



Community Agriculture

Long-Term Agriculture Designation & Zoning Review

**Part of the Community-Driven Review of
Agriculture project**

Work Session # 1 – May 3, 2023

Overview of Today's Briefing

- ▶ **Overview of Project**
- ▶ **Overview of History & State Law**
- ▶ **Overview of Outreach Efforts**
- ▶ **Overview of Proposed Changes**

Background & Project Drivers



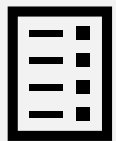
2019

Public, Ag Committee, Planning Commission identified **need to re-examine agriculture policy** during TC Comprehensive Plan update



Jan. 2020

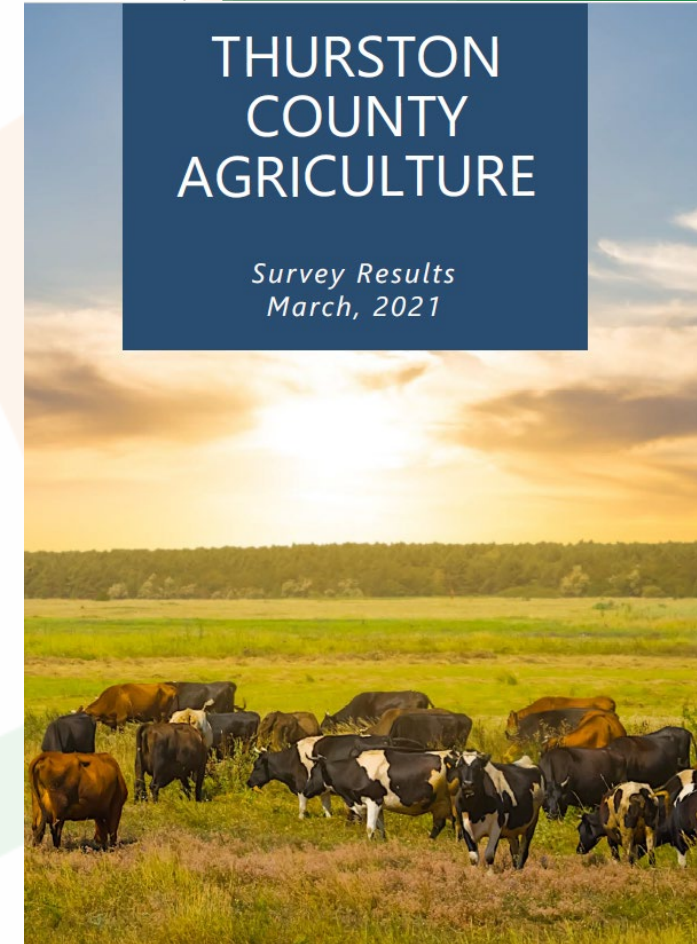
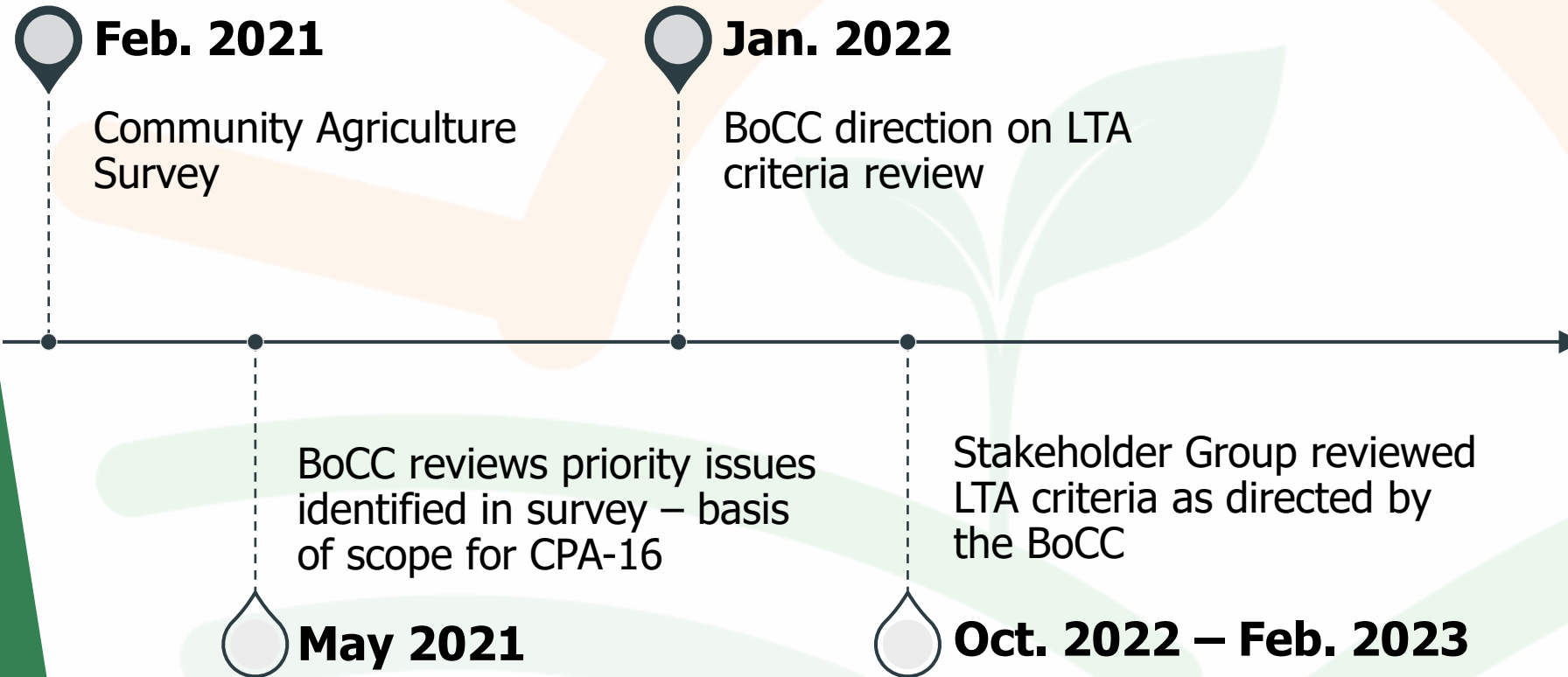
Futurewise appeal of 2019 Comprehensive Plan update, specifically on designation of agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance



Apr. 2020

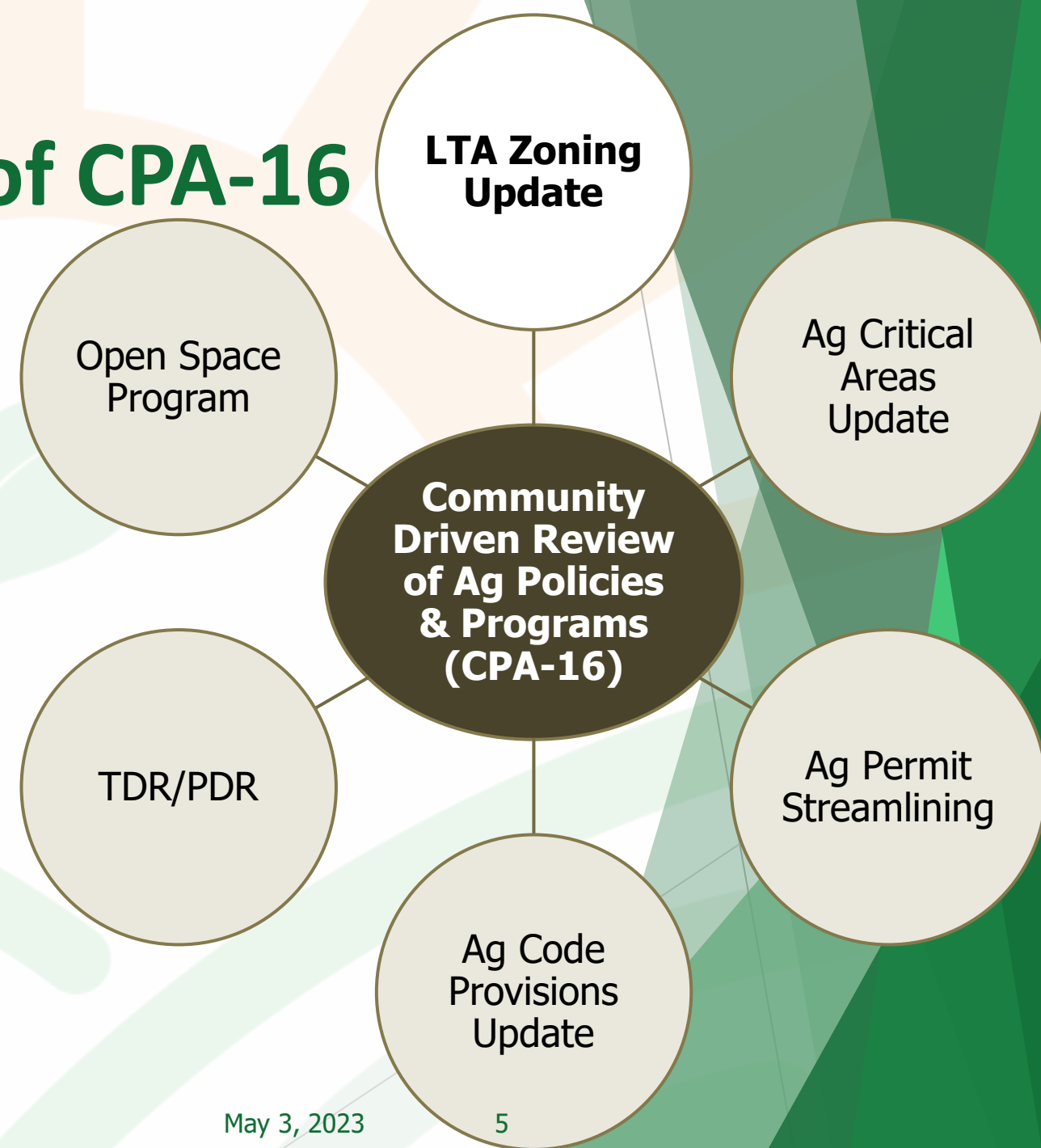
CPA-16, "*Community Driven Review of Agriculture Policies and Programs*" **docketed and prioritized as 2 of 9**

Project History



Other Components of CPA-16

- ▶ Review of LTA designation criteria one piece
- ▶ Other components are being reviewed on separate paths



What & Why: LTA



Long-Term Agriculture is both a zone and a land use designation



County required under state law to protect lands that can be used for agriculture



Intended to protect agricultural lands of “long-term commercial significance”



Designation criteria are county policies that tell us where these lands are sited



Criteria looks at things like soils, parcel size, proximity to urban areas, and more

Board Set Scope



(Criteria 2, 4)
Consider Agriculture
Zoning Within Urban
Growth Areas



(Criteria 5)
Consider Zoning
Smaller Acreage
Parcels



(Criteria 8)
Consider Changing Size
of Agricultural Blocks
of Land



County History of Long-Term Agriculture Lands

History of Long-Term Ag

- ▶ **1993** – County adopts criteria
- ▶ **2005** – County challenged, failed to meet GMA based on criteria 3 (land use) and criteria 5 (parcel size)
- ▶ **2007-2008** – County updated criteria 3, reapplied on map, compliance with GMA

History of Long-Term Ag

- ▶ **2013** – County redesignates two areas from LTA to R 1/10
- ▶ **2013** – appealed on redesignation of two areas
- ▶ **2014** – negotiated settlement, add additional 188.5 acres as LTA
- ▶ **2020** – appealed on 2019 Comprehensive Plan Update for not using updated soils information



State Law on Agricultural Resource Lands

State Law

- ▶ Counties must protect and conserve natural resources, like agriculture
- ▶ Intended to protect lands of “long-term commercial significance”

State Law

- ▶ [WAC 365-190-030](#) – Definitions
 - ▶ **(11) "Long-term commercial significance"** includes the growing capacity, productivity, and soil composition of the land for long-term commercial production, in consideration with the land's proximity to population areas, and the possibility of more intense uses of land. **Long-term commercial significance means the land is *capable of* producing the specified natural resources at commercially sustainable levels for at least the twenty-year planning period, if adequately conserved.**

State Law

- ▶ [WAC 365-190-050](#) – Agricultural resource lands
 - ▶ (1) In classifying and designating agricultural resource lands, **counties must approach the effort as a county-wide or area-wide process. Counties and cities should not review resource lands designations solely on a parcel-by-parcel process.**

State Law

- ▶ WAC 365-190-050 – Agricultural resource lands
 - ▶ Lands should be considered for designation based on three factors:
 - ▶ (3a) Not characterized by urban growth
 - ▶ (3b) Used or capable of being used for agricultural production
 - ▶ (3c) Has long-term commercial significance, as determined by: prime farmland soils, availability of public utilities, tax status, public services, proximity to UGAs, parcel size, nearby land use patterns, history of permits, land values, and proximity to markets

State Law

- ▶ WAC 365-190-050 – Agricultural resource lands
 - ▶ The process should result in designating the amount of agricultural resource lands that is sufficient to maintain and enhance the economic viability of the agricultural industry in the county over the long term.

Existing County Designation Criteria for Agricultural Lands of Long-Term Commercial Significance

Minimum Designation Criteria: Chapter 3

1. Soil Type	Predominantly prime farmland soils
2. Availability of Public Facilities and Services	Located away from urban growth areas (UGAs) due to projected water & sewer availability in 20-yr planning timeframe
3. Land Capability and Tax Status	Primarily devoted to or capable of being used for commercial production of ag products
4. Relationship or Proximity to Urban Growth Areas	Outside of UGAs with additional separation from urban densities
5. Predominant Parcel Size	20 acres or more
6. Land Use Settlement Patterns	Adjacent residential density no greater than 1 unit / 5 acres
7. Proximity of Markets	Access to markets should be available
8. Agricultural Diversity	320 acres minimum per area, 200 acres if near another area
9. Environmental Considerations	Outside of Natural Shoreline Environments




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THURSTON COUNTY LONG-TERM AGRICULTURE

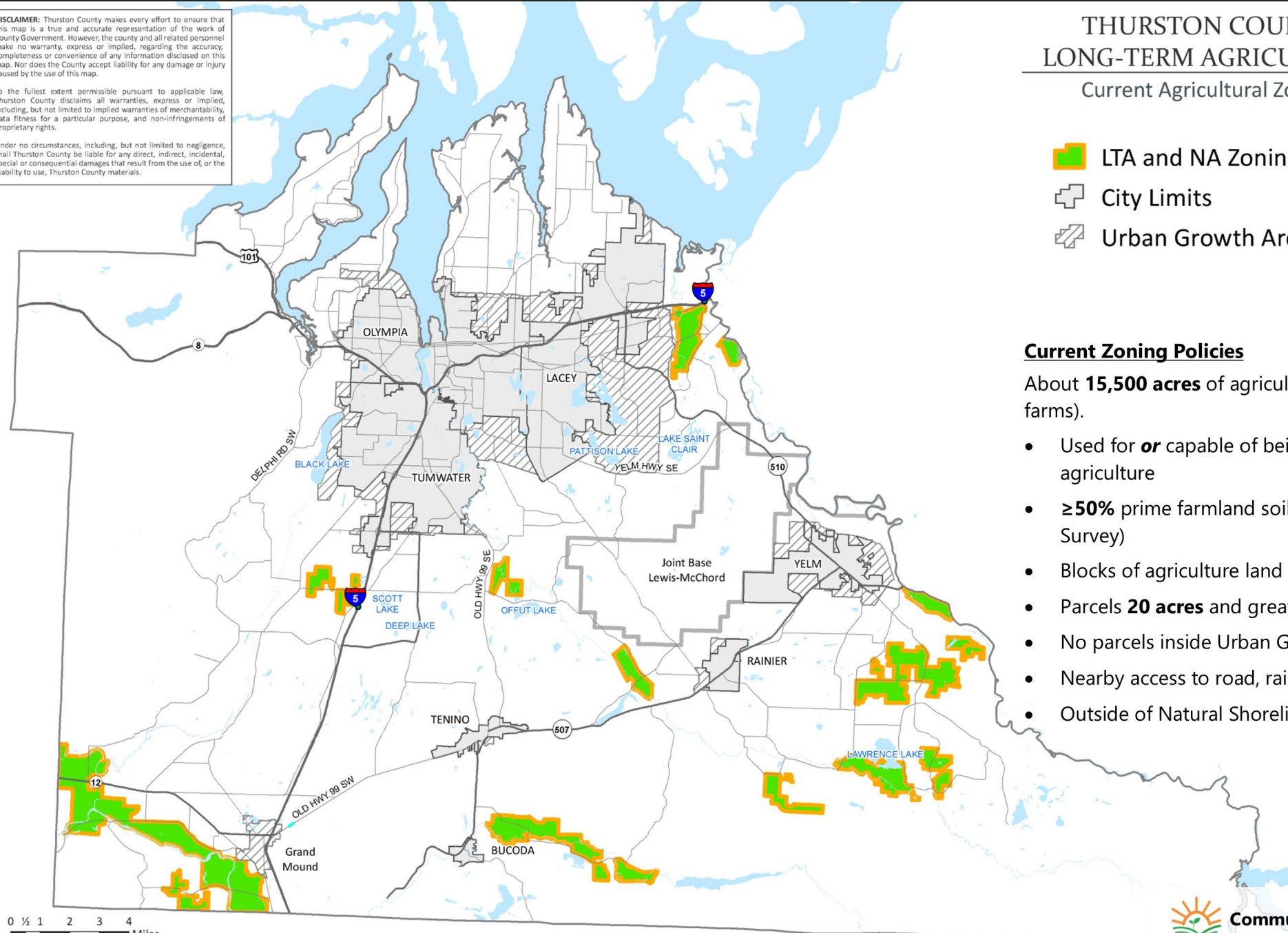
Current Agricultural Zoning

-  LTA and NA Zoning
-  City Limits
-  Urban Growth Area (UGA)

Current Zoning Policies

About **15,500 acres** of agriculture zoning (**72%** existing farms).

- Used for **or** capable of being used for commercial agriculture
- **≥50%** prime farmland soils (**1990** USDA Soil Survey)
- Blocks of agriculture land **200 - 320+ acres**
- Parcels **20 acres** and greater
- No parcels inside Urban Growth Areas
- Nearby access to road, rail, or air routes to markets
- Outside of Natural Shoreline Environments



Community Agriculture Program
Community Planning & Economic Development

What do other jurisdictions do?

County	Prime Farmland Soils	Minimum Parcel Size	"Block Size" Criteria	Allowed in UGAs
Thurston	Yes – "predominantly" prime farmland soils	≥20 acres	320 acres or 200 if nearby to other LTA	No
Skagit	All lands with prime soils	Ag-NRL: ≥5 acres RRc-NRL: ≥40 acres	160 acres when nearby to other resource lands	No
Pierce	East County: 50% or 20 acres Central/South: 25% or 10 acres	East County: ≥10 acres Central/South: ≥40 acres	N/A	No
Snohomish	Must be prime	≥10 acres	40 acres if not nearby to other designated ag land	No
Lewis	Yes, and some non-prime for poultry, horticulture, fisheries	≥20 acres	N/A	Considers proximity
Clark	Yes	≥20 acres	N/A	Considers proximity
Whatcom	Majority of area is prime	Large enough to maintain ag operations	N/A	Considers proximity



Outreach Efforts



Stakeholder Group: Composition

- ▶ 13 members regularly attended, diverse group representing:
 - ▶ Larger farms (50+ acres)
 - ▶ Smaller farms (5-50 acres)
 - ▶ Advocates for farmland protection
 - ▶ Building community (Realtor, Olympia Master Builders)
 - ▶ Technical experts from cities, state offices, and tribes kept in the loop throughout the process

Stakeholder Group

- ▶ Dedicated 14+ hours to learn about and work on this topic
- ▶ Charged with reviewing zoning policies
 - ▶ Narrowed down options
 - ▶ Identified concerns
 - ▶ Shared ideas for broader changes to protect farmland *and* support farmers





What did they share?

- ▶ Financial compensation for loss of development rights
- ▶ Agriculture types and sizes are diverse
- ▶ Need more programs to support farmers
- ▶ Explore other tools to protect farmland
- ▶ Water availability is a concern for new farmers





Other Outreach

- ▶ Agriculture Advisory Committee
- ▶ Agritourism Committee
- ▶ Voluntary Stewardship Program Workgroup
- ▶ Community Road Show
- ▶ Targeted Outreach (Community Farmland Trust, Thurston Conservation District, WSU Ext., Olympia Master Builders, Thurston Chamber of Commerce, Thurston Realtor Association, Thurston Economic Development Council)



Proposed Changes

Stakeholder Group: Major Themes

Current Criteria



Soils: 50%+ Prime Farmland



Urban Growth Areas: None

Proposed Criteria

Protect lands with highest
proportion of prime
farmland soils (75% +)

Ag zoning not right tool for
protecting agriculture in UGAs
Explore other options

Stakeholder Group: Major Themes

Current Criteria



Agricultural Blocks of Land: 200-320 acres



Parcel size: 20 acres

Proposed Criteria

Some felt agricultural blocks could be reduced to 40-100 acres

Leave as 20, or consider smaller acreage from 10-20

Consider average agriculture parcel size in Thurston County (15.5 acres)

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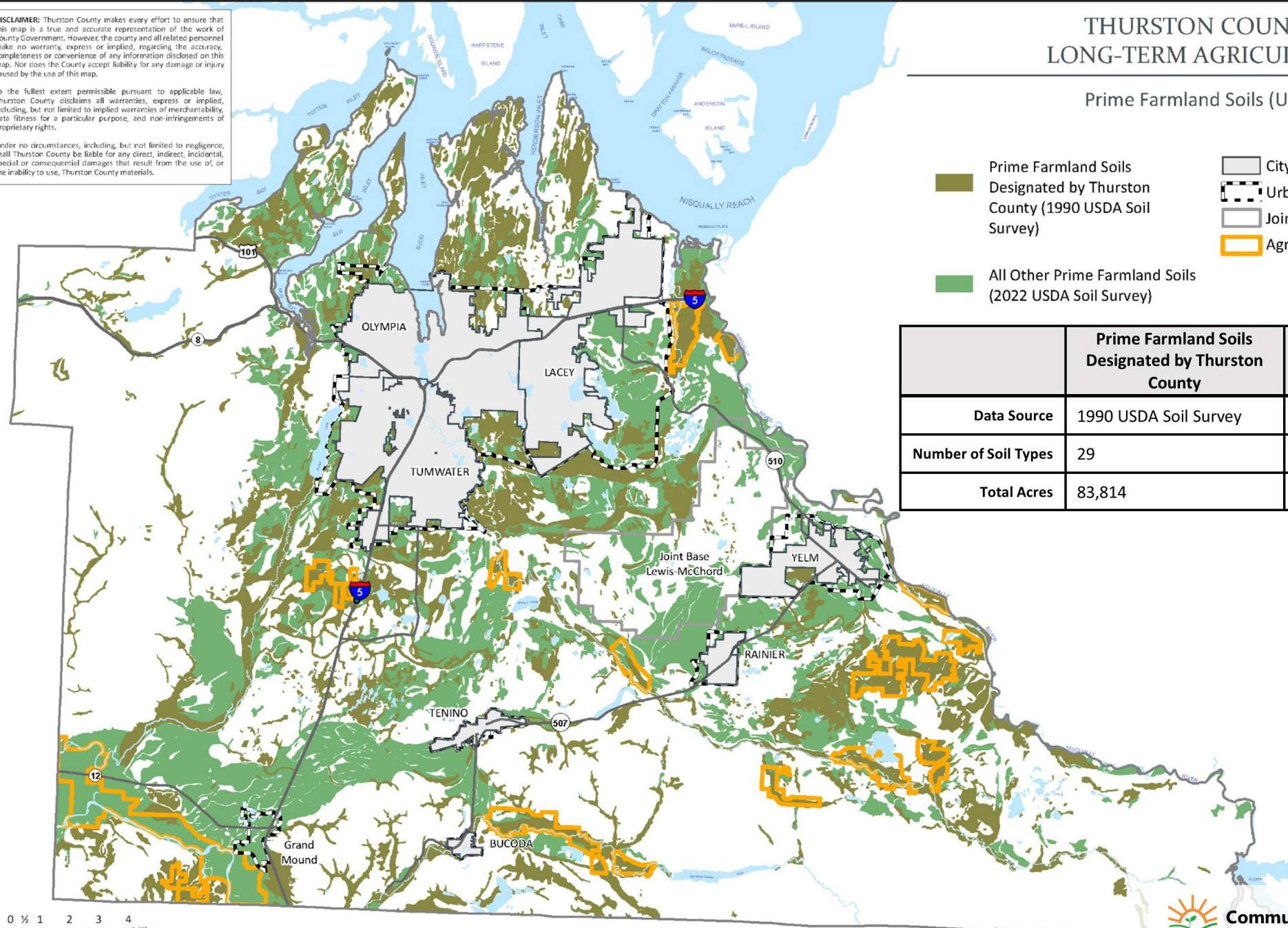
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THURSTON COUNTY LONG-TERM AGRICULTURE

Prime Farmland Soils (USDA)

- Prime Farmland Soils
Designated by Thurston
County (1990 USDA Soil
Survey)
- City Limits
- Urban Growth Area (UGA)
- Joint Base Lewis-McChord
- Agriculture Zoning (LTA or NA)
- All Other Prime Farmland Soils
(2022 USDA Soil Survey)

	Prime Farmland Soils Designated by Thurston County	All Other Prime Farmland Soils
Data Source	1990 USDA Soil Survey	2022 USDA Soil Survey
Number of Soil Types	29	29
Total Acres	83,814	183,452



0 1/4 1 2 3 4
Miles







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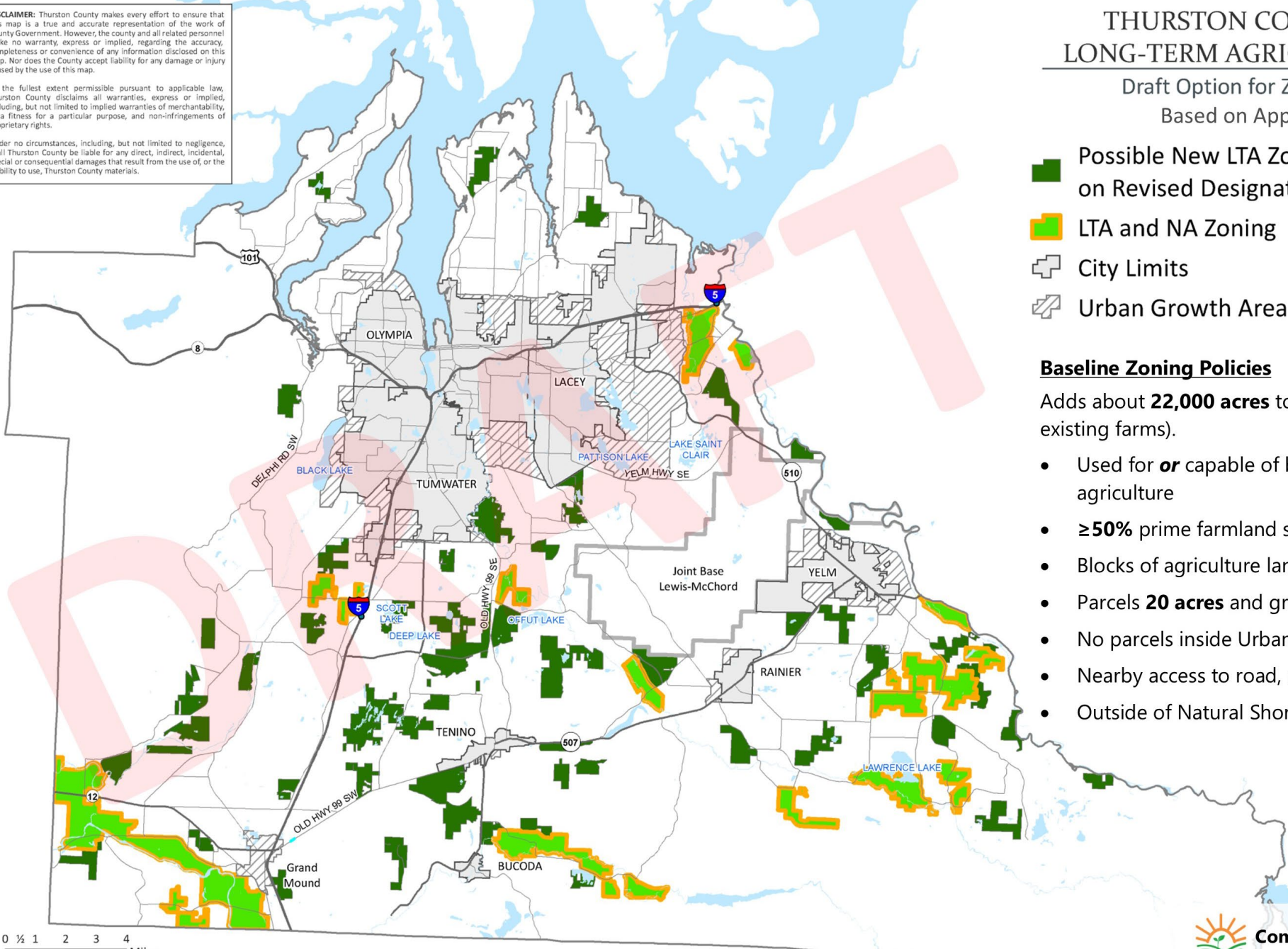
Draft Option for Zoning
Based on Appeal

-  Possible New LTA Zoning based on Revised Designation Criteria
-  LTA and NA Zoning
-  City Limits
-  Urban Growth Area (UGA)

Baseline Zoning Policies

Adds about **22,000 acres** to agriculture zoning (**45%** existing farms).

- Used for **or** capable of being used for commercial agriculture
- **≥50%** prime farmland soils (**2022** USDA Soil Survey)
- Blocks of agriculture land **200 - 320+ acres**
- Parcels **20 acres** and greater
- No parcels inside Urban Growth Areas
- Nearby access to road, rail, or air routes to markets
- Outside of Natural Shoreline Environments







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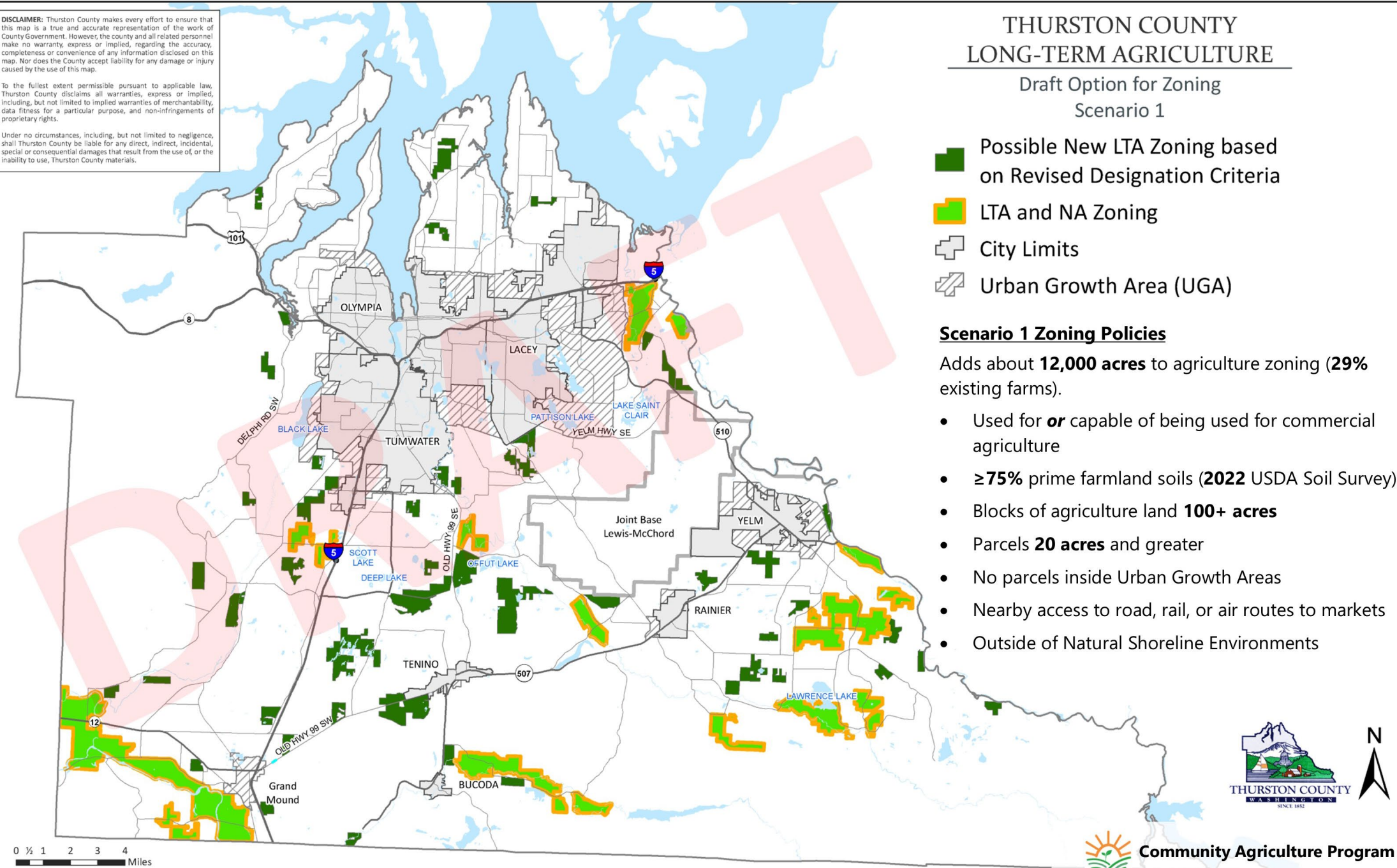
Draft Option for Zoning Scenario 1

-  Possible New LTA Zoning based on Revised Designation Criteria
-  LTA and NA Zoning
-  City Limits
-  Urban Growth Area (UGA)

Scenario 1 Zoning Policies

Adds about **12,000 acres** to agriculture zoning (**29%** existing farms).

- Used for **or** capable of being used for commercial agriculture
- **≥75%** prime farmland soils (**2022** USDA Soil Survey)
- Blocks of agriculture land **100+ acres**
- Parcels **20 acres** and greater
- No parcels inside Urban Growth Areas
- Nearby access to road, rail, or air routes to markets
- Outside of Natural Shoreline Environments







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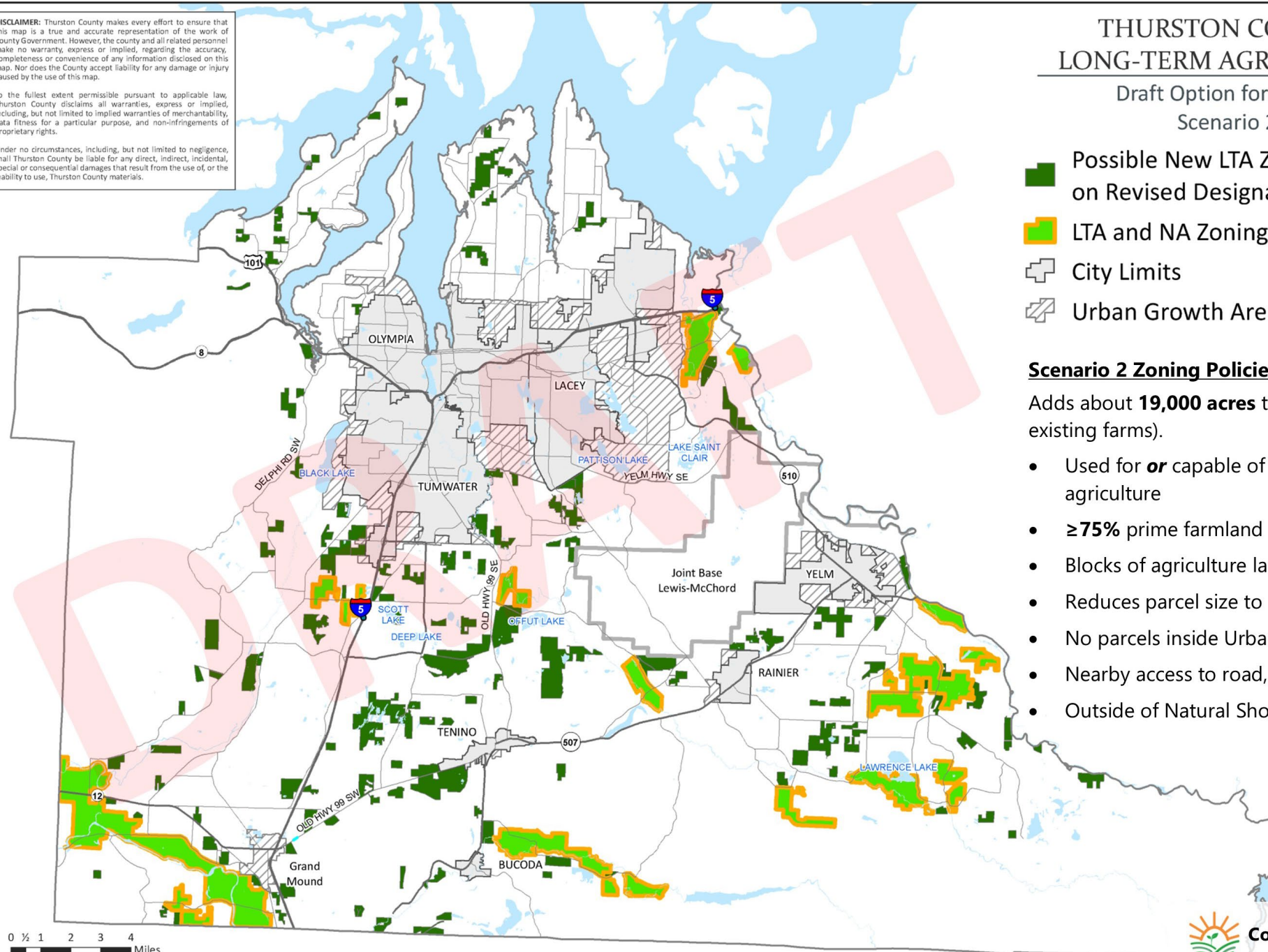
Draft Option for Zoning Scenario 2

-  Possible New LTA Zoning based on Revised Designation Criteria
-  LTA and NA Zoning
-  City Limits
-  Urban Growth Area (UGA)

Scenario 2 Zoning Policies

Adds about **19,000 acres** to agriculture zoning (**32%** existing farms).

- Used for **or** capable of being used for commercial agriculture
- **≥75%** prime farmland soils (**2022** USDA Soil Survey)
- Blocks of agriculture land **40+ acres**
- Reduces parcel size to **15+ acres**
- No parcels inside Urban Growth Areas
- Nearby access to road, rail, or air routes to markets
- Outside of Natural Shoreline Environments



Development Regulation Amendments

- ▶ In response to comments from stakeholder group and informed by outreach efforts
- ▶ Aimed at increasing flexibility, allowing uses that support agriculture, and clarifying requirements
- ▶ Proposal to include cluster requirements on lands not zoned as long-term agriculture to preserve more farmland

Development Regulation Amendments

- ▶ Update Agritourism Overlay District
 - ▶ Clarify uses and development standards
 - ▶ Remove barriers like minimum parcel size
 - ▶ Streamline permit processes
- ▶ Update Agriculture Zoning
 - ▶ Expand uses--giving farmers flexibility to diversify income & strengthen Ag economy
 - ▶ Streamline permit processes

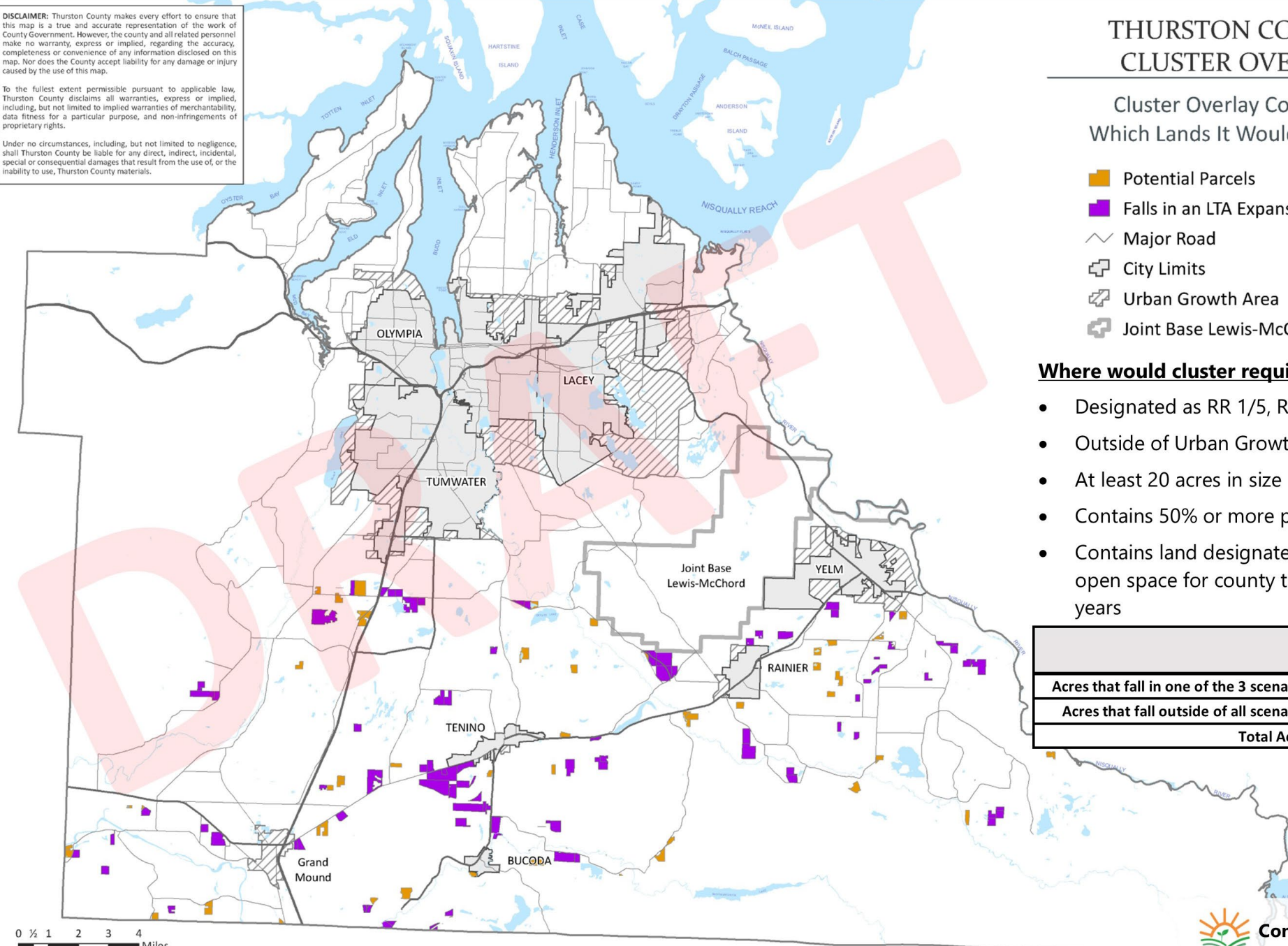
Agriculture Cluster Requirement

- ▶ Protect agricultural lands and operations by requiring development be clustered
- ▶ Same number of houses can fit on parcel while preserving land for Ag use
- ▶ Residential parcel sizes only limited by septic and water facilities
- ▶ Retains higher land value for farmer for ongoing operational needs

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THURSTON COUNTY CLUSTER OVERLAY

Cluster Overlay Concept – Which Lands It Would Apply To

- Potential Parcels
- Falls in an LTA Expansion Option
- Major Road
- City Limits
- Urban Growth Area
- Joint Base Lewis-McChord

Where would cluster requirements apply?

- Designated as RR 1/5, RRR 1/5, and R 1/10
- Outside of Urban Growth Area boundaries
- At least 20 acres in size
- Contains 50% or more prime farmland soils
- Contains land designated as agricultural current use open space for county tax purposes within the past 7 years

	Acres that fall in one of
Acres that fall in one of the 3 scenarios	4,967
Acres that fall outside of all scenarios	1,723
Total Acres	6,690

0 1/2 1 2 3 4
Miles

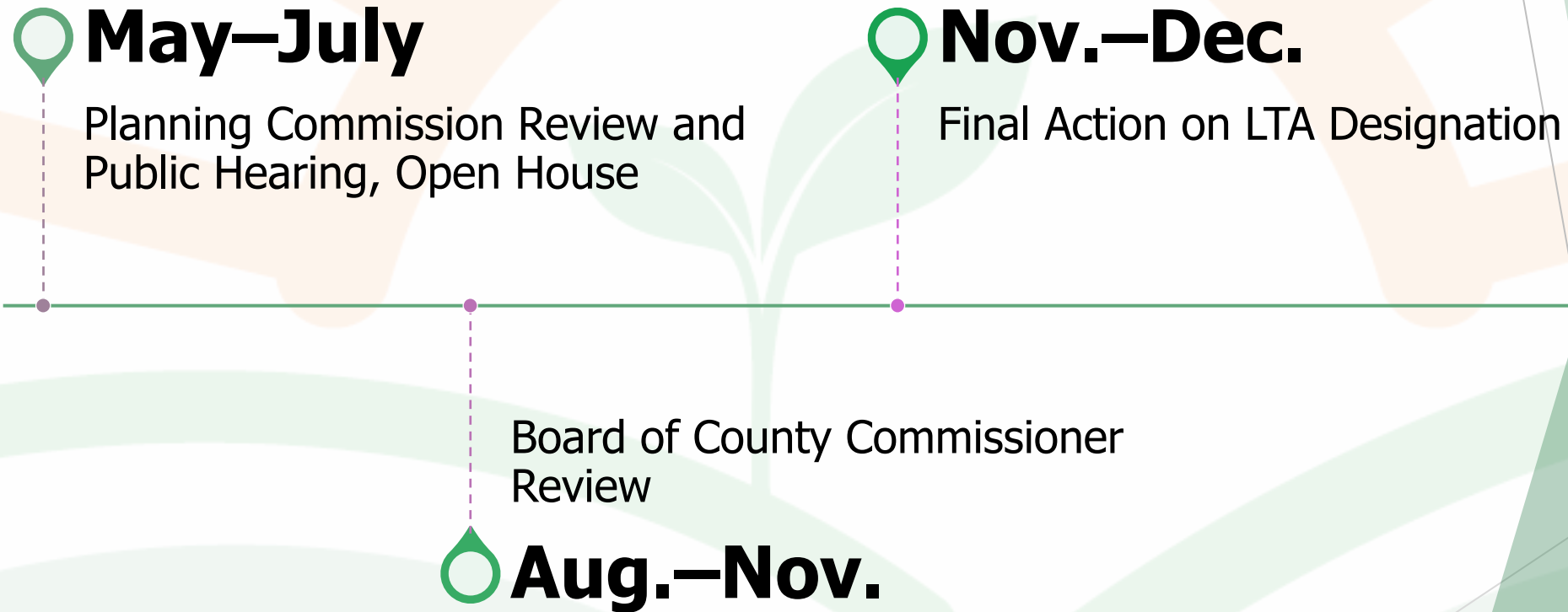


 **Community Agriculture Program**
Community Planning & Economic Development



Next Steps

Project Timeline





Planning Commission Review Schedule

- ▶ **May 3** – work session
- ▶ **May 17** – work session 2, request public hearing
- ▶ **June 21** – public hearing, work session 3
- ▶ **July 5** – work session 4, (possible recommendation)
- ▶ **July 19** – work session 5, recommendation (if needed)



Today's Request

- ▶ Questions or comments?
 - ▶ Bring back questions to May 17 meeting
 - ▶ At next meeting, schedule public hearing



Thank you!

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Other Efforts to Support Agriculture

What else are we doing?

- ▶ Update compensation programs like TDR, PDR, Open Space and Conservation Futures
- ▶ Update agriculture zoning to allow more uses on non-prime farmland soils
- ▶ Propose new zoning tool for agricultural cluster subdivisions
- ▶ Update Agritourism Overlay District



Thurston County Ag Land Conservation Tools

Tool	Future updates
Transfer of Development Rights Program	Grant funding for updates in 2023-2025
Purchase of Development Rights Program	
Conservation Futures Property Tax	
Open Space Current Use Tax Incentive Program	
Open Space Farm and Ag Conservation Land Tax Incentive Program	Board reviewing proposal to expand eligibility Q1 2023
Rural cluster development	Included in proposal
HCP Working Lands Conservation Easements	New program – dedicated funding