

3.8 Land Use

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The City of Yelm, its Urban Growth Area (UGA), and surrounding areas within Thurston County are subject to the planning requirements of the Washington State Growth Management Act, Chapter 36.70A RCW. Pursuant to the Act, the City of Yelm and Thurston County have each adopted comprehensive land use plans and land use designations for those areas within the City limits and within unincorporated areas, respectively. A *Joint Plan*, adopted by both the City and County, adopts common policies applied within the Yelm UGA until annexation occurs.

The Thurston Highlands site is within the corporate City limits of Yelm and is zoned “Master Planned Community.” This property has been envisioned for this form of development since it was annexed into the City in 1993. The property is located in the southwest quadrant of the City, adjacent to the western boundary of the Yelm Urban Growth Area, abutting Fort Lewis and rural lands within unincorporated Thurston County. Properties northeast of Thurston Highlands are within the Yelm Urban Growth Area, but currently outside the incorporated area, while properties east of Thurston Highlands are within the Yelm City limits.

Yelm has established a mix of residential, commercial, and industrial zoning districts in order to accommodate a mix of residential densities, various types of retail trade, and manufacturing uses in an effort to establish a sustainable community in which housing, retail services, and jobs are approximately balanced. The Yelm Urban Growth Area is sized to accommodate the anticipated 20-year population growth projection as estimated by the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM) and allocated by Thurston County, with the support of the Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC). Development of Thurston Highlands as a Master Planned Community has been anticipated in this growth projection in the *Yelm Comprehensive Plan* and *Joint Plan* with Thurston County (2006).

Table 3.8-1 shows the most recently-adopted official population projections by the Thurston Regional Planning Council for the City of Yelm and its Urban Growth Area. These projections indicate that the City’s population is expected to increase by more than 2.5 times between 2010 and 2030.

Table 3.8-1. City of Yelm and Yelm UGA population projections: 2010 – 2030 (Thurston Regional Planning Council, September 2007, amended October 2007).

2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
8,380	12,090	15,660	18,600	22,230

The *Buildable Lands Report for Thurston County* (TRPC 2002) further analyzed the potential for development within Yelm and its Urban Growth Area in order to determine whether there are sufficient lands designated for urban growth to meet housing supply needs for the upcoming 20-year planning horizon. The report concludes that within Yelm, the development potential within the City limits (including the Thurston Highlands Master Planned Community) and the Yelm Urban Growth Area can provide sufficient housing for the allocated population projection.

POTENTIAL CONSTRUCTION IMPACTS

Construction of the Thurston Highlands Master Planned Community would result in the conversion of vacant land to urban uses: residential, commercial, recreational, and public service sites. Construction of urban land uses and the associated infrastructure would occur in phases. The City’s Capital Facilities Plans would be continually updated during the 10 to 30-year build-out of the Thurston Highlands Master Planned Community in order to provide the necessary infrastructure to accommodate this and other anticipated growth.

DEVELOPED CONDITION IMPACTS

A range of conceptual land use alternatives is being evaluated for development of the Thurston Highlands Master Planned Community, from Traditional Development similar to that presently occurring within the City of Yelm, to a higher-density Urban Village concept, and the Preferred Alternative that is a hybrid of these two “bookends.” Under any land use alternative, the Master Planned Community is anticipated to have approximately 5,000 dwelling units. Comparative land use data for these alternatives are presented in Table 3.8-2.

Table 3.8-2. Comparative non-residential land use data for the Thurston Highlands conceptual land use alternatives.

	Preferred Alternative	Traditional Development	Urban Village
Retail Space	825,000 sf	480,000 sf	850,000 sf
Professional Office Space	135,000 sf	150,000 sf	650,000 sf
<i>Total Commercial</i>	<i>960,000 sf</i>	<i>630,000 sf</i>	<i>1,500,000 sf</i>
Open Space ¹	400+ acres	~315 acres	400 to 500 acres

¹ The open space calculation includes common areas such as the Farmers Market and Village Square. The Village Square would not be a feature of the Traditional Development Alternative.

As the *Buildable Lands Report for Thurston County* (TRPC 2002) concludes that there is sufficient buildable area within the existing City limits and associated Urban Growth Area to accommodate the anticipated 20-year population growth within the City of Yelm, it is not anticipated that development of the Thurston Highlands Master Planned Community would change the land use patterns planned for by the City through its *Comprehensive Plan and Joint Plan* with Thurston County (2006), nor would development of the Master Planned Community create a need to expand the Yelm Urban Growth Area to accommodate the upcoming 20 years of population growth.

Development of the Thurston Highlands Master Planned Community would change the character of the City of Yelm through the creation of a large population center somewhat separate from the current Central Business District and existing residential neighborhoods. The project would create a major population center to the west.

Associated commercial developments within the Master Planned Community to serve the needs of the population within the development will comprise a significant percentage of total commercial development within the City, though separate from the existing Yelm commercial core.

The proposed Urban Village to serve the retail and professional service needs of the residents of Thurston Highlands, together with the public services and facilities that may be required within the development such as schools, a fire station, a possible satellite police station, and parks, could create the feeling of a separate community within the greater Yelm community.

POSSIBLE MITIGATION MEASURES

It is anticipated that the Development Agreement (or similar instrument) to be created between the City of Yelm and the Thurston Highlands applicant would include regulations for the Master Planned Community that encourage retail and professional services sufficient to serve the needs of the residents of the Master Planned Community, but not compete with the existing Yelm commercial core. The purpose of these project-specific regulations would be to encourage the continuation of meeting regional retail needs within the City's existing Central Business District.

Proposed development of community and regional parks, and community facilities such as a Farmers Market within the Master Planned Community, for use and enjoyment by all citizens within the Yelm community and surrounding area, could minimize distinctions between the Thurston Highlands development and greater Yelm.

A transportation system that provides multiple connections including streets, pedestrian paths, and bicycle paths, between the Thurston Highlands Master Planned Community and the greater Yelm community would be intended to facilitate blending the development with the existing community.

SIGNIFICANT UNAVOIDABLE ADVERSE IMPACTS

Because development of the Thurston Highlands Master Planned Community has been anticipated in the City's *Comprehensive Plan* for 15 years, no significant unavoidable adverse impacts to land use within the City of Yelm or its Urban Growth Area would be anticipated as a result of this project.

