



Executive Summary

Issue Title: Department of Community Development: Year of the Rural Update

Meeting Date: April 21, 2025

Time Required: 2:00-3:00pm, 60 minutes

Attendees: Rafe Wysham, Scott Diener, Colin Poff, Heather Cleveland

Action Requested At This Meeting: Update on progress for outreach, rural reclassifications, and rural and resource lands chapter. Discuss with the Board of County Commissioners their priorities and areas of focus for the next work study.

Background:

The 2024 Comprehensive Plan was adopted in December 2024. To allow for focus on the rural communities, lands, and specific topics impacting rural areas, the County is updating a Rural and Resources Lands Chapter. The policies in the Chapter will work in tandem with the Kitsap County Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Map. The Chapter guides land use patterns and supports land use decisions for the unincorporated portions of Kitsap County outside of urban growth areas (UGAs). The purpose of the Chapter is to define and provide policy direction to preserve and enhance the rural character of Kitsap County. The three deliverables for the Year of the Rural include:

- Rural and Resource Lands Chapter Update
- Rural Reclassification Requests – Recommendations
- Potential Code Updates

Agenda:

- Rural Comp Plan Comments and Survey Summaries
 - Highlights, next steps, acknowledge tensions, rural vision and character
 - Public on website by 4/18 (share website view)
 - Submit for Gov Delivery YOTR Update
- Additional outreach through June - initial findings
 - Agriculture
 - Forestry
 - Rural Businesses
 - Water and Environment (TBD)
 - Childcare (collaborating with Policy Analyst and existing taskforce)
 - Energy Siting
 - Cluster Housing
- June Workshops

- Confirm dates then locations with Commissioners
 - Potential Topics: Rural Vision/Character, Forestry, Agriculture, Events, Water
- CAC Schedule
 - June - announce workshops
 - September - presentation of draft, promote public comments and testimony
- Reclassification Requests
 - Initial staff deliberations.
 - Criteria we will include in our decision making
 - Alt 2 Applications
 - June/July decision
- Chapter Update
 - Draft outline
- Code Updates
 - Assessing - more information in May
- Next YOTR Works Study – Monday, May 12

Attachments:

- Rural Zoning Smart Sheet
- Rural Comment & Survey Summary

Rural Land Use Smart Sheet

Prepared April 2025

Rural Definitions

Some – not all of the definitions related to Year of the Rural.

[KCC Chapter 17.110 Definitions](#)

“Development rights” means the residential building rights permitted to a lot or parcel within a sending area, as defined in this chapter, based on the gross density, established pursuant to the Kitsap County zoning map and this title, and measured in base dwelling units per developable acre.

“Dwelling unit” means a single unit providing complete, independent living facilities for one or more persons, including permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking and sanitation. A recreational vehicle is not considered a dwelling unit outside of an approved RV park.

“Event facility” means a facility or site where private or public events, such as weddings, musical performances, parties, reunions, fairs, markets, bazaars, retreats, or conferences, are conducted in exchange for compensation and that are not part of a larger venue, such as a hotel, resort, or conference center.

“Forestry” means the use of land for producing and caring for a forest, including the harvesting of timber.

“Home business” means a commercial or industrial use, conducted entirely within a dwelling or an accessory structure, that is clearly secondary to the residential use.

“Infill development” means the construction of housing or other uses on vacant or underutilized properties bordered on a minimum of two sides by existing development.

“Livestock” means horses, bovine, sheep, goats, swine, reindeer, donkeys, mules, llamas and any other hoofed animal, large and small (small being one hundred fifty pounds or less).

“Manufactured/mobile/RV/park model/tiny home parks” means a parcel of land which has been planned and improved for the placement of manufactured homes, recreational vehicles, tiny homes, and/or park models, including hookup facilities, for permanent residential use. Accessory uses often include bathing and laundry uses.

“Rural character” means the patterns of land use and development that are consistent with the following:

- A. Open space, the natural landscape, and vegetation predominate over the built environment;

- B. Traditional rural lifestyles, rural-based economies, and opportunities to both live and work in rural areas;
- C. Visual landscapes that are traditionally found in rural areas and communities;
- D. Compatible with the use of the land by wildlife and for fish and wildlife habitat;
- E. Reduces the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into low-density development;
- F. Protects natural surface water flows and ground water and surface water recharge and discharge areas; and
- G. Meets the requirements of RCW 36.70A.030(15).

“Rural cluster” means site development that avoids sensitive areas while preserving forested land, steep slopes, wetlands, prairies and other ecologically or visually valuable landscape features while still obtaining residential density. Typically a percentage of a site area is preserved in its existing natural or farmed state, with individual house lots occupying the remaining acreage.

“Rural wooded incentive program development” means a development within the area designated “rural wooded” on the Kitsap County Comprehensive Plan land use map that has utilized the clustering provisions of this title and for which final approval has been granted by the board of county commissioners.

Rural Zones

[KCC Chapter 17.130 Rural Residential Zone \(RR\)](#) - aka RR5, 1 du/5 Acres

Purpose: This zone promotes low-density residential development and agricultural activities that are consistent with rural character. It is applied to areas that are relatively unconstrained by environmentally sensitive areas or other significant landscape features. These areas are provided with limited public services.

[KCC Chapter 17.140 Rural Protection Zone \(RP\)](#) - aka RP10, 1du/10 Acres

Purpose: This zone promotes low-density rural development and agricultural activities that are consistent with rural character and protects environmental features such as significant visual, historical and natural features, wildlife corridors, steep slopes, wetlands, streams and adjacent critical areas.

[KCC Chapter 17.150 Rural Wooded Zone \(RW\)](#) - aka RW20, 1du/20 Acres

Purpose: This zone is intended to encourage the preservation of forest uses and agricultural activities, retain an area’s rural character and conserve the natural resources while providing for some rural residential use. This zone is further intended to discourage activities and facilities that can be considered detrimental to the maintenance of timber production. Residents of rural wooded (RW) residential tracts shall recognize that they can be subject to normal and accepted farming and forestry practices on adjacent parcels.

[KCC Chapter 17.160 Forest Resource Lands \(FRL\)](#)

Purpose: The primary land use allowed in this zone is commercial timber production and harvesting. This zone is further intended to discourage activities and facilities which can be considered detrimental to the production and commercial harvest of timber. Residents located within or adjacent to the forest resource lands zone (FRL) shall recognize that they can be subject to normal and accepted forestry practices on parcels located within this zone.

[KCC Chapter 17.170 Mineral Resource Overlay \(MRO\)](#)

Purpose: The intent of this overlay is to protect and enhance significant sand, gravel and rock deposits as identified mineral resource lands. It is also used to ensure the continued or future use without disrupting or endangering adjacent land uses, while safeguarding life, property, and the public welfare. Provisions of state statutes applicable to Kitsap County pertaining to surface mining are hereby adopted by reference.

[KCC Chapter 17.209 Rural Commercial \(RCO\)](#)

Purpose: The intent and function of the rural commercial zone is to permit the location of small-scale commercial retail businesses and personal services which serve a limited service area and rural population outside established UGAs. The rural commercial zone permits small-scale retail, sales and services located along county roads on small parcels that serve the immediate rural residential population. Rural businesses, which serve the immediate rural population, may be located at crossroads of county roads, state routes, and major arterials.

[KCC Chapter 17.330 Rural Industrial \(RI\)](#)

Purpose: This zone provides for small-scale light industrial, light manufacturing, recycling, mineral processing, and resource-based goods production uses that are compatible with rural character and do not require an urban level of utilities and services.

[KCC Chapter 17.360 Limited Areas of More Intensive Rural Development \(LAMIRD\)](#); note each LAMIRD has its own code, e.g. [KCC Chapter 17.360A Keyport Rural Village](#)

[KCC Chapter 17.145.195 Event facility](#)

[KCC Chapter 17.455 Agriculture Code](#)

Thematic Summary of Rural-Related Comments – Combined Comment Sources

This summary addresses rural-focused comments compiled from four data sources: General Comprehensive Plan Comments, March 2024 DEIS comments, April 2024 Preliminary Alternatives, and August 2024 Final Draft Community Rural Comments. Out of 1092 total comments, 312 specifically mentioned rural issues such as farming, forestry, agriculture, clear cutting, and related topics. Each section below contains a thematic overview based on recurring concerns expressed by commenters.

Environmental Concerns (196 responses, 62.8%)

Respondents voiced deep concern about the environmental impacts of rural development and industrial forestry. Clear cutting, loss of forest canopy, and damage to salmon habitat and wetlands were frequently mentioned. Port Gamble Forest was cited repeatedly as a key environmental asset. Commenters stressed the need for protections against runoff, erosion, and the cumulative effects of timber and residential development in sensitive areas.

Zoning and Land Use (238 responses, 76.3%)

Many comments opposed rezoning rural lands to allow for high-density residential or commercial uses. Respondents argued that rural zoning should protect working farms, forests, and open space. There was widespread concern about large landowners such as Raydient and Rayonier developing formerly resource-designated land. Several comments described this as a violation of the county's rural vision and a threat to long-standing land use values.

Traffic and Transportation (145 responses, 46.5%)

Rural residents raised repeated concerns about increased traffic, especially from logging trucks, construction vehicles, and new housing developments. Common themes included narrow roads, lack of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and general traffic safety. Many requested traffic studies before any rural growth plans are approved.

Infrastructure and Utilities (94 responses, 30.1%)

A significant number of commenters questioned whether rural infrastructure—such as water systems, septic tanks, and stormwater facilities—could support further development. Several noted that current infrastructure is already failing or inadequate and raised concerns about who would pay for upgrades associated with expanded growth.

Public Services and Facilities (24 responses, 7.7%)

Comments highlighted challenges in emergency response, policing, and public health services in rural areas. Respondents argued that public services are already stretched thin, and new development would further reduce access and response times.

Procedural and Legal Issues (44 responses, 14.1%)

Many respondents expressed distrust in the planning process. Several raised legal questions about Growth Management Act compliance and procedural fairness. There were concerns that public input was not meaningfully integrated and that large private landowners held disproportionate influence over zoning decisions.

Housing and Growth (170 responses, 54.5%)

Numerous rural residents opposed high-density or multifamily housing projects in rural areas, citing threats to community identity and resource-based livelihoods. Some supported modest rural growth tied to agriculture or housing for local workers but rejected urban-style development patterns as incompatible with rural values.

General Opposition or Support (134 responses, 42.9%)

Many comments expressed general opposition to growth alternatives that would enable major development in rural zones. The 'no action' alternative was widely favored as a way to slow growth and preserve open space. Others emphasized the need for better alignment between planning decisions and rural priorities.

Other/Uncategorized (10 responses, 3.2%)

A small set of comments reflected deeply personal attachments to rural living, such as appreciation for peace, open space, traditional industries, or family land. These comments were not tied to a specific policy but reflected strong resistance to urbanization.

Draft Summary – Rural and Resources Survey Responses

4/11/2025

Introduction

Kitsap County is currently preparing a Rural and Resource Lands Chapter for the County Comprehensive Plan. As part of the chapter’s initial public outreach phase, Kitsap County conducted an online public survey to identify concerns and suggestions about a number of rural and resource lands issues.

The survey was open to public responses from February 1 through March 7, 2025, and 1,026 responses were received. Approximately 50% of the respondents were located in the North Kitsap district; however, analysis did not reveal significant variations in opinions by district for the ranked-choice questions.

The survey included questions about rural character, environmental concerns, land use priorities, economic and housing concerns, and infrastructure and quality of life. These answers were recorded on a four-point scale of importance from “Very Important” to “Not Important”. Additional free-form response questions on land use regulations, forestry and timber activities, farming and agriculture, and quality of life were also included. Demographic information was collected to inform the planning process. The public input gained in the survey will assist the County in developing the plan’s focus, goals, and policies for future implementation.

Because of the number of total responses, and the complexity of individual free-form responses. Key trends, conclusions and ratings have been categorized in this summary to inform the next phases of planning. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

The survey is in **Appendix A**. Graphics showing responses to all rated-choice questions are in **Appendix B**. The full text of all responses to the long form (open ended) questions, with the exclusion of demographic information, is in **Appendix C**. Demographic information is in **Appendix D**.

A. General Conclusions from the Survey

In general, the survey reflects largely positive views of the County’s rural areas. **87% said that Kitsap County is a desirable place to live.**

The most common themes and concerns from the survey are summarized below. Each topic is also compared to the 2010 Rural and Resource Lands (RRL) chapter of the Comprehensive Plan to indicate continuing and/or updated priorities and concerns. Although the Comp Plan was updated subsequent to 2010, no significant changes to the RRL chapter were made. The RRL was removed from the Comp Plan in the 2016 update, and its policies were moved into the Land Use chapter.

1. Rural Character Is Valued.

- Respondents overwhelmingly support **preserving the rural character** of the community.
- There's strong agreement on **protecting scenic views, open space, and natural features** like forests and wetlands.
- Resistance was noted toward development that could change the **look and feel** of the area.

2010 RRL chapter:

2. Development Preferences Are Conservative

- Most residents support **low-density development** and a desire for **development that visually and functionally fits rural character**.
- There is general **opposition to large commercial developments** and dense residential projects like apartments or townhomes.
- Preferred future growth includes **agriculture, small-scale businesses, and home-based enterprises**.

2010 RRL chapter:

3. Housing Affordability Is a Concern—But Complex

- While many agree that **housing affordability** is important, support for **multi-family** or **higher-density housing** is relatively low.
- There's a desire for **senior housing, aging-in-place options,** and **starter homes,** but still within a low-density, rural aesthetic.

[2010 RRL chapter:](#)

4. Transportation Is a Mixed Priority

- **Traffic congestion** and **road maintenance** are key concerns.
- There is **lukewarm support for bike lanes and sidewalks,** especially in outlying rural areas.
- Some support exists for **alternative transportation options,** especially near community centers.

[2010 RRL chapter:](#)

5. Natural Resources and Environment Are Key Priorities

- Very strong support for **protecting groundwater, limiting development in sensitive areas,** and **conserving agricultural land.**
- **Flooding and stormwater management** are viewed as important community issues.

[2010 RRL chapter:](#)

6. Community Services and Infrastructure: Keep It Lean

- There's limited appetite for **expanding government services** unless directly tied to growth impacts.
- People prefer **efficient use of existing infrastructure** over expensive expansions.
- A cautious approach is favored regarding **public investments**, with some support for partnerships or grants.

[2010 RRL chapter:](#)

7. Economic Development Should Fit the Community

- Support exists for **agriculture, small local businesses, and tourism that aligns with rural values.**
- Residents are wary of **big-box stores, industrial parks, or high-traffic commercial centers.**
- Emphasis is placed on **supporting existing businesses and local entrepreneurship.**

[2010 RRL chapter:](#)

8. Community Identity and Communication Matter

- People care about **community character, rural lifestyle preservation, and local community events.**
- Some respondents indicated a desire for **better public engagement, transparency, and clear communication from local government.**

[2010 RRL chapter:](#)

B. Key Data and Overall Trends

Items that were strongly rated or otherwise notable in the scale ratings are summarized below:

Rural Character

The preservation of rural character ranked highest among all rated items in the survey. 85% of respondents expressed strong support for rural character preservation (rated as “Very Important”). An additional 8% rated it “Somewhat Important”.

The 2010 RRL provided these descriptions of “rural character”:

“Rural land uses consist of both dispersed and clustered residential developments, farms, wooded lots, and small and moderate-scale commercial and industrial uses that serve rural residents as their primary client. Rural landscapes encompass the full range of natural features, including forested expanses, pastures, cropland, rolling meadows, ridge lines and valley walls, distant vistas, streams and lakes, shorelines and other sensitive areas.” (page 3)

“Rural characteristics...(include) the abundance of trees, low-density development patterns, access to recreation, views of water, mountains, farms, and a quiet, unregimented atmosphere... For County residents, the term rural also defines a philosophy of living and a quality of life. This quality of life includes a sense of quiet, community and a slower pace of life. Rural characteristics include the abundance of trees, access to recreation, views of water and mountains, and a quiet, unregimented atmosphere.” (page 5)

These 2010 examples of “rural character” have consistently carried over in the responses received for the 2024 survey. Kitsap County Code (KCC) 17.110.666 also defines “rural character”, and this definition was included in the survey.

Environment

- Natural environment: 77% rate the natural environment “Very Important” for the maintenance of rural character. An additional 17% rated it “Important”.
- Drinking water protection: 75% of respondents rate this “Very Important”. An additional 15% rated it “Important”.
- Salmon habitat: 57% rate salmon habitat as “Very Important”. An additional 24% rate it “Important”.

Respondents also said that scenic areas (57%) and having green areas separate urban areas (59%) were important to maintain rural character.

Land Use Priorities

- Rural lifestyle: 62% rate it “Very Important”, 25% rate it “Important”.
- Open space: 56% rate it “Very Important”, 27% rate it “Important”.
- Rural-based economies: 42% rate this “Very Important”, 35% rate it “Important”.
- Timber production: Opinions were split. 28% rate it “Very Important” or “Important”, 35% were “Neutral”, and 34% believe it’s “Not Important”.
- Energy siting: Opinions were split. 58% “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” that renewable energy siting should be allowed in the County. 24% “Strongly Disagreed” or “Disagreed” that renewable energy siting should be allowed.

Economic and Housing Concerns

- Housing limitations: 63% said it is “Very Important” to limit the number of homes built in rural areas. An additional 27% rated it “Important”.
- Right to farm: 55% said supporting farmers’ rights is “Very Important”. An additional 31% rated it important.

Services and Assets

Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction on a number of items:

- Rural roads: 66% are “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied”.
- Trees – wooded areas or rural parcels: 61% are “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied”.
- Electricity: 60% are “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied”.
- Shoreline: 60% are “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied”.
- Parks and Recreation: 64% are “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied”.
- Trees – greenbelt: 56% are “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied”.
- Urban roads: 55% are “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied”.
- Internet: 44% are “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied”. 35% are “Very Dissatisfied” or “Dissatisfied”.
- Trees – timber land: 32% are “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied”. 22% are “Very Dissatisfied” or “Dissatisfied”.
- Traffic: 21% are “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied”. 54% are “Very Dissatisfied” or “Dissatisfied”.
- Public transportation: 19% are “Very Satisfied” or “Satisfied”. 33% are “Very Dissatisfied” or “Dissatisfied”.

C. Free-Response Questions and Responses

In addition to the scaled response questions, survey respondents were asked to provide individual long-form answers to several questions about land use regulation, forestry and timber, farming and agriculture, and quality of life.

1. “Do you believe land use regulations impact you?”

- Yes: 27% of respondents explicitly stated "Yes", "Absolutely", or similar affirmations.
- No: Less than 2% of respondents explicitly stated "No", suggesting most believe regulations have some effect on them.

Common Themes in Detailed Responses:

- Frustration with Over-Regulation: Some respondents believe Kitsap County has too many land use regulations that restrict property rights.
- Concern About Overdevelopment: Multiple responses mention increasing construction, clearing of green spaces, and loss of wildlife habitat.
- Traffic & Population Density Issues: Several responses connect land use regulations to rising traffic congestion and higher population density.
- Desire to Keep Rural Areas Protected: Some responses advocate for keeping urban development out of rural zones.

The overwhelming majority of respondents believe land use regulations impact them, with opinions divided between overregulation concerns and worries about development and environmental impact.

2. “What is your vision for forestry and timber activities in Kitsap County for the next 20 years?”

- 52% disagreed or strongly disagreed with offering more timber incentives.
- 20% agreed that more timber incentives should be offered.
- 24% were neutral on this question.

Common Themes in Detailed Responses:

- Conservation and limiting logging: Many respondents express a desire to limit timber activities and preserve forests.
- Some respondents advocate for sustainable timber practices and replanting trees.
- Environmental balance was a top concern, especially in relation to soil health, water quality, and biodiversity.

The dominant view in the survey suggests support for conservation and limitations on logging.

3. “What is your vision for farming and agriculture activities in Kitsap County for the next 20 years?”

- 85% strongly agreed or agreed that policies and strategies should be developed to ensure the right to farm in Kitsap County.

Common Themes in Detailed Responses:

- Support for expanding farming: Many responses mention the need for more farms and agricultural activities.
- Preference for small-scale, local farming: Several responses emphasize family-style, local farming over industrial or large-scale farming.
- Preserving existing farms: Some responses support protection of current farms from development.
- Alternative preferences: A few responses oppose farming expansion, with some advocating for more trees instead.

4. “What can improve your quality of life in Kitsap County?”

Most respondents said that Kitsap County is a very desirable (51%) or somewhat desirable (36%) place to live.

Common Themes in Detailed Responses:

- Environmental concerns: Reducing rural burning and other pollution, protecting private wells and water resources.
- Transportation and infrastructure: Safer roads for bicyclists, reducing traffic congestion (especially from the Navy shipyard and the Silverdale/Poulsbo areas), expanding shoreline access.
- Development and land use: Slowing down urban development to preserve rural character, preventing farmland from being converted into housing developments, allowing more personal freedom in land use with less government intervention.
- Public transit and commuting solutions: Better public transit and park-and-ride systems to manage Navy shipyard commutes and traffic impacts. Preserving natural beauty and wildlife: Concerns about urbanization leading to light pollution and the loss of Kitsap County’s natural appeal, protection of wildlife habitats.

D. Next Steps: Planning Priorities for Rural and Resource Lands

Advance Rural Character Preservation in Policy and Zoning

87% of respondents prioritize preservation of rural character. Define 'rural character' in policy terms; ensure zoning prevents incompatible uses.

Strengthen Targeted Growth to Urban Areas

Only 27% support new rural housing; strong public desire to limit sprawl. Ensure that Rural and Resource Lands policies direct development to urban areas (within UGAs) consistent with adopted population targets and GMA.

Consider Rural Roads and Traffic Safety

71% voiced concerns about roads and transportation issues; over half are dissatisfied with traffic and transit. Policies should support maintenance, traffic calming, shoulder widening, and crossings for protection of pedestrians and bicyclists. Potential for greater rural benefit from Kitsap Transit & WSDOT coordination on ride-sharing and park-and-ride options? Coordinate with Naval Base Kitsap on shipyard-generated traffic congestion.

Support Small-Scale, Local Economic Development

72% support small businesses in rural areas; concerns are expressed about large-scale commercial intrusion. Policies should incentivize agritourism, home-based businesses, small-scale agriculture and food production.

Protect Farmland and Support Farming as a Long-Term Rural Use

85% want to protect farming; favor small/local over industrial or non-farm conversion. Consider policies that encourage easements and tax incentives, and prevent siting of land uses and development incompatible with existing nearby farms and agriculture.

Ensure Environmental Protections in Rural Zones

83% support stronger ecosystem protections, especially for timber, water, and land clearing. Review existing land use and natural resources policies for potential reinforcement in rural areas. Consider policies regarding the commercial timber industry, such as ensuring sustainable forestry, limitations on clear-cutting, and requiring replanting.

Expand Community Engagement and Transparency

Only 39% feel informed; rural residents want more say in shaping their communities. Create rural-specific outreach, such as open houses, dedicated planning liaisons, better online tools.