



# City of Yelm

## Community Development Department

105 Yelm Avenue West

P.O. Box 479

Yelm, WA 98597

June 10, 2008

### COVER MEMO

**Environmental Review.** This Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is being sent to agencies, Tribes, adjacent property owners and individuals with an interest in the Thurston Highlands Master Planned Community proposal within the City of Yelm, Washington. The EIS analyzes the environmental impacts of the proposed action, for which the City has received an application for Conceptual Site Plan Approval for development of a mixed-use project on 1,240 acres over the course of 10 to 30 years. The EIS will be used by the City of Yelm, along with other relevant considerations or documents, prior to taking action on the proposal. It is anticipated that future development of the site will be guided by the provisions and requirements of a Development Agreement (or similar instrument) between the City and the applicant.

Public and agency comment is invited regarding the proposed action and alternatives. The Draft EIS and all technical reports prepared for the proposed project are available in electronic format, on a compact disk (CD), from the City of Yelm Community Development Department. Comments are due no later than July 28, 2008, addressed to:

Grant Beck, Community Development Director  
City of Yelm, Washington  
105 Yelm Avenue West  
P.O. Box 479  
Yelm, WA 98597

E-mail comments can be submitted to Grant Beck, Community Development Director at:

[highlands@ci.yelm.wa.us](mailto:highlands@ci.yelm.wa.us)

Two public open houses are planned during the Draft EIS comment period: one in mid-June, and one in mid-July 28, 2008. Everyone on the EIS Distribution List will receive notice of these meetings. Public notice will also be published in local newspapers: the *Nisqually Valley News*, *The Olympian*, and the *Tacoma News Tribune*.

**The Proposal and Alternatives.** As previously stated, the Thurston Highlands Master Planned Community is a mixed-use development proposal. Under any conceptual land use alternative, the development scenario would include approximately 5,000 homes to be provided in a mix of housing types and densities; commercial development; office space; several hundred acres of permanent open space; a Regional Sports Complex; school sites; an on-site fire station; and on-site provisions for other public services (e.g., water supply; wastewater collection, treatment and reuse or disposal; stormwater management facilities; electrical power and communications; transit facilities; churches; and a possible satellite police station); and extension of Tahoma Boulevard through the site to SR 507.

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The purpose of the Thurston Highlands proposal is to develop a Master Planned Community on a 1,240-acre site in the southwest quadrant of the incorporated area of the City, in accordance with the City's *Comprehensive Plan* vision for this property. The objectives of the proposal are to develop the southwest area of Yelm in a manner that would:

- Be consistent with the Washington State Growth Management Act and the City of Yelm *Comprehensive Plan* to provide for anticipated growth in the community.
- Implement sustainable development principles to the maximum extent practicable within an urban area. Develop a community that thoughtfully provides for the needs of its residents with efficiency and stewardship for the future.
- Implement characteristics the citizens of Yelm would like to see in their community.
- Minimize impacts to environmentally sensitive areas and preserve natural areas for public enjoyment.
- Provide for efficient growth in public services and utilities required to serve phased development of the Master Planned Community.

*The Preferred Alternative.* The Preferred Alternative is a blend of characteristics of traditional development and an urban village concept, described below as the range of land use alternatives. For planning and environmental review purposes, the Preferred Alternative is estimated to include approximately 3,000 single-family detached homes, 546 duplex units, 509 multi-family units (3 to 4 dwelling units per building), and 945 multi-family units with 5 or more dwelling units per building. Other uses would include approximately 825,000 square feet (sf) of retail commercial development, 135,000 sf of professional office space, and about 400 acres of permanent open space (approximately 32 percent of the site), including common areas like a Farmers Market and Village Square.

*Traditional Development Alternative.* The Traditional Development Alternative would be characterized by suburban development similar to what has occurred within the City of Yelm over the past several years: a curvi-linear, gridded street system with an emphasis on single-family residential neighborhoods and small-scale neighborhood convenience commercial uses. A larger portion of the site would be allocated to a low-density zone. Traditional neighborhoods would spread the residential density out over the majority of the project site, providing larger lot sizes (5,000 to 7,000 square feet) and an average density of 4 dwelling units per buildable acre, resulting in a more automobile-oriented community. For planning and environmental review purposes, the Traditional Development Alternative is estimated to provide approximately 4,000 single-family detached homes, 400 duplex units, 400 multi-family units with 3 to 4 dwelling units per building, and 200 multi-family units with 5 or more dwelling units per building. Other uses would include approximately 480,000 sf of commercial development, 150,000 sf of office space, and about 315 acres of permanent open space (approximately 25 percent of the site).

*Urban Village Alternative.* The Urban Village Alternative would create compact areas of high-density residential uses inter-mixed with commercial uses around a central Village Square. This development pattern could reduce reliance on automobile travel. Neighborhoods would have much smaller single-family lots, with an average density ranging from 5 to 7 dwelling units per buildable acre. Private yards would generally be smaller, though some areas of the site would still be developed as traditional single-family residential subdivisions. For planning and environmental review purposes, the Urban Village Alternative is estimated to provide

approximately 1,000 single-family detached homes, 1,240 duplex units, 1,420 multi-family units with 3 to 4 dwelling units per building, and 1,340 multi-family units with 5 or more dwelling units per building. Other uses would include approximately 850,000 sf of commercial development, 650,000 sf of office space, and 400 to 500 acres of permanent open space (30 to 40 percent of the site).

*No Action Alternative.* It is assumed under the No Action Alternative that the property would temporarily remain undeveloped. This is the basis for comparison of the No Action Alternative to the Preferred Alternative and other conceptual land use alternatives.

**Key Environmental Issues.** All relevant elements of the environment identified in the Washington State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Guidelines for discussion in an EIS (WAC 197-11-444) are addressed in the Thurston Highlands Draft EIS. Twelve elements of the environment were studied by scientists and engineers, with the result that twelve site-specific technical reports were prepared. The full content of these technical reports and their appendices are available on the CD of Draft EIS files, and include:

- Aesthetics
- Air Quality
- Fiscal Analysis
- Fish, Wildlife and Habitats
- Geology and Soils
- Grading, Drainage and Utilities
- Infiltration Effects (Surface Water and Groundwater)
- Light and Glare
- Parks and Recreation
- Surface Water Evaluation of Thompson Creek
- Transportation Impact Analysis
- Wetlands

Additional surface water evaluation and infiltration effects data collection and analysis is ongoing during the Draft EIS comment period. These technical reports will be revised to include the additional information, and will be republished as companion documents to the Final EIS.

Your interest in this proposal within the City of Yelm is appreciated. If you would like more information about the proposed Master Planned Community or related subjects, please contact Grant Beck, Community Development Director and SEPA Responsible Official by telephone: 360.458.3835, or by e-mail at the address indicated above. Additional information regarding the environmental review process and public involvement opportunities is provided in Draft EIS Chapter 1, Section 1.2.



Grant Beck, Director  
City of Yelm Community Development Department