

# Chapter 8

## Utilities

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Bayview Ridge residents and businesses rely on a number of basic utility services that help define their quality of life and maintain their health and well-being. Power, natural gas, telecommunications, and cable television are considered utilities. These services are usually taken for granted. Yet without coordination and conscientious planning for future growth, service may be interrupted, inadequate, or prohibitively expensive.

The purpose of this section is to facilitate coordination between the utility providers and Skagit County. Such coordination will ensure that new facilities provided are compatible with planned growth and that utility planning is done in conjunction with land use. While planning for utilities is the primary responsibility of the utility providers, this section identifies issues and policies related to the provision of utilities that are of importance to Skagit County.

### Existing Public and Private Utilities

#### Public Utilities

##### *Electricity*

Electricity within the Bayview Ridge Subarea is provided by Puget Sound Energy (PSE). PSE maintains both 230KV and 115 KV transmission lines, to both the City of Anacortes and the refineries, that traverse the south and east borders of Bayview Ridge. These facilities are available to provide power to Bayview Ridge. PSE also maintains a gas generation station at the intersection Farm to Market and SR 20 that is used to boost system wide power during peak demand times. PSE reports no current capacity issues.

#### Private Utilities

##### *Natural Gas*

Cascade Natural Gas (CNG) provides natural gas service within Bayview Ridge. CNG maintains both an 8-inch and a 16-inch distribution main that traverses the southern boundary of the UGA. These major supply lines serve both the City of Anacortes and the refineries and have adequate capacity to meet the Bayview Ridge needs throughout the 2015 planning period.

##### *Telecommunications*

Telecommunications is the transmission of data or information by wire, radio, optical cable, electromagnetic, or other similar means. In Skagit County, telecommunication utilities include telephone, cellular telephone, and cable television. In 1996, the federal government passed the Telecommunications Act, which, among other things, deregulated the provision of data and information. The Telecommunications Act was intended to promote competition in this vastly changing and expanding industry.

Considerable expansion of the telecommunications industry is expected as a result of expanded licensing by the FCC and technological innovation, such as digital TV signals which can be linked to personal computers and the Internet.

### ***Internet Service Providers***

Currently there are 12 internet service providers (ISPs) operating in the Bayview Ridge Subarea area. ISP ownership frequently undergoes change in the current environment of deregulation and new service providers continuously enter the market. Current and future needs of the Bayview Ridge Subarea appear to be adequately met.

### ***Telephone***

Telephone service for Bayview Ridge is provided by Verizon (previously GTE Northwest). Telephone service is initiated by customer demand and requests and service providers are required to provide adequate telecommunications service on demand (RCW 80.36.090). Accordingly, telephone service providers will provide facilities to accommodate whatever growth patterns occur.

### ***Cellular Telephone***

Cellular telecommunication allows people to have mobile telephone communication via radios which send and receive signals from a network of receivers placed at several cellular communication (“cell”) sites.

Cell sites are placed on tall poles, lattice-type towers, or on existing buildings. Each cell site has a coverage area of several miles, depending on topography and number of customers. As the cellular telephone user moves from one cell to the next, the call is passed to an open channel at an adjacent cell site. Transmission quality and dialing of cellular telephones are comparable to that of conventional wireline telephones.

Bayview Ridge is currently served by several cellular telephone companies including, but not limited to:

- Nextel
- AT&T Wireless
- Verizon Wireless
- Sprint
- Voice Stream

These companies are licensed to operate in the County and throughout the region within guidelines set by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Siting and design of towers is regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the local zoning authority.

### ***Cable Television***

Cable television service in Bayview Ridge is provided by AT&T Broadband.

## Special Districts

### ***Port of Skagit County***

The Port of Skagit County is a major property owner within the Bayview Ridge Subarea. As a special district, the Port of Skagit County can develop property for industrial use and can lease and sell land, buildings, and facilities to private industry in accordance with state laws. State laws specify that ports may acquire, construct, maintain, operate, develop, and regulate within the district: harbor improvements; rail or motor vehicles transfer and terminal facilities; water transfer and terminal facilities; air transfer and terminal facilities; other commercial transportation; transfer; handling storage and terminal facilities; and industrial improvements.

Port districts are funded by revenue from the operation of terminals, the sale or lease of properties, and tax levies. A port district may incur debt including issuing general obligation bonds up to 0.25 percent of the assessed value of taxable property in the district without vote of the people. An additional 0.05 percent debt may be incurred if 60 percent of the electorate approves. They also have the power to issue revenue bonds for the acquisition, construction, reconstruction, or extension of various improvements.

Together with the Skagit County Economic Development Association, the Port is a leader in promoting economic development in Bayview Ridge.

Their largest operation is the Skagit County Regional Airport. At the airport site, the Port operates an industrial park with over 960,000 square feet of existing building space. Currently, there are 53 major tenants or owner-occupants occupying 108 acres and employing 1,200 workers.

## Relationship to Other Plans

### ***Growth Management Act Requirements***

The 1990 Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) requires that local comprehensive plans include a utilities element. According to the GMA, the utilities element shall, at a minimum, consist of “the general location, proposed location, and capacity of all existing and proposed utilities, including but not limited to: electrical lines, telecommunication lines, and natural gas lines.”

In addition, the State guidelines for implementing the GMA (Chapter 365-195 WAC) state that policies should be adopted which call for:

1. *Joint use of transportation rights-of-way and utility corridors, where possible.*
2. *Timely and effective notification of interested utilities of road construction and of maintenance and upgrades of existing roads to facilitate coordination of public and private utility trenching activities.*
3. *Consideration of utility permits simultaneously with the proposals requesting service and, when possible, approval of utility permits when the project to be served is approved.*

### ***Countywide Planning Policies***

Countywide Planning Policy No. 12 addresses the need for public facilities and services (See p.7-4 for Countywide Planning Policies 12-1 through 12-7). The policy states that public facilities and services necessary to support development shall be adequate to serve the development at the time of occupancy without decreasing current service levels. The countywide planning policy calls for an integrated system of facilities. It further requires that lands be identified for public purposes, such as: utility and transportation corridors, landfill, sewage treatment facilities, recreation, schools, and other public uses. Such planning will lead to a more efficient delivery of services.

## **Major Issues**

### ***Coordination and Concurrency***

As development occurs, system and facility improvements must keep pace with the higher demand. The improvements must take place within predetermined time frames to maintain appropriate levels of service. To ensure concurrency, Skagit County needs to coordinate with private utility companies and other regional jurisdictions so that utilities may provide high-quality and reliable services to their customers and plan for future development and expansion of utility facilities.

### ***Compatibility and Design Standards***

The siting of utility facilities requires coordination with Skagit County's land use plan and this comprehensive plan so that they will be sited in a manner reasonably compatible with adjacent land uses, including the airport. In addition to monitoring land use compatibility, the County may need to consider imposing design standards for the following: Should views be protected from excessive numbers of unsightly towers and lines? When (or in which areas) and what types of utilities should the County require to be buried?

## **Regulatory Setting**

### ***Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission***

The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (WUTC) is responsible for regulating privately owned utility and transportation businesses in the state. The WUTC is a three-member board appointed by the governor and confirmed by the state senate. It is the WUTC's responsibility to see that companies provide safe and reliable service to their customers at reasonable rates. The WUTC regulates private utilities only (including but not limited to: electric, gas, telecommunication, and water companies).

Publicly owned utilities (such as municipal utilities and public utility districts) are regulated by their respective legislative bodies.

WUTC mandates that utility facilities and service must be provided on a uniform or nondiscriminatory basis to all customers and that cost of service must be equitable. State law

regulates the rates and charges, services, facilities, and practices of utilities. Any change in customer charges or service provision policy requires WUTC approval.

In accordance with state law, private utilities have an obligation to provide service upon demand. In other words, the utility companies must provide service to customers within their service territory as it is requested. This is known as a utility's duty to serve. Consistent with this duty, the utility providers follow growth and will provide service to development in accordance with service territories.

There are other federal and state agencies that impose requirements on utilities. The Washington State Department of Health (WDOH) has jurisdiction over water purveyors; the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and Department of Energy have jurisdiction over electric power service; and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has jurisdiction over the telecommunications industry.

### ***Federal Energy Regulatory Commission***

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) is an independent five-member commission with the U.S. Department of Energy. FERC establishes rates and charges for the interstate transport and sale of natural gas, for the transmission and sale of electrical power, and for the licensing of hydroelectric power projects. In addition, the commission establishes rates and charges for the interstate transport of oil via pipeline.

## **Bayview Ridge Subarea Plan**

### **Public Utilities**

#### ***Electricity***

PSE plans to continue to improve and extend its facilities as necessary to serve the growing loads in its service area. PSE is continually researching means to expand, supply, and upgrade equipment. System planners design and build their systems to follow population and employment growth projections based on county and city plans. The electricity load is determined from these plans and projections. An electric system plan is then developed to serve those loads at prescribed reliability levels, taking into account environmental, economic, financial, and operational factors. Utility construction is coordinated with the appropriate jurisdictions and agencies and is typically phased in as actual growth occurs.

Future electrical service plans are not only designed to provide for future growth and accommodate new and increased load. They also include changes to the existing systems to improve reliability, power quality, and looping of the system for redundancy backup service.

## **Private Utilities**

### ***Natural Gas***

CNG does not plan in advance for individual connections. Rather, connections are initiated by customer requests for new construction or conversion from electricity to gas. CNG expects to continue developing distribution systems and services in accordance with the Integrated Resource Plan Guidelines set forth by the State. CNG will identify necessary reinforcement and continue to meet growth at lowest possible cost by maximizing capacity of the existing distribution system.

The location, capacity, and timing of system improvements depend greatly on opportunities for expansion and on how quickly the Bayview Ridge area grows. The possible routes to connect different parts of the system will depend on right-of-way permitting, environmental impact, and opportunities to install gas mains along with new development or other utilities.

At this time, CNG does not have any planned improvement projects in Bayview Ridge. However, CNG has an active policy of expanding its supply system to serve additional natural gas customers. CNG's engineering department continually performs load studies to determine CNG's capacity to serve its customers.

### ***Telecommunications***

Since telephone service providers do not generally conduct detailed, long-range planning activities, no specific projects have been identified by Verizon at this time. General improvements to expand service to meet the projected future demand include constructing additional fiber optic cable, copper cable, and switching stations.

### ***Cellular Telephone***

The cellular system will expand in response to several factors: customer growth within a designated area, shift in distribution patterns, and/or a decrease in service quality or reliability (measured by the record of dropped calls or complaints of poor sound quality). In general, cellular system growth follows trends in population density along the higher volume transportation corridors.

### ***Cable Television***

Cable television service in Bayview Ridge is provided by AT&T Broadband.

At present, no new programming or major extension of cables is planned. Any future expansion that does occur will be completed as technology, market demand, and return on investment allows.

## **Special Districts**

### ***Port of Skagit County***

Expansion of industrial facilities at the Skagit Regional Airport is anticipated by the Subarea Plan. Please refer to Chapter 3 of this document.

## Goals, Objectives, and Policies

**Goal 8A The provision of utilities is critical to urban development at urban densities. Land use and transportation planning and development must be supported with adequate utility infrastructure.**

*Objective 8A-1 Maintain consistency, compatibility and concurrency between utility providers, local, state, and federal plans.*

Policy 8A-1.1 Require that the utilities and services needed to support development be available concurrent with the impacts of development.

Policy 8A-1.2 Utility services that are provided by a private purveyor should have a plan that is consistent with, and coordinated with, the Subarea Plan.

Policy 8A-1.3 Each utility shall have a response plan for emergency management that is coordinated with the *Skagit County Emergency Response Plan*.

Policy 8A-1.4 Require the joint use of utility corridors when feasible.

*Objective 8A-2 Encourage underground utility distribution to reduce visual and safety impacts of overhead lines where economically feasible.*

Policy 8A-2.1 Large new developments and subdivisions in the Bayview Ridge Subarea shall have underground distribution lines.

*Objective 8A-3 Regulate the construction of communication facilities consistent with needs of the Subarea.*

Policy 8A-3.1 Telecommunication towers are prohibited in the Bayview Ridge Subarea, except in the Heavy Industrial District, and only in conformance with the Federal Aviation Agency's Part 77 Surfaces and other regulations as described in the *Port of Skagit County's Skagit Regional Airport Master Plan* (1995) or as further amended.

Policy 8A-3.2 Encourage the co-location of communication utilities to reduce the potential for more monopoles.

Policy 8A-3.3 Require removal of unused telecommunication equipment.

Policy 8A-3.4 Require mitigation of visual impacts.

*Objective 8A-4 Coordinate the placement of overhead power lines.*

Policy 8A-4.1 Include Puget Power, General Telephone, and all other overhead line users in development and implementation of streetscape planning.

Policy 8A-4.2 If power lines are to be moved, establish an early notification system for any proposed public or private project so that opportunities to retain existing trees are adequately planned for.