2004 King County Comprehensive Plan Update
Area Zoning Study

Department of Development and Environmental Services

Study Area:	**Willows Road**

Summary

This subarea of approximately 128 acres is currently designated Rural Residential on the King County Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map. The predominant zoning is RA-2.5-SO, Rural Residential, one home per 2.5 acres within a special district overlay. The area is part of the Rural Area but is nearly surrounded by the Urban Growth Area.

The purpose of this subarea plan is to determine whether any or all of these Rural properties should be included in the Urban Growth Area. The intent of the existing Rural designation was to provide a buffer between the Urban area and the Sammamish Agricultural Production District to the east, but it is questionable whether it still serves that purpose.

It is proposed that the Urban Growth Area be amended to include this entire subarea. Maps and a list of parcels indicating the proposed amendments are attached.

Background

The 1981 Northshore Community Plan designated this subarea for lower residential density than the adjacent urban residential areas to the west. At that time it was generally believed that soon market forces were going to push urban development east from Lake Washington to the mountains. However, prime agricultural land occupied the Sammamish River Valley in between. In an effort to protect the agricultural land from encroachment and the negative environmental impacts of adjacent urban development, a buffer was created by applying low-density residential (R-1) zoning to the area approximately a half mile wide on both the west and east sides of the agricultural land. The Willows Road study area was the southern portion of the western buffer area.

By the time the Updated Northshore Community Plan was prepared in 1991, the northern two-thirds of the western buffer was rezoned urban low-density residential (RS-15000-P), and was incorporated with Woodinville in 1993. The Willows subarea was zoned AR-5-P.

With the passage of the Growth Management Act and the subsequent 1994 King County Comprehensive Plan, the Willows Road subarea retained its Rural land use designation and zoning. With the adoption of Title 21A, the new zoning code, the study area zoning became RA-2.5-SO and RA-5-SO. The Agricultural Production Buffer Special District Overlay was applied to all Rural land adjacent to Agricultural Production District.

Recently, however, property owners have requested that the area be redesignated Urban. This subarea plan was carried out to analyze the area for possible redesignation to Urban, as authorized by King County Council Motion 11697.

Applicable Countywide Planning Policies:

FW-1 STEP 9. Amendments to the Countywide Planning Policies may be developed by the Growth Management Planning Council or its successor, or by the Metropolitan King County Council, as provided in this policy. Amendments to the Countywide Planning Policies, not including amendments to the Urban Growth Area pursuant to Step 7 and 8 b and c above, shall be subject to ratification by at least 30 percent of the city and County governments representing 70 percent of the population in King County. Adoption and ratification of this policy shall constitute an amendment to the May 27, 1992 interlocal agreement among King County, the City of Seattle, and the suburban cities and towns in King County for the Growth Management Planning Council of King County.

Applicable King County Comprehensive Plan Policies:

U- 102 The Urban Growth Area designations shown on the official Land Use Map includes enough land to provide the capacity to accommodate growth expected over the period 1992-2012. These lands should include only those lands that meet the following criteria:

a. Are characterized by urban development which can be efficiently and cost effectively served by roads, water, sanitary sewer and storm drainage, schools and other urban governmental services within the next 20 years;

b. Do not extend beyond natural boundaries, such as watersheds, which impede provision of urban services;

c. Respect topographical features which form a natural edge such as rivers and ridge lines;

d. Are sufficiently free of environmental constraints to be able to support urban growth without major environmental impacts unless such areas are designated as an urban separator by interlocal agreement between jurisdictions;

e. Are included within the Bear Creek Urban Planned Development (UPD) sites; and Are not rural land or unincorporated agricultural or forestry lands designated through the Countywide Planning Policies plan process.

U- 115 King County should apply the Urban Residential, Low land use designation: to protect floodplains, critical aquifer recharge areas, high function wetlands and unstable slopes from degradation, and link these environmental features into a network of open space, fish and wildlife habitat and Urban Separators. The residential density for land so designated should be maintained at one unit per acre, provided that lands that are sending sites under the Transfer of Density Program may transfer density at a rate of at least four units per acre.

R-103 King County's Rural Area is considered to be permanent and shall not be redesignated to an Urban Growth Area until reviewed pursuant to the Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A.130(3) and Countywide Planning Policy FW-1.

P-119 King County should actively pursue designating Urban Separators in the unincorporated area and work with the cities to establish permanent, Urban Separators within the incorporated area that link with and enhance King County's Urban Separator corridors.

Analysis:
This subarea was originally intended as a Rural buffer to protect the Sammamish Agricultural Production District from the impacts of urban development. However, since that time the rest of the western buffer has been eroded with the expansion of the industrial area to the southeast and the incorporation of the area to the north.

Today, the subarea is nearly entirely surrounded by urban land except a small portion of the eastern edge, which is a steep slope and a railroad right-of-way. This steep slope ensures that much of the eastern edge is precluded from development, but also that local infrastructure and services can only be efficiently provided from the west, through the Urban area. The southwestern part of the subarea in particular is oriented toward the nearby Urban area. Adjacent land uses include industrial and medium and high-density residential development.

The southwestern portion of the area has been studied for suitability as an urban residential area. While some property owners have requested an R-12 zoning, this would be a higher density zoning than most of the surrounding area. R-6 is more compatible with surrounding uses. The King County Code allows density bonuses up to 50% above the base density allowed by Urban zoning in return for certain public benefits.

The City of Kirkland planning staff has been consulted as part of this study, as this area is adjacent to the Kirkland Potential Annexation Area. Planners for the City of Kirkland agree if this area is redesignated Urban it should be included in the Kirkland PAA. Kirkland staff also indicated support for R-6 zoning for the southern portion of the study area given the topography and compatibility with residential zoning to the west.

The southeastern area was studied for industrial designation. However, there are concerns about access to that area. While the southwestern area is served by urban roads, to the southeast the road narrows considerably and connects to Willows Road NE in a hairpin turn with limited visibility requiring very low speeds. It is unlikely that the road could handle the increase in traffic associated with a commercial or industrial use at that location, and would be costly and difficult to expand to serve such traffic.

The northern part of the subarea retains a degree of rural character. Still, it is divided from the rural area by a combination of steep slopes, incorporated Urban land, and the railroad right-of-way. The existing pattern of low-density residential development is compatible with the R-1 zoning of a designated Urban Separator. Kirkland staff supports this proposed Urban Separator designation. A significant portion of the area is already designated permanent open space as a p-suffix development condition resulting from a “Four to One” subdivision.

The Agricultural Production Buffer Special District Overlay has been applied to Rural lands only, and should be eliminated for this subarea if it is redesignated Urban. The same result will be achieved instead through the proposed Urban Separator Designation and the existing P-suffix open space designation.

There is no justification for redesignating this study area as Urban based on growth and development needs. Studies such as the Buildable Lands Report indicate there is sufficient development capacity within the UGA to accommodate projected housing and employment needs.

In this case, however, redesignating this area to Urban will create a more logical Urban Growth Area and allow more cost-effective delivery of services.

The proposed amendment to the Urban Growth Area is expected to be brought to the Growth Management Planning Council in 2004, per Countywide Planning Policy FW-1 Step 9.

Conclusions:
This area was designated Rural as a buffer for Agricultural land to the east. However, the study area is no longer serving that purpose. The southwest part of the area is oriented toward the Urban area and can most efficiently be served through the Urban area. Low-density residential development and open space characterize the northern area. Designation of the northern part of the subarea as an Urban Separator is an effective replacement for the Rural buffer.

Designation of the northern portion of the subarea as an Urban Separator with zoning of R-1 is consistent with Policy U-115 and Policy P-118.

While redesignation to Urban is not necessary to meet growth and development targets, it is warranted in order to create logical boundaries and allow efficient provision of services. This amendment meets the intent of the Growth Management Act and Countywide Planning Policies, and is therefore consistent with King County Comprehensive Plan Policy R-103.

Executive Staff Recommendation:
Amend the Urban Growth Area to include this subarea.

Update the Interim Potential Annexation Areas Map to add this area to the City of Kirkland Potential Annexation Area.

Amend the Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map to redesignate the northern part of the subarea Greenbelt/Urban Separator and the southern portion Urban Residential, Medium Density (see attached chart).

Amend the zoning for the parcels in the area as shown in the attached chart, so that the northern section is zoned R-1-SO and R-1-P-SO, and the southern portion is zoned R-6-SO. Eliminate the Agricultural Production Buffer Special District Overlay, but retain the existing P-suffix development conditions and the Significant Trees Special District Overlay.

See attached maps and list of recommended amendments by parcel.