

UTILITIES PROFILE

INTRODUCTION

The Growth Management Act requires comprehensive plans to include utilities elements. Skagit County has elected to describe all public and private utilities in this element. This includes public water, sanitary sewer, surface water management, and solid waste, as well as private electrical power, natural gas and telecommunications utilities. The GMA requires comprehensive plans to address these facilities and services in the following manner:

- Inventory the general location of existing utilities.
- Establish the proposed location of proposed utilities.
- Examine the capacity of existing and proposed utilities.

WATER

Under state law, water utilities are required to establish procedures for coordinated planning under the framework of a “coordinated water system plan” (CWSP). Skagit County’s CWSP was updated in 1999 and describes the characteristics of the public water service providers in the county. These include “Group A” systems that serve 15 or more connections or 25 or more people per day for 60 or more days per year. They must meet state and federal Safe Drinking Water Act requirements. In addition, there a number of “non-expanding” and “Group B” water systems that serve smaller areas and are not required to meet federal standards. The federal and state statutory requirements for water system planning and coordination overlap the GMA. It is important for the County to engage in active planning for water supply as the state Department of Ecology examines water rights issues in the “lo flow” basins. Limitation of these water rights could result in the suppression of water supply, particularly for individual well in the rural area and therefore limit future development.

SANITARY SEWER

Public sewer service is not provided in rural areas. The Skagit County Health Department and the Skagit Public Utilities District (PUD) have considered the feasibility of providing sanitary sewer service to some areas where public health issues have been

raised due to failing on-septic systems, although so far, sewer service has been found to be prohibitively expensive. The Health Department works with these communities to find solutions that utilize improved septic treatment. That process involves testing existing systems and determining solutions to problems, most of which have been resolved.

Within the UGAs, sanitary sewer service is provided by the cities and towns and the PUD. Expansion of these services is implemented as part of the development process.

DRAINAGE

Surface water management within the county includes regulation of new development; county planning, design, construction, and maintenance of facilities; and other facilities such as drainage ditches that are the responsibility of special districts. Surface water management is necessary for both water quantity and quality. The state requires that the County ensure that surface water is managed in compliance with the *Stormwater Management Manual for the Puget Sound Basin* and related federal water quality standards. The County's surface water utility collects annual assessments from property owners to pay for some of its operations. However, most drainage projects are the result of road funds and therefore tend to be included in road improvement projects. This includes culvert replacements and "salmon enhancement" projects that are also funded by state and federal programs.

SOLID WASTE

The County's solid waste management system consists of the collection and delivery of waste including recyclable materials to transfer stations, from which these materials are shipped to remote landfills and processing centers.

ELECTRICAL POWER

Puget Sound Energy (PSE) is an investor-owned utility providing electrical service to approximately 1,000,000 residential, commercial, and industrial customers in a nine-county, 4,500 square mile service area in western Washington. To provide reliable service, PSE builds, operates, and maintains an extensive electrical system consisting of generating plants, transmission lines, substations, and distribution systems. PSE is regulated by the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (WUTC) and is obligated to serve its customers subject to WUTR rates and tariffs.

NATURAL GAS

Cascade Natural Gas transmits and distributes natural gas to more than 227,000 residential, commercial, and industrial customers in Washington and Oregon. It also distributes gas to approximately 200 large customers, mostly industrial users buying their supplies from third parties. Cascade Natural Gas owns 5,100 miles of distribution mains, 200 miles of transmission mains, and 3,500 miles of service lines. Subsidiary CGC Resources manages the company's pipeline capacity. The utility obtains its gas mainly from Canadian suppliers.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Telephone and cable services are provided throughout the county by a number of private utilities. As with electrical power, these providers are regulated by the state. Skagit County coordinates provisions of these services through the development permitting process.

UTILITIES ISSUES

Other than water rights in the low-flow stream basins and isolated instances of septic failures, the public utility services in Skagit County's rural areas have sufficient capacities to accommodate projected growth. Distribution of these services is addressed concurrently with growth and development. The provision of services within the UGAs is coordinated with the cities and towns. The private utilities have not indicated any capacity or distribution issues that have an effect on forecasted growth in the rural area.

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