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Community Planning and Economic Development

Joshua Cummings, Director

Creating Solutions for Our Future

March 6, 2020

Subject: Prairie plant reviews and Field Screening Guidelines for Prairie Habitat

Prior to the upcoming prairie review season, we are providing information to qualified gopher consultants regarding Thurston County's prairie plant review process. Property owners and applicants may request your services as a qualified consultant for a gopher review unaware of Thurston County's prairie review requirements. Providing this additional service to your applicants is your choice. Individuals with strong south Puget Sound prairie plant identification skills may conduct the prairie plant review and submit a report (survey) that meets county codes and follows the attached Thurston County Prairie Screening Protocol.

To identify the presence of prairie, Thurston County reviews each project to verify whether a site is on a diagnostic soil or historic prairie. For these sites, an onsite survey is needed. Thurston County uses soil mapping from Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and Thurston County Geodata. The list of Thurston County prairie indicator soils (from TCC 24.25.065, Table 24.25-6) is included in the attached Field Screening Guidelines. Prairie soils indicate potential prairie habitat, which is a critical area protected under the Thurston County Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) Title 24. Sites containing prairie soils require a prairie plant review (survey).

The prairie plant review must be conducted during the appropriate growing season, which typically begins in mid-April and runs through September, depending on weather conditions which affect the growing season. This review consists of a site visit that follows the attached guidelines to check for prairie indicator plants listed in the Thurston County CAO. A list of prairie indicator plants, taken from TCC 24.25.065 Tables 24.25-7 and 24.25-8, is included in the attached protocol and data sheets.

This interim Prairie Screening process was devised as a rapid assessment screening tool to determine if prairie habitat present, and if the proposed building project appears likely to impact prairie habitat or if avoidance of this critical area feasible.

In order to accurately detect the presence of prairie plants on a site, reviews conducted earlier in the season are best. Many prairie plant species are senesced and difficult or impossible to detect in the late summer or fall.

County biologists conduct spring prairie reviews for many applications on our pending gopher review list prior to the start of MPG review season. Applicants and/or consultants will need to notify us if they do not want us to conduct a prairie review. During the gopher review window, county prairie plant reviews are conducted at the same time we conduct gopher screening.

Thurston County's Prairie Plant Review process uses the attached Field Guidelines for Prairie Habitat Screening.

If you intend to submit a prairie plant survey, please notify the County as soon as possible via email to vince.mcdowell@co.thurston.wa.us. If the County does not receive this notification, the county will conduct the prairie site visit for applications we receive.

Your completed prairie plant survey can be submitted with your gopher report or as a separate document. All required information must be included. We must have a project application in review in order to review your reports.

Applications and/or consultant gopher reports received by the county at the end of the review season which do not include a prairie plant review may result in those projects having to wait until the next spring's review window to receive the required prairie surveys.

Additional prairie information including the CAO prairie plant manual is available online at the Thurston County website <http://www.thurstoncountywa.gov/planning/Pages/hcp-prairie-review.aspx>.

Thank you for all your efforts helping our citizens provide what they need to proceed with their projects.

Sincerely,

Vince McDowell

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Enclosures:

*2020 Thurston County Field Screening Guidelines for Prairie Habitat
Standards for prairie reports*