, industrial, residential, or mixed-use areas...” Existing development is defined as that which existed on July 1, 1990.
- Type II: “The intensification of development on lots containing, or new development of, small-scale recreational or tourist uses, including commercial facilities to serve those...uses, that rely on a rural location and setting...”
- Type III: “The intensification of development on lots containing isolated nonresidential uses or new development of isolated cottage industries and isolated small-scale businesses that are not principally designed to serve the existing and projected rural population and nonresidential uses, but do provide job opportunities for rural residents...”

Goal 2HH: Establish LAMIRD Designation Criteria

Policy 2HH-1: Designation criteria for Type I LAMIRDs

A. Location Criteria. Type I LAMIRDs may be designated in an area that:

1. Was characterized by existing development more intensive than surrounding rural areas (residential and non-residential) as of July 1, 1990, and
2. Is not currently designated by the Comprehensive Plan as Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) or Resource Lands, and
3. Is not located within one mile, measured by public road, of a designated Urban Growth Area (UGA).

B. Additional Location Criteria. The following may serve as additional criteria for Type I LAMIRD designation (relative to the specific circumstances of the area, and in combination with each other):

1. The area has historically served as a hub of public and commercial services for the surrounding rural areas;
2. The existing (1990) residential built environment was more intensively developed than surrounding areas;
3. The area should be separated from other LAMIRD designations, regardless of type, by a minimum of one or more miles, except in the Guide Meridian corridor between Bellingham and Wiser Lake, where historic development patterns support closer spacing.
4. The area has few environmental constraints on water and sewer/septic (based on availability of utilities, and/or water supply of sufficient quality/quantity and soils appropriate for septic/drainfield systems);

5. Public services are available to serve potential infill, such as adequate potable water and fire protection, transportation facilities, sewage disposal and stormwater control; or
6. The area is planned for more intensive development in a post-GMA local subarea plan.

C. Outer Boundary Criteria. For land meeting the criteria described in A and B above, Type I LAMIRD boundaries must minimize and contain areas of intensive development and be delineated predominately by the built environment, and shall include:

1. Parcels that were intensively developed on July 1, 1990.
2. Parcels that on July 1, 1990 were not intensively developed may be included within Type I LAMIRD boundaries if they meet any of the following conditions:
 - a. Including the parcel helps preserve the character of an existing (built) natural neighborhood;
 - b. Including the parcel allows the logical outer boundary to follow a physical boundary such as bodies of water, streets and highways, and land forms and contours;
 - c. Including the parcel (or in limited cases, a portion of the parcel) prevents the logical outer boundary from being abnormally irregular;
 - d. Including the parcel is consistent with efficient provision of public facilities and services;
 - e. Including the parcel does not create a new pattern of low-density sprawl; and,
 - f. The parcel is not subject to critical areas constraints that result in substantial development restrictions.

Policy 2HH-2: Designation criteria for Type II LAMIRDs

A. Location Criteria. Type II LAMIRDs may be designated on land that:

1. Consists of one lot, or more than one lot in common ownership, and
2. Is not currently designated by the Comprehensive Plan as Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) or Resource Lands, and
3. Is not located within one mile, measured by public road, of a designated Urban Growth Area (UGA) or another LAMIRD area, regardless of type

B. Additional Criteria The following serve as additional criteria for Type II LAMIRD designation:

1. The area must rely on the rural location or setting for its use, and

2. The area may include residential development existing on September 20, 2005, but not new, and
3. The area may serve more than the local existing & projected rural population, and
4. Public services and public facilities shall be limited to those necessary to serve the recreation or tourist use and shall be provided in a manner that does not permit low-density sprawl, and

Policy 2HH-3: Designation criteria for Type III LAMIRDs

A. Location Criteria. Type III LAMIRDs may be designated on land that:

1. Is not currently designated by the Comprehensive Plan as Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) or Resource Lands, and
2. Consists of a lot or small group of lots that either:
 - a. Contained nonresidential uses on September 20, 2005 and was located within a commercial, manufacturing, or industrial zoning district at the time of original county-initiated designation, or
 - b. Contain cottage industries or small scale businesses established after September 20, 2005, or proposed to be established, total area not being smaller than one acre or larger than ten acres, such lot or group of lots being located no less than one mile by public road from the edge of an Urban Growth Area or another LAMIRD area, regardless of type.

B. Additional Criteria. :

1. A Type III LAMIRD designation on a lot or small group of lots containing nonresidential uses on September 20, 2005 should be separated from other LAMIRD designations, regardless of type, by no less than one-half mile by public road, except in the Guide Meridian corridor between Bellingham and Wiser Lake, where historic development patterns support closer spacing.
2. In the event that the listed criteria result in the need to choose one proposed designation over another, preference is given to a proposed use that:
 - a. Provides the greatest number of job opportunities for rural residents.
 - b. Is located at a controlled public road intersection.

Rural Centers

Rural Centers are areas that have historically served as centers of activity and services for surrounding rural areas. These areas are Type I LAMIRDs and include small unincorporated towns and other areas where a concentration of commercial and public uses have been in existence since before the adoption of the GMA in 1990. Typically, these are mixed-use areas containing both residential and nonresidential uses developed at a greater intensity than is generally found in outlying rural areas. In many cases, they are served by public services and facilities, including schools, libraries, post offices, and public transportation. This more intensive development is contained within the boundaries of the Rural Center designations, preventing the expansion of more intensive uses and densities into the surrounding rural areas. Because undeveloped lots may be included within Rural Center boundaries, infill development is possible, but at an intensity consistent with the development that existed in 1990.

Unincorporated areas within Whatcom County designated as Rural Centers are: Acme, Custer, Deming, Diablo, Glacier, Hinotes Corner, Kendall, Laurel, Maple Falls, Newhalem, Point Roberts, Pole & Guide Meridian, Sudden Valley, and Wisner Lake.

GOAL 2JJ: Designate centers of rural activity that existed on July 1, 1990 as Rural Centers.

Policy 2JJ-1: Areas designated as Rural Centers shall meet the criteria stated in this chapter and the requirements of RCW 36.70A.070(5)(d)(i), which describes limited areas of more intensive rural development consisting of the infill, development, or redevelopment of existing commercial, industrial, residential, or mixed-use areas, including necessary public facilities and public services to serve the limited area.

Policy 2JJ-2: Boundaries of Rural Centers shall meet the criteria stated in this chapter, and the requirements of RCW 36.70A.070(5)(d)(iv), which requires limited areas of more intensive rural development to be clearly identifiable and contained within a logical outer boundary delineated predominately by the built environment as it existed on July 1, 1990.

Policy 2JJ-3: Additional Rural Centers should not be designated, nor should boundaries of Rural Centers be changed unless the area of the proposed addition meets the criteria stated in this chapter, and requirements of RCW 36.70A.070(5)(d) . Designated Resource Lands should not be redesignated as Rural Centers.

Policy 2JJ-4: Development within Rural Centers should be consistent with the existing character of the area and allowed development should be similar to the use, scale, and intensity of the development that existed on July 1, 1990.

Policy 2JJ-5: Lands inside Rural Center designation boundaries that are within low-density residential (lot size five acres or greater) or resource zones, or are federally owned, should not be re-zoned to allow more intensive uses and densities.

Policy 2JJ-6: Land uses within Rural Centers, except for industrial uses, should be principally designed to serve the existing and projected rural population.

Policy 2JJ-7: Encourage future public participation activities to develop additional planning goals and policies specific to residents' needs and preferences in individual Rural Centers.

Rural Tourism

Whatcom County's scenic rural areas are enjoyed by residents and tourist alike. Small scale recreation and tourist uses that rely on a rural setting provide income opportunities for rural residents and contribute to the local economy. The Rural Tourism designation (Type II LAMIRD) limits and contains such uses, which can be more intensive than surrounding rural uses.

GOAL 2KK: Provide opportunities for small-scale recreational or tourist uses in rural areas.

Policy 2KK-1: Areas designated for Rural Tourism shall meet the criteria stated in this chapter, and the requirements of RCW 36.70A.070(5)(d)(ii), which describes limited areas of more intensive rural development consisting of the intensification of development on lots containing, or new development of, small-scale recreational or tourist uses, including commercial facilities to serve those uses, that rely on a rural location and setting, but that do not include new residential development.

Policy 2KK-2: New Rural Tourism designations should not include new residential development.

Policy 2KK-3: Designated Resource Lands should not be redesignated as Rural Tourism.

Rural Business

Many businesses have been established in commercial and industrial zones outside of Rural Center areas. These uses, which are more intensive than those found in surrounding rural areas, provide commercial services and job opportunities for rural residents. The Rural Business designation permits uses to continue while preventing the spread of businesses in sprawl or strip development patterns, or increasing the intensity of development inconsistent with surrounding rural character.

The Rural Business designation includes both Type I and Type III LAMIRDs. To ensure that these uses remain isolated and do not lead to strip development, criteria for Rural Business designation include spacing requirements from other Rural Business designations as well as Rural Centers and Urban Growth Areas.

The areas designated Rural Business under Type I LAMIRD guidelines are: Axton & Guide Meridian, Gooseberry Point, Guide Meridian Border Crossing, Nugents Corner, Smith & Guide Meridian, and Van Wyck. The areas designated Rural Business under Type III guidelines are: Birch Bay-Lynden & I-5, Blue Canyon, North Lake Samish & I-5, Slater & Elder, Van Zandt, and Welcome.

GOAL 2LL: Designate Rural Business areas to limit and contain nonresidential uses.

Policy 2LL-1: Type I Rural Business designations shall meet the Type I LAMIRD designation criteria stated in this chapter, and the requirements of RCW 36.70A.070(5)(d)(i), which describes limited areas of more intensive rural development consisting of the infill, development, or redevelopment of existing commercial, industrial, residential, or mixed-use areas, including necessary public facilities and public services to serve the limited area. Development should be consistent with the existing character of the area and allowed development should be similar to the use, scale, and intensity of the development that existed on July 1, 1990.

Policy 2LL-2: All areas designated Rural Business except for those referenced in Policy 2LL-1, shall meet the Type III LAMIRD designation criteria stated in this chapter, and the requirements of RCW 36.70A.070(5)(d)(iii), which describes limited areas of more intensive rural development consisting of the intensification of development on lots containing isolated nonresidential uses or new development of isolated cottage industries and isolated small-scale businesses.

Policy 2LL-3: Uses in the Rural Business designation need not be principally designed to serve the existing and projected rural population and nonresidential uses, but should provide job opportunities for rural residents.

Policy 2LL-4: No more than five proposals for Rural Business designations for new non-residential uses should be considered in any given year. Proposals for Rural Business designations for existing legal non-residential uses will not be counted toward the numeric limit.

Policy 2LL-5: Designated Resource Lands should not be redesignated as Rural Business.

Rural

The rural lands not located within a Rural Center, Rural Tourism, or Rural Business designation fall within the Rural designation. These are areas where it is essential to preserve the character of the countryside and prevent the encroachment of incompatible uses and densities from more intensively developed areas.

GOAL 2MM: Designate Rural areas to preserve rural character and prevent incompatible uses.

Policy 2MM-1: Development within Rural designations should be consistent with rural character as described in this chapter.

Policy 2MM-2: Prevent new uses and structures that are incompatible with, or are of a greater scale or intensity than existing uses in the area.

Policy 2MM-3: Within the Rural land use designation, isolated cottage industries and isolated small-scale businesses must comply with RCW 36.70A.070(5)(d)(iii), and the lot(s) upon which the conditional uses are located should not be within one mile of any other similar conditional use, a Rural Center or Rural Business land use designation, or an urban growth area.

Policy 2MM-4: Decisions regarding zoning and allowable uses within the Rural designation should take into account the cumulative impacts of uses allowed by administrative approval and conditional use permit over time.

Special Study Areas

Lake Whatcom

Lake Whatcom is the drinking water source for approximately half of Whatcom County. Recent studies on Lake Whatcom indicate water quality in the lake has declined. Oxygen levels in Lake Whatcom are declining to lower levels, and are declining faster than in the past. In 1997, the Washington State Department of Ecology listed Lake Whatcom as an impaired water body and place Lake Whatcom on the Federal Clean Water Act 303(d) list because of low oxygen levels. The 303(d) listing requires the establishment of a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) that designates loading capacity of the lake such that there will be no measurable change in oxygen levels from natural lake conditions. The TMDL goals will require a variety of planning, pollution prevention, pollution reduction and technical approaches. Meeting the TMDL goals will be required in order to stabilize water quality in Lake Whatcom.

The primary cause of declining oxygen levels had been from residential development in the watershed. Past development permitted by the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County has led to increased phosphorus loading into the lake, which in turn has led to

Deleted: [all text, goals, policies: "Lummi Island," "Small Towns and Crossroads Communities," "Northeastern Towns," "The Central Communities," "Western Towns," "Crossroads Commercial," "Resort and Recreational Subdivisions," "Point Roberts," "Mount Baker Recreational Region," "Lake Whatcom Region," "Eliza Island," "Suburban Enclaves," "Chuckanut/North Bellingham," "Lake Samish," "Fort Bellingham," "Additional Areas," "Transportation Corridors," and "Guide Meridian"]

lower oxygen levels in the lake. Poorly managed forest practices can also lead to significant increases in phosphorus loading to the lake.

In November/December 1992, a joint resolution was passed by the Bellingham City Council, Whatcom County Council, and Water District 10 Commissioners, which reaffirmed this position with six general goal statements and a set of specific goal statements in various categories. The specific goal statements for urbanization were the following:

- Prevent water quality degradation associated with development within the watershed.
- Review and recommend changes in zoning and development potential that are compatible with a drinking-water reservoir environment.
- In addition to zoning identify and promote other actions to minimize potential for increased development in the watershed (i.e. land trust, development rights, cost incentives, etc.).
- Develop specific standards which reduce the impacts of urbanization, such as minimal lot clearing; clustered development to reduce infrastructure; collection and treatment of stormwater before entering the lake.
- Develop appropriate interlocal agreements with governing agencies to prohibit the potential for additional development once an agreed upon level is set.

The joint resolution included goals for watershed management that extended beyond urbanization. Goals were included for stormwater management, on-site waste systems, conservation, forest management, spill response, hazardous materials transport and handling, data/information management, education/public involvement, and other topics. A joint strategy was agreed to for developing specific plans to meet the adopted goals. Eight high priority goals were selected first and plans have been completed and jointly adopted for each of the goals.

In 1998, the City, County, and District 10 formalized their joint commitment to protect and manage the lake through the joint adoption of an interlocal agreement and allocation of funding toward protection and management efforts in the watershed. A five-year program plan was developed for ten program areas. Specific priority was placed on activities related to watershed ownership, stormwater management, and urbanization/land development.

The watershed contains four urban areas: the City of Bellingham, which straddles the upper portion of the northern-most basin of the lake; Geneva, which is immediately south and east of Bellingham's city limits and is part of the city's urban growth area; Hillsdale, which is immediately north and east of Bellingham's city limits and is also part of the city's urban growth areas; and the Sudden Valley provisional urban growth area. In addition, it includes a variety of other zones, including resource, rural, and suburban zones. Over 75% of the watershed is in Forestry zoning and more than 73% of the current land use is forestry.

In 2003, there were approximately 2,730 existing dwelling units in the Lake Whatcom watershed located outside of the Bellingham UGA. Under the zoning adopted in January 2004, the gross potential build-out in this area is about 6,507 total dwelling units. Therefore, even under the more restrictive zoning adopted in January of 2004, there could be a significant amount of new development in the watershed.

Water and sewer service are provided by Water District 10. Capacity problems in the district's sewer line, which serves Geneva and Sudden Valley, have caused overflows into the lake in the past. An aggressive program to preclude stormwater infiltration has eliminated the overflow problems to a large extent. In addition, the district has a contractually limited flow capacity to Bellingham. The Lake Louise Road sewage interceptor was constructed in January 2003 to carry waste water from Sudden Valley and Geneva and serves as a complement to the Lake Whatcom Boulevard trunk line. The interceptor was designed to service full build-out of Sudden Valley and Geneva. Properties with septic tanks are required to connect to the sewer system within five years of completion of the project.

There are several pending subdivisions in the area which are being proposed at less than full density but which will increase the overall development level outside of urban areas to a significant degree.

In 2004, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Board on Natural Resources adopted the Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan. This plan provides additional protections on state managed lands within the Lake Whatcom watershed. The plan provides additional protections on streams and potentially unstable slopes on normally included in forest practices in Washington State. If the DNR exchanges land from the watershed the protections provided by the plan would not be applicable to the new owner.

In 2006 the Whatcom County Council approved funding to study reconveyance of DNR managed County Forest Board Lands.

Chapter 11: Environment, contains more discussion of Lake Whatcom issues and includes additional goals and policies related to watershed management, stormwater, and water quality.

GOAL 2NN: **Prioritize the Lake Whatcom area as an area to minimize development, repair existing storm water problems, specifically for phosphorus, and ensure forestry practices do not negatively impact water quality. Provide sufficient funding and support to be successful.**

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Policy 2NN-1: **Work with property owners to find acceptable development solutions at lower overall densities than the present zoning allows.**

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Policy 2NN-2: **Develop a storm drainage utility district or other funding mechanism to deal with the unique problems of development in a drinking water watershed.**

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Policy 2NN-3: **Recognize that all users of Lake Whatcom water have an interest in the resource and should share in the cost of its protection.**

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- | Policy ~~2NN-4~~: Work cooperatively with the City and Water District 10 to identify, review, and, as appropriate, recommend changes to existing monitoring programs that will address the needs of the various jurisdictions. Place a particular focus on the information needed to evaluate the impacts of additional development in the watershed. Include an analysis of the diversion from the Middle Fork of the Nooksack. Coordinate effort with the Lake Whatcom Management Committee process. Deleted: 2PP

- | Policy ~~2NN-5~~: Evaluate and pursue, as appropriate, the use of incentives to encourage voluntary lot consolidation, transfer or purchase of development rights, current use taxation, and participation in open space conservation programs. Deleted: 2PP

- | Policy ~~2NN-6~~: Do not allow density bonuses within the Lake Whatcom Watershed. Deleted: 2PP

- | Policy ~~2NN-7~~: Work cooperatively with the City and Water District 10 to develop benchmarks to determine the effectiveness of management options; when goals have been achieved; or when additional actions are necessary. Deleted: 2PP

- | Policy ~~2NN-8~~: Continue to develop and refine structural and non-structural best management practices (BMPs), both voluntary and required, to minimize development impacts within the Lake Whatcom watershed. Deleted: 2PP

- | Policy ~~2NN-9~~: Work to keep Whatcom County Forest Board and Forest Purchase lands within the Lake Whatcom watershed in public ownership, and support managing forestry on said lands in a manner that minimizes sediment and phosphorus yields from streams. Deleted: 2PP

- Policy 2NN-10 Do not allow additional lots smaller than five acres to be created within Rural Centers in the Lake Whatcom watershed.

- Policy 2NN-11 Encourage the location of public facilities in Rural Centers within the Lake Whatcom watershed to reduce vehicle miles traveled within the watershed.

Private Parcels Surrounded by National Park or National Forest

There are a number of private parcels in Whatcom County which are completely surrounded by National Forest and National Park land. Some of these have houses built on them, primarily for seasonal use, but most represent mining patents and are used, or have been used, only for mining. The majority of these parcels are located in the Mt. Baker area or the Slate Creek area near the eastern border of the county with their access primarily by Forest Service roads.

When interim zoning was established for Whatcom County in 1972, these parcels along with a majority of the rest of the county were zoned general protection (GP). This zoning allows single-family houses on one acre lots and a multitude of other uses mostly subject to the conditional use process. As final zoning has been established around the county as part of the subarea planning process, only these exclave parcels and the Lummi Reservation remain under interim zoning.

GOAL 2PP: Continue to recognize private parcels surrounded by National Park or National Forest as part of Whatcom County's jurisdiction.

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Policy 2PP-1: Increase the potential for land exchanges, and other voluntary mechanisms, in order to reduce the checkerboard ownership and jurisdictional patterns within eastern Whatcom County.

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Subdivisions on the Lummi Reservation

There are at least 2,086 parcels on the Lummi Reservation, many of which are owned by non-Indians. As Federal policy has changed and tribal lands have been allowed to be removed from trust to fee status, state and county regulations have become applicable. The County has made efforts to work closely with local tribes on land use directions. The requirements of Growth Management cannot be applicable to reservation trust lands, even when a checkerboard pattern has developed. It is the full intent of this County, when possible, to continue working cooperatively with area tribes on land use, watershed planning, utility planning and the coordinated water system plan. Most platted areas have sewer, which is provided by the Lummi Sewer District.

GOAL 2QQ: Seek resolutions that satisfy the requirements of Growth Management, the needs of the non-tribal residents and the goals of the Lummi Nation.

Deleted: 2RR

Policy 2QQ -1: Work with the residents and the Lummi Nation to establish adequate water and sewer for the existing platted lots.

Deleted: Policy 2RR-1: . Recognize subdivided areas on the Lummi Reservation as limited areas of more intense rural development if they meet the criteria of RCW 36.70A.070(5). ¶

Policy 2QQ -2: Whatcom County will administer land use policy on fee lands and prohibit discriminatory land use practices.

Deleted: 2RR-2

Deleted: 2RR-3

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN DESIGNATIONS MAP

The Comprehensive Plan designations map (**Map 8**) is intended to provide direction for future land use decisions in Whatcom County. It is officially adopted as part of this document. Because of the scale of the map, specific boundaries are identified on maps in the County Planning and Development Services office.

Comprehensive Plan Designation Descriptors

These descriptors are intended to be general in nature. More specific criteria and explanation will be incorporated into subarea plans.

Title: Urban Growth Areas

Purpose: To denote where future urban growth may occur.

Definition: Areas characterized by urban growth that have existing public facility and service capacities; areas characterized by urban growth that may be served with urban services in the future; and lands adjacent to areas characterized by urban growth.

Locational Criteria: First urban growth may be located on lands characterized by urban

growth that have existing public facility and service capacities; next urban growth may be located on lands characterized by urban growth that may be served with urban services in the future; and finally urban growth may be located on lands adjacent to areas characterized by urban growth.

Title: Major Industrial Area / Port Industrial Urban Growth Areas

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Purpose: To reserve appropriate areas to attract heavy industrial manufacturing uses and provide employment opportunities while minimizing land use conflicts and off-site impacts.

Definition: Land area for large-scale heavy industry that has a high impact on the surrounding neighborhood and environment.

Locational Criteria: Industry should be located in areas adequate for its use away from

residential centers, but within reasonable commuting distance; near transportation facilities and services.

Title: Master Planned Resort

Purpose: To recognize and contain resort areas that existed on July 1, 1990, or permit new master planned resort areas that depend on a setting of significant natural amenities.

Definition: Historic or new planned unit development that is self-contained and fully integrated, in a setting of significant natural amenities, with primary focus on destination resort facilities consisting of short-term visitor accommodations associated with a range of developed on-site indoor or outdoor recreational facilities.

Locational Resorts may be located in urban or rural areas within a setting of significant natural amenities.

Title: **Rural Center**

Purpose: To recognize centers of rural activity that existed on July 1, 1990 and limit and contain more intensive rural land uses within logical outer boundaries.

Definition: Small towns and other historic centers of rural activity containing residential and nonresidential uses developed at a greater intensity than surrounding rural areas.

Locational No less than one mile from Urban Growth Areas or other Rural Centers, except in the Guide Meridian corridor between Bellingham and Wiser Lake, where historic development patterns support closer spacing.

Title: **Rural Tourism**

Purpose: To recognize small-scale recreational and tourism businesses in rural areas, and to limit and contain more intensive rural development on those lots.

Definition: Lots containing nonresidential uses developed at a greater intensity than other rural areas.

Locational In a rural location and setting upon which the recreational or tourism use relies.

Title: **Rural Business**

Purpose: To recognize isolated businesses in rural areas, which provide job opportunities, and to limit and contain more intensive development on those lots.

Definition: Isolated lots or isolated small groups of lots containing nonresidential uses developed at a greater intensity than other rural areas.

Locational For uses existing on September 20, 2005, no less than one-half mile from Urban Growth Areas, Rural Center and Rural Tourist designations, or other Rural Business designations, except in the Guide Meridian corridor between Bellingham and Wiser Lake, where historic development patterns support closer spacing (one mile for uses not existing on September 20, 2005).

Title: **Rural**

Purpose: To provide opportunity for a variety of low-density residential development including cluster development with the flexibility to practice farming or forestry, or operate a home occupation or cottage industry; to retain a sense of community. Also to encourage agriculture and forestry activities through the use of incentives.

Definition: Allows one dwelling unit per five or ten acres, but encouraging ten acre development; with less traffic noise and congestion than in urban areas; low-density population; open space; privacy; largely forestry and agriculture oriented; rural level of services.

Locational Criteria: Low residential density; areas with physical environmental constraints; areas characterized by full and part-time forestry and agriculture, but not designated as commercial resource lands. One unit per two acre zoning is limited to previously developed areas or as in-fill development only.

Title: **Agriculture - Resource Lands**

Purpose: To recognize and promote agriculture in Whatcom County and protect prime agricultural soils and productive agricultural lands from conversion to other uses. To prevent conflicts between residential and agricultural uses.

Definition: Commercial agriculture lands located on parcels 40 acres or larger, with one dwelling unit per 40 acres allowed.

Locational Criteria: Soils identified as prime agricultural soils; large parcels; existing commercial agricultural uses.

Deleted: Title: . . Small Towns - Rural ¶

¶ Purpose: . To acknowledge locations remote from urban centers that support the local economy by providing goods and services to residents and tourists.¶

¶ Definition: . Small communities with mixed tourist commercial, residential, resort, or public land uses.¶

¶ Locational . Existing small community or resort centers with adequate services.¶

¶ Criteria: . including water and sewer which can be cost-effectively provided; near existing transportation routes; characterized by commercial uses and higher densities than surrounding rural areas.¶

¶ Title: . . Crossroads Commercial - Rural¶

¶ Purpose: . To provide commonly desired goods and services near unincorporated or small population centers.¶

¶ Definition: . Small concentrations of businesses meeting local area service needs. Such uses as gas stations, neighborhood general stores, and restaurants would be included.¶

¶ Locational . Central to rural populations; commercial areas should be located near¶

¶ Criteria: . arterial routes and fulfill a need for goods and services in that area.¶

¶ Title: . . Resort and Recreational Subdivisions - Rural¶

¶ Purpose: . Recognize the existing mixture of recreational and residential development of resort and ... [2]

Deleted: Definition: . The suburban enclaves are comprised of rural residential areas that are not urban or likely to develop into urban areas during the planning period.¶

¶ Locational: . Areas characterized by development at densities averaging one unit per¶
¶ Criteria: . acre and served or partially served by public roads, sewer or water, or other public services or facilities.¶

¶ ... [3]

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Title: Rural Forestry - Resource Lands

Purpose: To provide flexibility in use, enabling the landowner to live on the land and practice forestry and forestry-related industry.

Definition: Lands used primarily for growing trees with some low-density residential development.

Locational Criteria: Lands useful for growing trees for commercial timber production; usually located within public service districts; accessed by private roads built to Whatcom County development standards or public roads; low-density residential development; land parcels generally 20 acres or greater in size; property often in tax deferred status.

Title: Commercial Forestry - Resource Lands

Purpose: To provide land base for commercial forestry activities and provide predictability of future land use to forest land owners.

Definition: Land primarily devoted to commercial timber production.

Locational Criteria: Land primarily devoted to growing trees for long-term commercial timber production; located outside public service districts such as fire and water; accessed by private or state forest roads; parcels generally 40 acres or larger in size; land in tax deferred status.

Title: Mineral Resource Lands - Resource Lands

Purpose: To ensure a long-term supply of mineral resources and provide predictability in land use.

Definition: Lands of long-term commercial significance for the extraction of minerals.

Locational Criteria: Proven mineral resources of long-term commercial significance, low density rural areas, designated Agricultural lands generally with Non-Prime Farmland Soils and when demonstrated to be of higher value as a mineral resource than as an agricultural resource; and designated Forestry lands of higher value as a mineral resource than as forestry resource.

Title: Public Recreation

Purpose: To provide the public with open space and recreational opportunities; to protect conservation areas.

Definition: Areas with unique scenic or recreational amenities.

Locational Criteria: Parcels owned or managed by public or private agencies for recreational or conservation use.

Title: **Special Study Areas**

Purpose: To indicate areas where regional planning efforts are a high priority and necessary in order to address important local issues in greater detail.

Definition: Includes the Lake Whatcom Watershed and certain areas within the Lummi Reservation.

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[Re-number Goals and Policies in the remainder of Chapter Two as needed.]

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Background Summary

Maintaining the rural character and lifestyle is very important to Whatcom County residents. Typical uses in the rural areas include a mixture of low-density residential, pasture, agriculture, woodlots, home occupations, and cottage industries. The distribution of rural land use is adjacent to agricultural, forestry, and urban land uses and often provides a buffer between urban areas and commercial agriculture and forestry uses.

The population growth for Whatcom County from 2000 to 2022 is projected to be 68,103 for a total 2022 population of 234,917. This represents an increase of approximately 4,328 people in the areas of Whatcom County that are currently unincorporated and outside of permanent UGAs. A study of the potential subdividable land in the areas of the County zoned Rural one dwelling/five acres (R5A) found that out of 85,588 acres inventoried, about 2/3 of the acreage was in parcels 10 acres or larger in 2002. This indicates that there is potential for future land division in the rural portions of the county under current zoning regulations. Conceivably, the rural landscape could look different in the future if the current rural zoning is retained.

People in Whatcom County, through the Visioning Process, defined rural character as a variety of low densities, open spaces, privacy, peace and quiet with less traffic noise and congestion than found in urban areas. Retaining a sense of community and maintaining local control in land use decisions were also components of rural identity.

RURAL LANDS – ISSUES, GOALS, AND POLICIES

Rural Character and Lifestyle

County residents describe rural character and lifestyle as open space, quiet areas/privacy, largely agricultural and forestry orientation, peacefulness, sense of community, low-density population, less noise and congestion than found in urban areas, natural landscape, and greater self-determination of property use. With a rapidly increasing population in Whatcom County, maintaining the rural lifestyle currently enjoyed by county residents becomes more challenging. County residents generally believe that the current zoning and land use patterns of one or more houses per acre may not maintain the rural character of Whatcom County.

One way of preserving rural lifestyle is allowing flexibility in design of subdivisions. One method is to enable and encourage cluster development. Another is to allow density transfers between parcels in rural areas and from rural areas to Urban Growth Areas. Both methods provide economic flexibility to the individual property owner, promote economical lot design, conserve natural resources and environmentally fragile areas, retain future options with respect to land use decisions, and maintain the low density "rural" character of the area.

In addition, residents indicated that 45 years from today they would like to see 75% to 90% of the land (excluding National Forest and National Park land) in Whatcom County

zoned for use as rural, forestry, and agriculture lands. Currently, over 92% of the land in unincorporated Whatcom County is zoned rural, forestry or agriculture.

GOAL 2DD: Retain the rural character and lifestyle of Whatcom County.

- Policy 2DD-1: Concentrate growth in urban areas. In areas where existing development patterns do not already prohibit it, draw a distinction between urban/rural uses to prevent urban sprawl.
- Policy 2DD-2: Adopt mandatory and incentive programs, such as purchase of development rights, transfer of development rights, and tax deferrals, to achieve desired land use policies in rural areas and in areas where there are compelling reasons to do so, and allocate sufficient resources to achieve the desired outcome.
- Policy 2DD-3: Provide landowners with incentives and options to develop their property at densities that may be less than the underlying zone.
- Policy 2DD-4: Support cluster housing in rural subdivisions.
- Policy 2DD-5: Use an "Agriculture Protection Overlay Zone" designation in certain Rural zoned areas as a way to help achieve the goal of conserving and enhancing Whatcom County's agricultural land base.
- Policy 2DD-6: In the "Agricultural Protection Overlay Zone" on parcels 20 acres and larger with Rural 5 acre and Rural 10 acre zoning, require non-agriculturally related development to be clustered on a maximum of 25 percent of the available land with the remainder available for open space and agricultural uses. Development standards shall provide flexibility to achieve development potential in cases of natural limitations.
- Policy 2DD-7: Discourage new, fully contained communities outside designated urban growth areas.
- Policy 2DD-8: Encourage property owners to conserve forested areas, agricultural land, and open space by utilizing current-use taxation provisions (*RCW 84.34*).
- Policy 2DD-9: Conserve open space, park land, and green links for recreational use, as well as to protect essential habitat such as riparian areas and wetlands.
- Policy 2DD-10: Rezones from one dwelling unit per ten acre (R10A) zoning districts to one dwelling per five acre (R5A) zoning districts should be discouraged.

Rural Services

Definition: Small communities with mixed tourist commercial, residential, resort, or public land uses.

Locational Criteria: Existing small community or resort centers with adequate services, including water and sewer which can be cost-effectively provided; near existing transportation routes; characterized by commercial uses and higher densities than surrounding rural areas.

Title: **Crossroads Commercial - Rural**

Purpose: To provide commonly desired goods and services near unincorporated or small population centers.

Definition: Small concentrations of businesses meeting local area service needs. Such uses as gas stations, neighborhood general stores, and restaurants would be included.

Locational Criteria: Central to rural populations; commercial areas should be located near arterial routes and fulfill a need for goods and services in that area.

Title: **Resort and Recreational Subdivisions - Rural**

Purpose: Recognize the existing mixture of recreational and residential development of resort and recreational subdivisions and ensure that future growth can be serviced appropriately.

Definition: Resort and Recreational Subdivisions are large subdivisions originally created to primarily serve recreational or resort land uses and that continue to attract and maintain such uses.

Locational Criteria: Existing large scale recreational subdivisions.

Title: **Suburban Enclaves - Rural**

Purpose: To ensure efficient land use by allowing in-fill at suburban densities in areas already characterized by such development.

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Definition: The suburban enclaves are comprised of rural residential areas that are not urban or likely to develop into urban areas during the planning period.

Locational Criteria: Areas characterized by development at densities averaging one unit per

acre and served or partially served by public roads, sewer or water, or other public services or facilities.

Title: **Transportation Corridors – Rural**

Purpose: This designation is designed to alert the community to proposed transportation corridor related expansion and to guide developments appropriately.

Definition: Transportation Corridors are areas in demand for transportation related services and improvements where planning is underway or is anticipated.

Locational Criteria: Land not used or suitable for or residential development. Areas characterized by existing transportation-related development but lacking significant utility service to warrant an urban designation at this time.

Chapter Five UTILITIES

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Policy 5N-3:

Transmission pipeline are discouraged in urban growth areas and areas of intense rural development which would render such pipeline siting inappropriate.

Deleted: , small towns, crossroads commercial,
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Policy 5P-3:

Discourage extension of urban levels of water service to areas not designated as urban growth areas or rural centers.

Deleted: , industrial areas (including the Gateway Industrial Transportation Corridor), Small Towns or Resort/Recreational Subdivisions

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Policy 5T-1:

Discourage extension of sewer lines in areas not designated as urban growth areas or rural centers, unless there are serious public health or environmental concerns.

Deleted: , Small Towns, Resort/Recreational Subdivisions, or the Gateway Industrial Transportation Corridor

Policy 5T-2:

For those areas designated as a rural center and wishing to infill, work with the communities to create sewer and water districts as necessary to manage both utilities. Public water and sewer service shall be limited to areas where existing lot sizes and development patterns make public water and sewer appropriate and shall not be extended outside of the boundaries of the rural center.

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Policy 5T-3:

Assist sewer and water districts in environmental review and mitigation and in preparing grant applications to obtain package sewer services that can be developed in a phased and cost-effective manner to serve designated rural centers.

Deleted: Small Towns, Resort/Recreational Subdivisions, and industrial areas (including the Gateway Industrial Transportation Corridor)

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Chapter Six TRANSPORTATION

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Policy 6D-4:

Direct transportation planners to evaluate positive and negative impacts to the productivity of resource based industries when planning transportation corridors. Transportation improvements in areas designated "Resource Lands" should be constructed to facilitate the operations of those affected areas and industries.

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Policy 6D-6: Encourage new housing developments to be located in urban growth areas to help provide a sense of community and safe, non-motorized transportation to community facilities and public transit nodes.

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Policy 6N-5: Coordinate with Whatcom Transportation Authority to establish rural transit service in unincorporated areas, including rural centers, consistent with county land use plans, based on cost effectiveness, location of major trip generators, distance between generators, and the needs of transit-dependent individuals.

Deleted: Small Towns and Crossroads Commercial areas

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Policy 6P-4: Support commercial and industrial development adjacent to major transportation corridors, including I-5 and rail and air facilities, within urban growth areas, as long as such facilities do not reduce safe, efficient movement of vehicles in Whatcom County.

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Chapter Seven ECONOMICS

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Policy 7K-2: Designate adequate zoning to allow business and industrial development where it is needed and most appropriate.

Deleted: , including the Interstate-5 corridor

Policy 7K-3: Limit commercial or industrial development along Guide Meridian to designated urban growth areas, rural centers, and rural business areas located at key intersections in a manner that does not disrupt the Guide's regional transportation function.

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Chapter Nine RECREATION

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Specialized Recreation Areas

Specialized areas include nature interpretative centers and small park sites, including those related to Urban Growth Areas, rural centers, and neighborhood developments.

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RECREATION - ACTION PLAN

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- 9. In keeping with policies in other chapters of this plan, develop a mechanism for ensuring the provision of neighborhood parks in accordance with appropriate standards when residential areas are developed outside of incorporated areas. In the residential UGAs not associated with cities, and in rural centers, mechanisms are needed for acquisition, development and subsequent maintenance and operations. Community Associations and Park Districts are options to be explored.

Deleted: suburban enclaves and small towns

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**Chapter Ten
DESIGN**

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BACKGROUND SUMMARY

Sense of Place

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Among the elements which define a sense of place and which are particularly essential to examine, protect, and enhance are Places, Spaces, Focal Points, Gateways, Corridors, Connections, Edges and Transitions. All of these are perceptual elements common to most every natural or built place. They are among the most important and dynamic elements of an environment which enable us to distinguish, qualify, and identify one place as separate from another yet related to the whole. These elements can be perceived or applied to design of a diversity of land uses typical to Urban Growth Areas, or rural centers; maintenance of the integrity of our rural setting; sensitive utilization our natural resource lands - aquifer recharge areas, agricultural lands, forest lands, and our waters; and they are among the integral structural components of site-specific environments we design to accommodate our recreational activities, housing, public facilities and transportation facilities.

Deleted: , Small Towns, Crossroads

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- GOAL 10B:** As rural centers evolve, utilize design tools and decisions which are sensitive to and compatible with the positive character of the surrounding natural setting.

Deleted: Small Towns

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Gateways, Corridors, and Connections

Gateways, corridors, and connections are important as we pass from one identified place to another. The act of entering or leaving is an essential element in establishing the sense of place. Whatcom County is blessed with a number of natural corridors and important gateways such as the I-5 entry from Skagit County through the Chuckanut Mountains or the U.S./Canadian border crossings. Opportunities and problems should be recognized, associated with the following:

- human and natural gateways
- viewpoints and vistas
- river and stream corridors
- wildlife corridors
- utility easements
- traffic noise
- commercial signage
- links between urban growth areas and ~~rural centers~~

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