

**UDC UPDATE PROJECT**  
**PUBLIC FORUM**  
**RE: RURAL CLUSTER SUBDIVISIONS**  
**AS DISCUSSED ON SEP 6, 2007 AT 7:50 P.M.**

**Please note:** These are the individual comments made by the audience at the evening session of the UDC Public Forum. To view this commentary in summary form, please go to: [Snohomish County : UDC Update Project : Meeting Schedule](#)

**In attendance:**

Attendance included staff from PDS and DPW, a representative from The Tulalip Tribes and over a dozen citizens, with strongest representation by neighborhood/community advocates.

<u><b>Review Process</b></u>
<b><i>Are notification and public input opportunities for Rural Cluster Subdivision (RCSD) proposals adequate?</i></b>
No.
What is a Rural Cluster Subdivision (RCSD)?
Signs/Postings are usually located on the street edge in low-density area. Notification mailing gets sent out without any announcement. Those with families tend not to get involved until trees start getting cleared. The community and the general public need to be educated about the notification process.
Do you have to be a party of record in order to be informed?
Change the notification radius from 1000 feet to 20 miles.
Create a community list or some sort of email distribution list that sends monthly mailings to community groups who have specified an interest in wanting to be notified of all new permit applications. Members should have the ability to specify and self-select the type of development they are interested in.
Rural Cluster Subdivision (RCSD) development prior to the implementation of the density bonus was not significant enough to be noticed.
The signs/posting is done on an honor system. Developers sign an affidavit but when signs are not posted properly, there is no consequence. The County should hold developers responsible for proper posting.
The recent surge in Rural Cluster Subdivision applications is because of the Critical Areas Regulations (CAR).
One developer actually went to a meeting of the Home Owners Association at one of his subdivisions to vet potential issues. The homeowner showed up at the Hearing Examiner claiming to not have been notified.
There is a problem with the County vesting policy.
Neighbors likely do not understand the language being used on the notification posting or where their property is in relation to what is being proposed. The County may want to provide a link to the SCOPI or Assessor website to make the notification more understandable.
Snohomish County On-line Property Information (SCOPI) is not very user-friendly.
Once a sign goes up, there is enough data for people to go online and view what is going on.
If the County changed the notification/mailing policy to a wider radius covering the entire postal code and sent mailings on a monthly basis with a listing of all the developments that were applied for that month instead of individual notices for each project, there may be a cost savings.
The signs should state when the public comment period ends.
The text on some of these notification signs are washed out and unreadable.
People can call the telephone number listed on the actual sign and find out from the County planner when the public comment period ends – it is not that difficult.

Look at how the City of Lynnwood sends out notices as a model.

***How much discretion should the director have in responding to public input during the review process?***

Whose side does he/she come down on? If it is the public input side, then director should have lots of discretion.

The director/staff discretion should be limited to documenting that the public involvement process was adequate.

The County should mandate a process by which the developer is required to listen and respond to community input. The public would provide enforcement in this scenario.

Most developers would rather know about problems ahead of time so that they can mitigate/defuse them up front, otherwise it ends up costing more money.

Developers are inclined to cooperate more effectively with the public when approached in the beginning. When the public appears late in the game at the Hearing Examiner regarding an off-site issue, the developer is less likely to help them.

Developers can initiate contact with Home Owners Associations and talk to neighbors up front. Interested parties can also get in touch with the developer through the planner.

**Water**

***How should the County confirm the availability of adequate water in reviewing proposals for rural cluster development?***

Existing residents had to prove water availability to receive a building permit. Given the recent decision by the Department of Ecology, developers should be required to have proof of water availability for each parcel within a project at the subdivision phase.

Doesn't common sense tell you that if you're going to build houses then they ought to have water?

Requiring proof of water availability at the preliminary plat stage is not wise and would cause problems. Many applicants end up modifying their plans and/or moving footprints and drainfields.

Doesn't existing code require Rural Cluster Subdivisions to fit within the existing infrastructure of the area?

The County needs to make sure that residents comply with instream flow rules and that the adequacy of aquifers are being monitored and protected.

**Rural Character and Quality**

***Are the site design standards and open space standards adequately protecting and enhancing the character, quality and identity of rural areas?***

The policies related to this question need to be rewritten. Since there is no local agreement or known policy direction as to what Snohomish County rural character and quality are, developing uniform standards and enforcing such standards would be difficult. Snohomish County has changed from what it was thirty years ago.

The definition of rural character and quality changes as density increases.

How do you go about codifying rural character? We have to begin with a definition of rural.

The individual perspective of rural character and natural vegetation is subjective.  
New code provisions should require that native vegetation be retained.  
Clearing and grading should only be allowed on the building footprint.  
There is a difference between how open space/greenspace is viewed in an urban area (active recreation) versus a rural area (corridor, pasture, wildlife habitat).

Rural character does not need to be subject to design standards and should remain rural as much as possible. The development Aspen, for instance, looks like a giant subdivision placed in a rural area, wasted and removed vegetation and does not create a rural feeling at all.

There is no reason that the County cannot master plan and demand connectivity between developments. Consider exploring ways to allow contiguous spaces/habitat corridors.

The intent of Rural Cluster Subdivisions are supposed to be the centerpiece of maintaining rural character but are actually creating oversized suburbs with hideous cul-de-sacs that are a blight on the rural area. Density has to be addressed in this process.

How did we get to a point of allowing 30, 40 or even 100 houses to be built next to one another? The County should only allow 5 or 10 units per project and only if the developer provides a public benefit such as smaller

building footprints or affordable housing.

Rural Cluster Subdivisions should be spaced 10 to 20-acres apart.

New developments in rural areas should not be allowed to contrast too distinctly with what was there before.

House sizes of units in new developments should also be proportional to the house sizes of surrounding units. New code provisions should not allow the proliferation of large houses in the same area.

There should not be the ability to double existing density. Open spaces should be shared and arranged in a contiguous fashion. Explore formula for maximum house size based on total acreage. Smaller houses should be allowed more density.

The County should mandate that open space be donated to a non profit! In the rural area, all open space should be preserved; in urban areas, a portion of it should be preserved.

Who will be the watchdog of set aside open space? Options are usually a Home Owners Association, the developer or a Conservation Trust. With the latter, it is important to find one that does not demand removal of invasive species.

**Roads**

***How should the County address the perceived and real impacts of rural clusters on rural roads?***

There needs to be master planning or some contribution system where the development community is paying for traffic problems as they go. Traditional way of looking at traffic problems is usually at main intersections. Density is being doubled in rural areas and traffic problems are not being analyzed on rural roads.

Developers rarely are allowed double density in rural areas and are also paying traffic mitigation fees on every project that is built.

Traffic mitigation fees are not being used locally/applied to specific problems created by specific developments.

The County uses 9 trips/day as a base to determine Levels of Service. Average daily trips are truly less than that but unless we go before the hearing examiner to get it changed, it will remain at 9 trips/day.

Mitigation fees are based on transportation service areas and improvements required in those areas. The standards levels of service (LOS) are different for urban and rural areas. Urban development cannot exceed LOS E while rural developments cannot exceed LOS C. The problem is that traffic volumes would need to be much higher than they are now to exceed rural LOS. Traffic impacts may appear to be worsening but the County Council has set the threshold and LOS in the rural area. Developers do pay appropriate fees.

Traffic mitigation fees go into a general pot for the entire transportation service area and fees are spent on the most important perceived need. Such fees should be required to be set aside and spent only on the roads that are specifically impacted by a project. Shoulder widening for pedestrian safety in rural areas should be at the top of the list of important needs.

The County should not hold developers to a higher standard than it holds itself in terms of road standards. For example, if an arterial leading into a Rural Cluster Subdivision is 20-feet, developers should not be required to install internal roads of 24 – 27-feet.

The County should allow alleys in Rural Cluster Subdivisions so that garages can be set back.

Allow back-road access.

Concern about existing neighborhoods becoming “islands” due to new developments.

Existing dead end roads should remain dead ended.

The Department of Public Works and the Fire Departments will not allow those roads to remain dead ended.

There should be ingress and egress limits to large (3000-acre) developments. Such developments should not be able to use existing roads that are used by farmers.

Rural Cluster roads and driveways should be gravel.

***How should roads and pedestrian facilities be built to balance the needs of the public as stated in the comprehensive plan?***

Addressed in above comments.

<b><u>Affordable Housing</u></b>
<b><i>Are Rural Cluster Subdivisions (RCSDs) supporting and promoting affordable housing?</i></b>
No, the problem is with the policy and how “affordable” is defined.
If you place the word “more” in front of affordable housing in the above question, then the answer would be yes.
Explore having a percentage of homes below the median price.
No, it does not make any sense for developers to do inclusionary zoning; developers pay impact fees for that.
<b><u>Rural Urban Transition Area (RUTA)</u></b>
<b><i>Can rural clusters be designed/developed to practically accommodate future urban growth in the Rural Urban Transition Area (RUTA)?</i></b>
Should we set aside space in the RUTA for future development to be allowed?
No, Rural Clusters are too site specific; there may be well/septic constraints.
The regulations state that open space tracts located in the RUTA may facilitate future redivision and future access. Rural Clusters should not be allowed to be located in the RUTA.
Transition areas used to use “dry sewers” but this is no longer allowed because cities will object.
If we had an overseeing authority to the health district. They don’t want the responsibility.
<b><u>Final Comments</u></b>
The County should conduct a study to determine if Rural Cluster Subdivisions truly preserve open space compared to if land is traditionally developed at 1 dwelling unit per 5-acres.
The public forum is a good place to learn about these issues and get background information.
The next public forum should place Rural Cluster Subdivisions first on the agenda.
Rural Cluster Subdivisions are raising property values and promoting the demise of farms faster than would otherwise occur.

**FLIPCHART COMMENTS**

<b>Question #1: Are notification and public input opportunities for RCSD proposals adequate?</b>
No!
Sign location.
Education/community connection.
Could be changed to 20 miles.
Interest group list.
Person receiving notice may not be able to decipher it.
Better mapping system.
<b>Question #2: How much discretion should the director have in responding to public input during the review process?</b>
Depends on which side their coming down on.
There was an adequate public involvement process.
<b>Question #3: How should the county confirm the availability of adequate water in reviewing proposals for rural cluster development?</b>
Require adequacy of water earlier in the process.
Adequate water in for streams/in stream rules.
<b>Question #4: Are the site design standards and open space standards adequately protecting and enhancing the character, quality and identity of rural clusters?</b>
Problem is with the policy.

Leave trees/retain native vegetation.
Contiguous spaces.
Feeling of oversized suburbs.
Distance separation of projects.
Contrast of what was there vs. what is there should not be too great.
Mandate the open space be donated to non-profit.
<b>Question #5: How should the county address the perceived and real impacts of rural clusters on rural roads? - exterior</b>
Master planning.
Change policy for spending dollars in the transportation service areas.
Narrower roads.
Keep dead-end roads.
Gravel roads.
<b>Question #6: How should roads and pedestrian facilities be built to balance the needs of the public as stated in the comprehensive plan?</b>
No input at this time.
<b>Question #7: Are RCSDs supporting and promoting affordable housing?</b>
Problem is with policy.
Inclusionary housing.
<b>Question #8: Can rural clusters be design/developed to practically accommodate future urban growth in the Rural Urban Transition Area?</b>
Community drainfield.
Rural clusters in rural urban transition areas should go away.
Dry sewers.