

CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

## PURPOSE OF THIS PLAN

The *La Center Junction Subarea Plan* was developed to provide land use, transportation and urban design guidelines and capital improvement recommendations that are necessary to plan for urban growth. The purpose of this plan is to more closely link land use and transportation improvement decision-making and to provide a coordinated set of land use and transportation recommendations to be used by the Planning Commission and City Council in their reviews and evaluations of development proposals.

This subarea plan is intended to identify the specific improvements necessary to serve the I-5 junction, estimate the cost of such improvements, and develop a funding strategy for near-term implementation.

## BACKGROUND

Early settlers such as John Timmen, Aurelius Wilkins and John Pollock took claims along the East Fork of the Lewis River near the current site of La Center in the early 1850s. In those days, rivers were the primary means of travel. La Center, platted in 1874, was located at the head of navigation on the East Fork Lewis River and became a center of trade for northern Clark County. La Center continued to grow with the area's agriculture and logging industries and was officially incorporated on August 27, 1909. Growth continued apace because Washington's main north-south route west of the Cascades (State Road No. 1 / Pacific Highway) swept through town. But when the new "River of Commerce" (Interstate 5) was completed in 1969 it bypassed the town.

Since then, the City has conducted a focused effort to reconnect to the current 'river of commerce' (Interstate 5) and create opportunities for local jobs and economic diversity for its citizens. In 2008, Clark County approved the City's request to include over one square mile of commercial and industrially zoned land at the I-5 junction in the city's urban growth area. A key component of the County's approval was a

contingency to add an additional 120 acres in the southwest quadrant should the Cowlitz Tribe succeed in acquiring trust status for their 152 acres of land in the northwest and southwest quadrants of the interchange.

This subarea plan covers approximately 940 acres at or near the La Center Junction which could fall under the City's jurisdiction in the next 20 years. Of that, about 840 acres is held in 82 privately-owned parcels—the rest being held in public rights-of-way for roads.

The City's adoption of this expanded urban growth area occurred on the same day that the Western Washington Growth Management Hearings Board significantly reduced the city's urban growth area. This decision has since been overturned in Superior Court, but final legal resolution is still many months away. Nonetheless, the City retains a significant footprint at the I-5 junction.

The City recently completed its first economic development plan that highlighted the need to ensure appropriate sewer, water, and other infrastructure is extended to make sites "shovel ready". This plan describes in detail the anticipated development, necessary supporting infrastructure, the expected cost, and the public and private sectors role in financing these improvements.

## METHODOLOGY

Subarea studies generally seek to identify needed infrastructure improvements based upon anticipated conditions 20 years into the future. Common examples include transportation studies that identify needed road improvements. Our process follows a relatively standard approach with the exception of looking at a broader range of public facilities & services than is typical. Major steps in this study include:

- *Identify legal requirements* – Staff researches federal, state and local regulations and policies for guidance, opportunities or restrictions on how the subarea can be developed. In particular, the *La Center Urban Area Comprehensive Plan* and *La Center Municipal Code* identifies local goals, policies and regulations currently in place.
- *Inventory Existing Infrastructure* – Staff researches available capacities, alignments, and conditions of roads, sewer, water, electrical & data lines, etc. Current land uses and constraints are also inventoried and characterized.
- *Identify Preferred Development* – Staff concurrently reviews land constraints and estimates generalized building footprints and occupancies at full build out. This should include the entire area of the UGA southwest of the East Fork Lewis River. It should also be coordinated with local ports and commercial realtors.
- *Identify Needed Infrastructure* – Staff applies the preferred land use to existing infrastructure and determines where improvements in

infrastructure (such as sewer mains and pump stations, stormwater facilities) are needed. Alternatives would be explored to determine least-cost improvements.

- *Outside Consultant Review & Financing Analysis* – The city would then turn over its assumptions and conclusions to an outside consultant for review and comment. A financing plan is also developed.
- *Final Report & Action Plan* – Staff collates all materials and develops a near-term action plan. The action plan should include an analysis of how the City can pre-approve or otherwise expedite investments consistent with the subarea plan.

## ASSUMPTIONS

In order to estimate future demand on future public facilities and services, a number of assumptions must be made. Fortunately, exhaustive modeling and verification by Clark County and others over the past 15 years have removed a substantial amount of guesswork from these equations.

### POPULATION & EMPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS

- Commercial lands are expected to generate 22 employees per net acre.<sup>1</sup>
- Light Industrial / Employment Campus lands are expected to generate 9 employees per acre.
- Single Family Residential to accommodate 4 households per gross acre (3.6 HH/ac. net).
- Multi Family Residential to accommodate 12 households per gross acre.
- Industrial properties assumed to have a Floor-to-Area Ratio (FAR) of 0.3 (30% of land is in buildings)
- Commercial properties assumed to have an FAR of 0.2
- Mixed use properties assumed to have a commercial FAR of 0.2, and 8 households per gross acre.
- Net buildable acres are calculated on a parcel by parcel basis by removing areas identified below from the parcel's gross acreage (Chapter 18.300 LCMC):
- Under GMA, La Center is required to have a minimum average residential density of 4.0 units per net acre. The current measured rate is 4.6 per acre.

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<sup>1</sup> Countywide, new building permits indicate an employment density observed in commercial and industrial areas at 7.9 and 8.2 employees per acre respectively. Battle Ground and Camas industrial employment density appears to be on target, which is 15.5 and 11.0 employees per acre respectively.

- Clark County population forecasting uses a population density rate of 2.59 persons per household.
- Clark County uses targeted employment rates of 20 employees per commercial acre; 20 employees per business park acre; and 9 employees per industrial acre.
- Clark County uses infrastructure factors of 27.5 percent for residential development and 25 percent for industrial and commercial development.
- Currently built land will be redeveloped, absorbing five percent of the projected population and job growth.
- Clark County uses a residential market factor of 10%, but no market factors for commercial, industrial or business park. This is a marked difference from a 50% market factor for industrial lands in the early days of GMA.

### **CRITICAL AREAS**

- Development within high-value habitat conservation areas is generally prohibited. Other habitats, because they commonly overlap with other critical areas, generally receive protections.
- Type S (Shoreline of the State) streams such as the East Fork of the Lewis River were assumed to have buffers of 250 feet.
- Type F (Fish bearing) streams such as Brezee and McCormick were assumed to have buffers of 200 feet.
- Type N<sub>p</sub> (Non-fish bearing, perennial) streams were assumed to have buffers of 75 feet (one-half of 150' due to allowable mitigation).
- Type N<sub>s</sub> (Non-Fish bearing, seasonal) streams were assumed to have buffers of 37.5 feet (one-half of 75' due to allowable mitigation).
- Floodways and Floodway Fringe areas are discounted 100%.
- Hydric soils – Are assumed to be Category IV wetlands; wetland buffers are assumed to be 25' due to allowable mitigation.
- Slopes greater than 25% are discounted 100% as development in these areas is prohibited under Section 18.300.090(E) LCMC.
- Landslide Hazards are discounted 100% as development in these areas is prohibited without a special geo-technical engineering report. There are no mapped areas of active or historic landslides in the subarea. However, nearly all areas of potential instability are also areas with slopes greater than 25%.

### **STORMWATER**

- LCMC 18.320 requires developments to comply with the Puget Sound Manual (1992) for stormwater control. Developments over 1 acre in size are required to have a NPDES construction stormwater permit from DOE and meet *Western Washington Stormwater Management Manual* requirements for erosion and sediment

control during construction. Once construction is complete, the *Western Washington Stormwater Management Manual* no longer applies to developments within La Center.

## THE COMMUNITY PROCESS

RCW 36.70A.140 requires the City “establish and broadly disseminate to the public a public participation program identifying procedures providing for early and continuous public participation in the development and amendment of comprehensive land use plans and development regulations implementing such plans.”

City Council Resolution 09-309 adopted a public participation schedule for the subarea planning effort. This effort included three general topic open houses, a smaller work session regarding the northeastern quadrant, and three community newsletters—in addition to public hearings held before the city planning commission and city council.

See Appendix D for meeting summaries.

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