



**Snohomish County**  
*Planning and Development  
 Services*

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**PERMIT SUBMITTAL**

Appointment  
 425.388.3311  
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This Assistance Bulletin only applies to property within unincorporated Snohomish County and does not apply to property within incorporated city limits.

**Q: What is an Urban Center?**

**A:** Urban centers are compact, well-designed areas that concentrate a variety of land uses in one place. Urban centers are people-oriented living and working places that allow residents to walk to shops and high capacity transit stations. The County Council (Council) has designated Urban Centers on the Snohomish County Future Land Use Map (FLUM) where significant population and employment growth can be located, a community-wide focal point can be provided, and the increased use of transit, bicycling, and walking can be supported.



Snohomish County has designated seven urban centers, all located in the unincorporated Southwest Urban Growth Area. The implementing zoning for these seven urban centers is UC. There are seven designated urban centers in unincorporated Snohomish County (I-5/164<sup>th</sup> St, I-5/128<sup>th</sup> St, SR 527/196<sup>th</sup> St, SR 99/152<sup>nd</sup> St, Point Wells, I-5/44<sup>th</sup> Ave W, and SR 99/SR 525).

**Q: Are there local examples of urban center development?**

**A:** Five developments were approved and constructed under Snohomish County's Urban Centers Demonstration Program (UCDP), which preceded the adoption of the UC zone and Snohomish County Code (SCC) Chapter 30.34A. The five developments are:

- Newberry Square (west of the Ash Way park and ride lot located north of 164<sup>th</sup> St)
- Prestonwood (1726 165<sup>th</sup> Place SW, Lynnwood)
- Nichorwynd (15503 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue W, Lynnwood)
- Esplanade (148<sup>th</sup> Street and Seattle Hill Road)
- Zocalo (201<sup>st</sup> Place and Bothell-Everett Highway)

Other examples within cities include:

- Mill Creek Town Center (Mill Creek)
- Village Center (Mukilteo)
- Village Commons (Stanwood)
- Portola Village (Everett)
- Redmond Town Center (Redmond)
- University Village (Seattle)
- Kent Station (Kent)

This bulletin is intended only as an information guide. The information may not be complete and is subject to change. For complete legal information, refer to Snohomish County Code.

## Q: What is Floor Area Ratio or FAR?

**A:** Floor Area Ratio (FAR) is a measure often used to determine the intensity of land use and provides a measurement of the maximum amount of building that may be constructed on a site. It is similar to dwelling units per acre which is how the density of residential development is often expressed. SCC 30.91F.445 defines FAR as “the interior building area square footage divided by the gross site area.”

*30.91F.445 "Floor Area Ratio" means the total building square footage (building area), measured to the inside face of exterior walls, excluding areas below finished grade, space dedicated to parking, mechanical spaces, elevator and stair shafts, lobbies and commons spaces including atriums and space used for any bonus features, divided by the site size square footage (site area).*

*Floor Area Ratio = (Building area)/(Site area)*

A higher FAR signifies a higher intensity of land use, and a lower FAR likewise signifies a lower intensity of land use. FAR is increased as the building occupies a greater portion of the parcel, or when additional floors are added. Specifications about how tall a building is, its shape or how it looks are addressed through site and architectural standards.

## Q: What uses are permitted in the UC zone?

**A:** In general, a wide range of retail, office, multiple family residential, civic, and medical uses compatible with transit and pedestrian-oriented development are permitted. The specific list of permitted uses is found in SCC 30.22.100.

## Q: What are the specific regulations that guide development in the UC zone?

**A:** New and re-development in the UC zone must comply with Chapter 30.34A SCC and any other applicable chapters in SCC Title 30 unless the activity is specifically exempted. These regulations govern bulk requirements (such as height and setbacks), the layout of the development (landscaping and on-site circulation), and architectural standards (how the building looks).

## Q: What development is exempt from SCC Chapter 30.34A requirements?

**A:** Per SCC 30.34A.010, the following activities are not subject to the urban center development regulations contained in SCC Chapter 30.34A. Exempted developments shall comply with all other applicable provisions contained in SCC Title 30 (i.e. landscaping, parking, signs, etc.); any applicable environmental regulations (i.e. critical areas and drainage); and applicable building codes.

- Interior alterations that do not alter the exterior appearance of a structure or modify an existing site condition.
  - Site and exterior alterations that do not exceed 75 percent of the assessed valuation (building or land) according to the most recent Snohomish County assessor records.
  - Building additions that are less than 10 percent of the existing floor area of the existing building(s). Any cumulative floor area increase after May 12, 2010, that totals more than 10 percent shall not be exempt unless approved pursuant to SCC 30.34A.180.
  - Normal or routine building and site maintenance or repair that is exempt from permit requirements.
  - Any remodeling or expansion of existing single-family residences with no change in use or addition of dwelling units involved.
  - Reconstruction of a single-family residence if it is destroyed due to fire or natural disaster.
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**Q:** What are the submittal requirements for an urban center development application?

**A:** All applications shall contain the items on the *Urban Center Development Submittal Checklist* and any other applicable submittal checklists (e.g landscaping plan, land disturbing activity, etc.) and shall be accompanied with the following:

- Master permit application
- Site plan, landscaping plan, and drawings of the proposed building(s)
- Targeted or full stormwater site plan pursuant to SCC Chapter 30.63A
- Traffic study pursuant to SCC Chapter 30.66B (Applicants are required to schedule a traffic pre-submittal conference)
- SEPA Checklist
- Transit compatibility plan
- Transportation Demand Management (TDM) plan
- Summary of pre-application neighborhood meeting

The *Urban Center Development Submittal Checklist* is available from PDS or may be accessed from the web at: <http://www.co.snohomish.wa.us/documents/Departments/PDS/Checklists/UrbanCenterSubmittalChecklist.pdf>

**Q:** What is the review process for an urban center development application?

**A:** SCC 30.34A.180 establishes the urban center review and approval process. Following submittal of a complete application, the applicant must immediately initiate an attempt to negotiate a “municipal agreement” with a city or town in whose future annexation area the development is located. The municipal agreement is an agreement entered into between an applicant and jurisdiction (city and/or town) in whose future annexation area the development is located. The agreement may define elements of the proposed urban center development such as design, location, density, or other aspects of the proposed development. It must be consistent with the County’s development regulations. It cannot be less restrictive than the County’s development regulations; however, the parties may agree to impose more restrictive development conditions. A municipal agreement precedes a development agreement. An applicant and the city or town has 45 days to attempt negotiations on a municipal agreement. Either party may withdraw before the end of the 45-day period or they may mutually request an extension for additional time. The 45-day clock starts on the first meeting between parties. If a municipal agreement is reached, the application (including completion of an EIS, if required) would be reviewed according to SCC Chapter 30.75 (Development Agreement). A development agreement would then be negotiated between the County and the applicant. The development agreement is forwarded to the Hearing Examiner (HE) who schedules a public hearing. The HE’s recommendation is forwarded as an ordinance to the Council. The Council has final approval authority. Any party of record has the option to appeal the Council’s decision to Superior Court.

Should a municipal agreement not be reached, the urban center application is reviewed according to SCC Chapter 30.72 (Type 2 quasi-judicial process). The application is sent to the urban center design review board (Board) who will hold a public meeting. The Board provides comments to PDS. If required, an EIS is completed and any mitigation measures would be incorporated into the staff recommendation. The staff recommendation is sent to the HE. The HE holds a public hearing. The HE may impose conditions on the development based on the public record including comments from the design review board. Any party of record may appeal the HE’s decision to the Council.

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**Q: Where can I get additional information on developing in the UC zone?**

**A:** For additional questions, please see the separate document titled *Urban Center Zone Frequently Asked Questions* available via the link below. You may also call 425-388-3311 with questions. Copies of the Urban Center Development Submittal Checklist and other required forms are available via the PDS Land Use Forms web page.

[http://www1.co.snohomish.wa.us/Departments/PDS/Divisions/Permitting/land\\_use\\_forms.htm](http://www1.co.snohomish.wa.us/Departments/PDS/Divisions/Permitting/land_use_forms.htm)

The website can also be found by typing “Land Use Forms” in the search box on the County’s website, [www.snoco.org](http://www.snoco.org) and selecting the third link from the search list. PDS has also prepared a handbook that may provide assistance in understanding the design standards outlined in chapter 30.34A SCC. This document is available at the link listed above.

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