



COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Carolina Mejia  
District One

Gary Edwards  
District Two

Tye Menser  
District Three

**COMMUNITY PLANNING &  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

*Creating Solutions for Our Future*

Joshua Cummings, Director

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Thurston County Planning Commission

**FROM:** Andrew Boughan, Associate Planner

**DATE:** August 18, 2021

**SUBJECT:** Follow-Up on 2020-2021 Official Comprehensive Plan Docket Item CP-19:  
Up Castle Site-Specific Land Use & Rezone Amendment

**Background**

Community Planning held an initial work session with the Planning Commission on August 4, 2021. At that work session, staff provided an overview of the request and considerations related to the amendment, as well as proposed draft code language. The Planning Commission directed staff to conduct further view on the following topics: Assessor's Open Space tax exemption status, Growth Management Standards on sewer & water, and several farmland related aspects including Nationally Significant farmlands, prime farmland soils, and existing No Net Loss policy in the Comprehensive Plan.

**Assessor's Open Space Tax Exemption Status**

The Thurston County Assessor's Office Open Space Tax Program includes the Designated Forest Land and the Farm and Agriculture current use programs. The property at 5505 222<sup>nd</sup> Ave SW (28.86± acres) is currently enrolled as current use farm and agriculture under the assessor's program.

This classification was created by the Legislature with the intended purposes for long-term protection of open space resources (RCW 84.34). Parcels twenty (20) or more acres of land devoted to the production of livestock or agriculture for commercial purposes, or parcels less than twenty (20) acres of land devoted to agriculture that meets a minimum income from these uses may be eligible for the program. The Assessor maintains two values for each land parcel classified in the program: a fair market value (based on its highest and best use) and a current use value (based on its classified use). Property taxes are reduced and based on the current use value. RCW 84.34.080 states that properties that apply to change the use must contact the Assessor's office within sixty (60) days of application and may owe back taxes, interest and penalties for early

departure from the program. There are some circumstances under RCW 84.34.108 where back taxes may not be imposed on the removal from classification, including official action by a county or city, including zoning changes, that disallow the current use.

### **Nationally Significant Farmland (American Farmland Trust, 2016)**

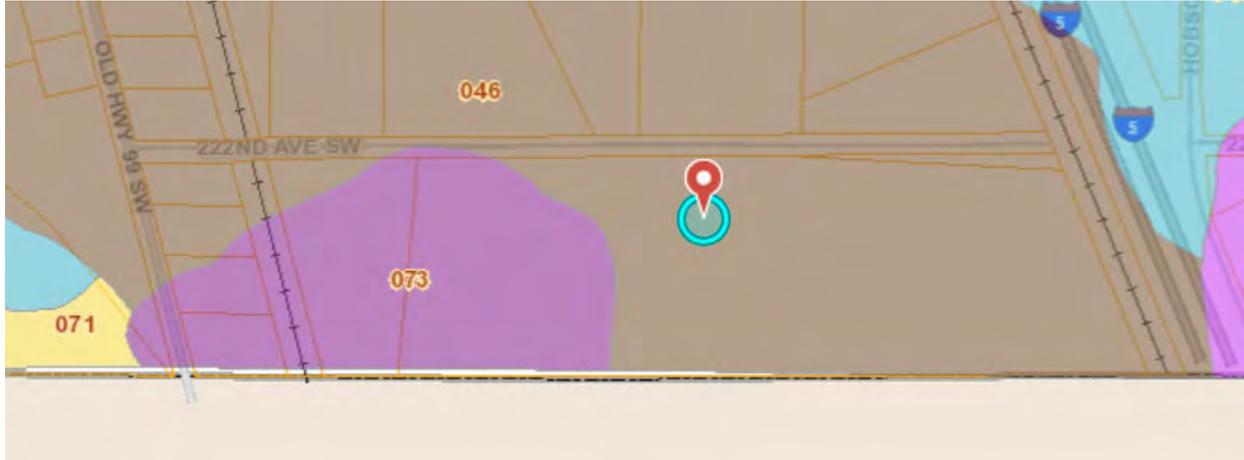
The American Farmland Trust and Conservation Science Partners worked together to identify and classify land cover and use across the United States, with a special focus on agricultural land, as part of their “Farms Under Threat” project. “Farms under Threat” provides actionable information on the location and quality of the agricultural land, threats posed by development, and policies that can help protect it. Nationally Significant farmland is the land best-suited to long-term, intensive crop production within the conterminous United States; and each state’s “best land” is approximately the better half of all agricultural land in each state.

There are two (2) separate pieces of Nationally Significant Farmland on the parcels, shown in orange below. The remaining yellow indicates other cropland and pastureland that is not considered nationally significant under the American Farmland Trust 2016 mapping.



### **Prime Soils**

The property is comprised of the Indianola loamy sand, 0 to 3% slope soil (shown as 046 on map) and Nisqually loamy fine sand 0 to 3 % slopes soil (shown as 073 on map). Indianola loamy sand, 0 to 3% slope soil is used for hayland, pasture, cropland, woodland, or home sites while the Nisqually loamy fine sand 0 to 3 % slopes soil could be used for hayland, pasture, or home sites. The main limitation affecting hay and pasture is the moderate available water capacity. The main limitation affecting cropland for the Indianola Loamy Sand is low precipitation during the growing season. Nisqually loamy fine sand 0-3% is listed as prime farmland soil in the Comprehensive Plan, Chapter 3-Natural Resources. Although Indianola loamy sand 0-3% is not currently listed as a prime farmland soil in the Comprehensive Plan, it is considered prime farmland if irrigated according to the USDA Web Soil Survey (2021). The County is currently conducting a community-driven review of agricultural (docket item CP-16), of which one of the components is reviewing the current criteria and prime farmland soils listed in the Comprehensive Plan which may include updates as appropriate.



### **No Net Loss Policy**

The County currently includes no-net loss policy for natural resource lands (agriculture and forest lands).

Chapter 3 Natural Resource Lands, Goal 1: Preserve agricultural land in order to ensure an adequate land base for long-term farm use. (This applies to all agricultural land, including areas outside of agriculture of long-term commercial significance).

Objective A: Conserve (no net loss) and enhance agricultural lands for long-term farming use.

“No net loss does” not mean “no loss”. Impacts may still occur but should be replaced on the other end to mitigate for loss. The current policy language in the Comprehensive Plan on no net loss of agriculture does not specifically state that total number of acres is the sole indicator to measure. The County has not yet determined a mechanism to measure and track no net loss, but may consider a variety of indicators including productivity, acreage, percent cover, ecological function, or others.

### **Growth Management Standards on Sewer & Water**

The County includes policy around extension of services beyond the Urban Growth Area.

(Chapter 2) Policy 9, “The highest levels of public services and facilities should be provided in urban growth areas, but may be provided at lesser levels in the smaller towns’ urban growth areas. Some services and facilities may only be provided after areas incorporate or are annexed to adjacent cities or towns. These urban services and facilities may include water supply; sanitary and storm sewers; police and fire protection; paved streets with curbs, sidewalks and street lights; and public transit and bicycle paths...”

(Chapter 7) Policy 3.2g, “Phase extensions of urban services and facilities concurrent with development and prohibit extensions of urban services and facilities, such as sewer and water, beyond urban growth boundaries except to serve existing development in rural areas with public health or water quality problems.”

Additionally, there is state policy within the Growth Management Act that limits the ability of jurisdictions to extend services outside of the Urban Growth Area.

[RCW 36.70A.110\(4\)](#), “In general, it is not appropriate that urban governmental services be extended to or expanded in rural areas except in those limited circumstances shown to be necessary to protect basic public health and safety and the environment and when such services are financially supportable at rural densities and do not permit urban development.”

County policy would prohibit the County from expanding utilities services (water & sewer) to the 5505 & 5641 222<sup>nd</sup> Avenue SW. Additionally, state policy restricts expansion of urban services to rural areas except in limited circumstances. Any future development would be required to comply with the sizing and dimensional standards for well and septic by Thurston County’s Environmental Health.