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**COMMUNITY PLANNING &
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

Joshua Cummings, Director

Creating Solutions for Our Future

MEMORANDUM (1)

TO: Thurston County Planning Commission

FROM: Maya Teeple, Associate Planner
Allison Osterberg, Senior Planner

DATE: January 16, 2019

SUBJECT: Comprehensive Plan Update: Chapter 3 – Natural Resource Lands

Background

Chapter 3 of the Comprehensive Plan, Natural Resource Lands, provides a framework for managing lands that support natural resource industries within Thurston County, including: agriculture, aquaculture, forestry, and mining. The chapter sets goals, objectives, and policies for the protection and long-term conservation of these resources. Designation criteria is also set within this chapter for long-term agriculture, long-term forestry, and mineral resources.

The Washington State Growth Management Act states the following goal for natural resource industries:

“Natural resource industries. Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forestlands and productive agricultural lands, and discourage incompatible uses.”

Thurston County has experienced an increase in population growth over the last several decades and is expected to continue growing, reaching nearly a 40% increase in population by the year 2040. With population growth comes the increased need to balance natural resource industries with other competing land uses, such as residential, commercial, and environmental protection.

The Natural Resources Chapter addresses topics such as:

- Build a robust, diverse, and strong local economy;
- Compatibility of resource industries with adjacent uses;
- Protection of resource industries for future use;
- Protection of adjacent land uses from impacts of resource industries;
- Meeting the need of future use for resources within the County and region.

What public feedback has the Natural Resource Lands Chapter received?

Over the past few months, staff have met with multiple stakeholder groups to discuss hopes and concerns for the future. A few of the group meetings and opportunities for feedback included:

- Comprehensive Plan Open Houses (March 27 and March 31, 2018)
- PC Public Hearing – Scope of Mineral Resource Lands Designation (March 7, 2018)
- Nisqually Subarea Open House (March 3, 2018)
- Thurston Mineral Resource Lands Stakeholder Group (9 meetings, April 2017- October 2018)
- Thurston County Agricultural Advisory Committee (Fall, 2017)
- Henderson Inlet and Nisqually Reach Shellfish Protection District Stakeholder Advisory Committee (2018)

Overwhelmingly, the community has expressed a desire to balance the four natural resource industries while protecting and preserving the environment and rural character. Other concerns that were expressed include:

- Conserve natural resource lands for future use, including agriculture and forestry that occurs outside of designated areas in rural zones;
- Address a generational crisis among farmers;
- Ensure sustainable forestry and mining;
- Identify and conserve lands for future resource use;
- Plan to minimize the impact of resource industries on surrounding uses and rural character;
- Plan to minimize the impact of resource industries on wildlife, habitat, and water resources.

What has changed in the Natural Resource Lands Chapter?

Updates to the Natural Resource Lands Chapter reflect current conditions, updated demographic information, supply and demand of natural resources in Thurston County. Other major changes in this chapter include:

- Map change to the Mineral Resource Lands Designation map (formerly M-43, now N-2), changing from a site-by-site designation process to a countywide designation process;
- Accompanying text and policy changes within Chapter 3 to account for a countywide designation process;
- Long-Term Forestry review, update and proposed long-term forestry land use map amendment and rezones;
- Inclusion of information on the Voluntary Stewardship Program.

Changes in the goals and policies primarily focus on updating the Mineral Resource Lands section to account for a shift to a countywide designation process. These new goals, objectives and policies are drafted from current policies in the Comprehensive Plan, suggested policies from Associated Earth and Sciences, Inc. (consultant), other jurisdictions including Snohomish and Whatcom County, and the Mineral Resource Lands Stakeholder group.

Decision Points

Staff are requesting the Planning Commission recommendations regarding the following items in Chapter 3 of the comprehensive plan.

- A. Amend Designation Criteria to reflect co-designation of mineral resource lands with long-term agriculture. (2 options described below – this decision reflects the Planning Commission’s 2018 recommendation on the scope of the mineral lands update.)

Amendments to the Thurston County Code associated with the mineral lands. These amendments are further detailed in Memo 2.

- B. Noise Monitoring (2 options)
- C. Resource Use Notice Distance (2 options)
- D. Expansion of operations onto undesignated lands (3 options)
- E. Interpreting designation map at the parcel level (5 options)

Amendments related to Long Term Forestry

- F. Long Term Forestry Review – Parcels Considered for Land Use Amendment (4 blocks each with 2 to 3 options). These amendments are further detailed in Memo 3.

- G. Consider whether the draft changes to Chapter 3 are clear and sufficiently describe and capture the community’s interests in natural resource lands, within the scope of the periodic update.

A. Option to co-designate long term agricultural lands

This option would eliminate the MRL Designation Criteria text within Chapter 3 which prohibits designation on long term agriculture lands. Staff are requesting a recommendation regarding the Mineral Lands Designation Criteria within Chapter 3 of the Comprehensive Plan. The Planning Commission recommendation from March 21, 2018, recommended that the scope for mineral lands designation follow Map Option 1A.

These Options are now reflected as Options A-1 and A-2. Option A-1 maps the current designation criteria for mineral lands that exists in the Comprehensive Plan. Option A-2 maps the current comprehensive plan criteria, except for the co-designation of Long Term Agriculture. The minimum designation criteria currently in the Comprehensive Plan states:

“5. Mineral resource lands **shall not include agriculture lands of long term commercial significance**, or historical/cultural preservation sites.”

The text above is text currently in the minimum designation criteria within the Comprehensive Plan. On March 21, 2018, the Planning Commission recommended Option 1A (now A-2), which maps the current designation criteria in the Comprehensive Plan, with the exception of allowing for co-designation of mineral resource lands with long term agriculture. Staff are requesting from the Planning Commission a decision on how to address the above text, which would affect the text within Chapter 3 of the Comprehensive Plan:

- A-1.** Maintain text as is currently written in the Comprehensive Plan. This option does not co-designate mineral resource lands with long-term agriculture.

- A-2. Amend minimum designation criteria to strike out “**agriculture lands of long term commercial significance, or**”. This option allows for co-designation of mineral resource lands with long term agriculture.