

1 SNOHOMISH COUNTY COUNCIL  
2 Snohomish County, Washington

3  
4 ORDINANCE NO. 26-XXX

5  
6 RELATING TO GROWTH MANAGEMENT; REVISING DEVELOPMENT  
7 REGULATIONS FOR SHERIFF PRECINCTS AND FIRE STATIONS;  
8 AMENDING CHAPTERS 30.22, 30.23, 30.91F, AND 30.91G OF THE SNOHOMISH  
9 COUNTY CODE; AND ADDING NEW SECTIONS SCC 30.91F.302 AND SCC  
10 30.91S.177

11  
12 WHEREAS, title 30 of the Snohomish County Code (SCC), known as the Unified  
13 Development Code, contains Snohomish County’s (“County”) zoning and development  
14 regulations; and

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16 WHEREAS, under the zoning regulations of chapter 30.22 SCC, uses may be  
17 allowed as “permitted uses”, which are permitted outright; “conditional uses”, which  
18 require special review to ensure compatibility with permitted uses in the same zone and  
19 are granted by the Snohomish County Hearing Examiner; “administrative conditional  
20 uses”, which also require special review to ensure compatibility with permitted uses in  
21 the same zone and are granted by the Department of Planning and Development  
22 Services; and prohibited uses, which are not allowed in a given zone; and

23  
24 WHEREAS, U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency’s standard definition  
25 of “critical facilities” includes, among other things, fire stations, police stations and  
26 sheriff precincts, and vehicle and equipment storage facilities; and

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28 WHEREAS, in 1996, the County first adopted a comprehensive plan as required  
29 under the Growth Management Act (GMA), chapter 36.70A RCW; and

30  
31 WHEREAS, in RCW 36.70A.030(35), the GMA defines public services to include  
32 fire protection and suppression and law enforcement; and

33  
34 WHEREAS, in RCW 36.70A.030(40), the GMA defines rural governmental  
35 services to include fire and police protection services associated with rural  
36 development; and

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38 WHEREAS, periodic updates to the comprehensive plan have occurred since its  
39 original adoption, with the most recent update adopted in 2024; and

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41 WHEREAS, the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update included the continuation of  
42 the Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP), which includes partnerships with federal, state, and  
43 local jurisdictions to advance risk reduction through proactive mitigation and planning  
44 efforts; and

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1  
2 WHEREAS, the HMP provides decision-makers and policymakers with guidance,  
3 goals, and objectives to consider when planning for capital facilities; and  
4

5 WHEREAS, the goals and objectives of the HMP referenced in the Capital  
6 Facilities Element of the Comprehensive Plan guide implementation of the HMP; and  
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8 WHEREAS, Snohomish County’s HMP has four main goals:  
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- 10 1. Reduce hazard and threat-related injury and loss of life,  
11 2. Promote resilient communities, resilient economy, sustainable growth, and  
12 hazard prevention,  
13 3. Consider equity when enhancing public awareness and community members’  
14 ability to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from a disaster, and  
15 4. Make decisions through regional collaboration; and  
16

17 WHEREAS, Goal 1 of the HMP included in the Capital Facilities and Utilities  
18 Element says that the County should “[r]educe hazard and threat-related injury and loss  
19 of life”; and  
20

21 WHEREAS, Objective 1.4 of the HMP included in the Capital Facilities and  
22 Utilities Element requires the County to “[d]evelop continuity of operations plans and  
23 community-based continuity plans to mitigate the impacts of hazards becoming  
24 disasters, and support disaster preparedness, response, and recovery;” and  
25

26 WHEREAS, Objective 1.5 of the HMP included in the Capital Facilities and  
27 Utilities Element requires the County to “[d]evelop, implement, and sustain programs  
28 that promote reliable, redundant, and resilient lifeline systems;” and  
29

30 WHEREAS, Goal 2 of the HMP included in the Capital Facilities and Utilities  
31 Element directs that the County should “[p]romote resilient communities, resilient  
32 economy, sustainable growth, and hazard prevention;” and  
33

34 WHEREAS, Objective 2.2 of the HMP included in the Capital Facilities and  
35 Utilities Element requires the County to “[i]ncrease the resilience of critical services,  
36 facilities, and infrastructure through applicable retrofits, sustainable funding programs,  
37 and zoning and development changes, and reduce exposure/vulnerability to all  
38 hazards”; and  
39

40 WHEREAS, the “risk assessment is the primary process (between Snohomish  
41 County and participating jurisdictions) on which the HMP is based” and “is the process  
42 of measuring the potential for loss of life, personal injury, economic injury, and property  
43 damage resulting from primary natural hazards”; and  
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1 WHEREAS, the “risk assessment” includes the following three elements:  
2

- 3 1. Hazard identification – determine what types of disasters may affect a  
4 jurisdiction including frequency and intensity,
- 5 2. Vulnerability identification – potential impacts of hazards on people, property,  
6 economy, and lands of the region, and
- 7 3. Cost evaluation – estimate the cost of potential damage or the cost that can  
8 be avoided by protection/mitigation;” and  
9

10 WHEREAS, the HMP recognizes that “county facilities also play a key role in  
11 disaster response and recovery, and it is important to plan, update, retrofit, and build  
12 these facilities resilient to the impacts from climate change;” and  
13

14 WHEREAS, Goal ED 2 of the Economic Development Element of the  
15 Comprehensive Plan directs that the County should “[p]rovide a planning and regulatory  
16 environment which facilitates growth of the local economy[ ];” and  
17

18 WHEREAS, ED Policy 2.A.3 of the Economic Development Element of the  
19 Comprehensive Plan instructs that “[t]o ensure timeliness, responsiveness, and  
20 increased efficiency, the county shall maintain a program of continuous review of the  
21 permitting process to eliminate unnecessary procedures that do not respond to legal  
22 requirements for public review and resident input[ ];” and  
23

24 WHEREAS, adopting land use regulations for fire stations and sheriff precincts  
25 ensures that such facilities are allowed or conditionally allowed in more areas of the  
26 County that can provide for appropriate response times, appropriate infrastructure,  
27 access to populations, and services consistent with best practices; and  
28

29 WHEREAS, the amendments in this ordinance streamline the process for  
30 allowing or conditionally allowing these facilities in more areas of the County, as sheriff  
31 precincts and fire stations are both critical facilities; and  
32

33 WHEREAS, on \_\_\_\_\_, 2026, the Planning Commission held a public  
34 hearing to receive public testimony concerning the code amendments contained in this  
35 ordinance; and  
36

37 WHEREAS, at the conclusion of the public hearing, the Planning Commission  
38 recommended adoption of the code amendments contained in this ordinance; and  
39

40 WHEREAS, on \_\_\_\_\_, 2026, the Snohomish County Council  
41 (“County Council”) held a public hearing, after proper notice, and considered public  
42 comment and the entire record related to the code amendments contained in this  
43 ordinance; and  
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1           WHEREAS, following the public hearing, the County Council deliberated on the  
2 code amendments contained in this ordinance;

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4 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED:

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6           **Section 1.** The County Council makes the following findings in support of this  
7 ordinance:

- 8  
9           A. The foregoing recitals are adopted as findings as if set forth in full herein.
- 10  
11           B. Proposals to open fire stations and sheriff precincts within the region have  
12 highlighted the need to amend title 30 of the SCC to update development  
13 regulations related to these uses to be either allowed or conditionally allowed in  
14 additional zoning districts.
- 15  
16           C. This ordinance amends the use matrices in SCC 30.22.100, 30.22.110, and  
17 30.22.120 to list fire station and sheriff precincts as specific uses. The  
18 amendments clarify the appropriate process for approving a fire station or sheriff  
19 precinct through permitted or conditionally permitted processes in chapter 30.22  
20 SCC. This approach to allowing or conditionally allowing the uses of fire stations  
21 and sheriff precincts is consistent with the GMA's identification of them as public  
22 services under RCW 36.70A.030(35) and rural government services under RCW  
23 36.70A.030(40).
- 24  
25                   1. Permitted uses are those permitted outright. Certain uses have special  
26 requirements indicated by footnotes in the use matrices.
- 27                   2. Conditional uses are those which require special review in order to ensure  
28 compatibility with permitted uses in the same zone. Conditional use  
29 permits are granted by the hearing examiner following a review and  
30 recommendation from the department and an open record public hearing.
- 31  
32           D. This ordinance will help address the need for additional and strategically located  
33 "critical facilities," as defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency  
34 (FEMA), and adds new definitions of "fire station" in SCC 30.91F.302 and "sheriff  
35 precinct" in SCC 30.91S.177. The amendments proposed by this ordinance will  
36 allow fire stations and sheriff precincts as:
- 37  
38                   1. permitted uses in the following urban zones: R-9,600, R-8,400, R-7,200,  
39 T, LDMR, MR, NB, PCB, CB, GC, IP, BP, LI, HI, UC and MUC;
- 40                   2. permitted uses in the following rural zones: RD, RRT-10, R-5, RB, CRC,  
41 RI; and
- 42                   3. as conditional uses in the F and F&R rural zones.
- 43

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- 1 E. This ordinance amends SCC 30.23.200(2) to add fire stations and sheriff  
2 precincts as uses which require no minimum lot dimensions.  
3  
4 F. This ordinance amends section 30.91G.060 to explicitly remove fire stations and  
5 sheriff precincts from the definition of “Governmental facilities”.  
6  
7 G. In developing the proposed code amendments, the County considered the goals  
8 of the GMA codified at RCW 36.70A.020.

- 9  
10 1. This ordinance is consistent with GMA Goal 12: “Public facilities and  
11 services. Ensure that those public facilities and services necessary to  
12 support development shall be adequate to serve the development at the  
13 time development is available for occupancy and use without decreasing  
14 current service levels below locally established minimum standards”.  
15 Allowing or conditionally allowing fire stations and sheriff precincts within  
16 additional areas of unincorporated Snohomish County helps to ensure  
17 quick response times and efficient deployment of resources in the event of  
18 an emergency.  
19 2. This ordinance is consistent with GMA Goal 14: “Climate change and  
20 resiliency. Ensuring that comprehensive plans, development regulations,  
21 regional policies and plans, and strategies under RCW 36.70A.210 and  
22 chapter 47.80 adapt to and mitigate the effects of changing climate;  
23 support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and per capita vehicle  
24 miles traveled; prepare for climate impact scenarios, foster resiliency to  
25 climate impact and natural hazards; protect and enhance environmental,  
26 economic, and human health and safety; and advance environmental  
27 justice.” Snohomish County has experienced extremes in climate change  
28 over the past decade, from high wind events known as ‘bomb-cyclones’ to  
29 wildfires and flooding. The need for resources such as fire stations and  
30 sheriff precincts to be strategically located around the county for  
31 deployment allows for quicker response times, less miles and greenhouse  
32 gas emissions, better preparation for climate impact events, and creates a  
33 more resilient response.  
34

- 35 H. The proposed amendments are consistent with and supportive of the following  
36 multicounty planning policy (MPP) from the Puget Sound Regional Council VISION  
37 2050:  
38

- 39 1. MPP-RC-3: “Make reduction of health disparities and improvement of  
40 health outcomes across the region a priority when developing and carrying  
41 out regional, countywide, and local plans.” By defining fire stations and  
42 sheriff precincts as public services, this allows a path forward for allowing  
43 or conditionally allowing these facilities in areas of unincorporated

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1 Snohomish County that had been previously overlooked for this type of  
2 development for deployment of emergency response.

- 3 2. MPP-RGS-6: “Encourage efficient use of urban land by optimizing the  
4 development potential of existing urban lands and increasing density in  
5 the urban growth area in locations consistent with the Regional Growth  
6 Strategy”. Allowing fire stations and sheriff precinct facilities as permitted  
7 uses within most urban zones will help ensure these public services are  
8 available to efficiently serve the unincorporated urban areas of the County.  
9 Permitting of these uses outright as proposed by this ordinance will also  
10 optimize use of existing infrastructure, such as sewer, water, developed  
11 transportation and infrastructure.
- 12 3. MPP-En-5: “Locate development in a manner that minimizes impacts to  
13 natural features. Promote the use of innovative environmentally sensitive  
14 development practices, including design, materials, and on-going  
15 maintenance.” By conditionally permitting fire stations and sheriff precincts  
16 within the F and F&R zones, the uses will be conditioned in those zones to  
17 ensure impacts to natural features are minimized.
- 18 4. MPP-CC-7:” Advance state, regional, and local actions that support  
19 resilience and adaptation to climate change impacts.” By permitting or  
20 conditionally permitting fire stations and sheriff precincts within more areas  
21 of unincorporated Snohomish County, the County will be better positioned  
22 to respond to impacts of climate change including extreme weather events  
23 and wildfires. Resources and emergency response planning should  
24 include all of Snohomish County, so that support can be better managed  
25 for resilient and adaptable changes.

26  
27 I. The proposed amendments are consistent with and supportive of the following  
28 countywide planning policy (CPP):

- 29 1. CPP-PS-3: “Jurisdictions should support the County as the preferred  
30 provider for regional services, rural services, agricultural services and  
31 services for natural resource areas.”
- 32 2. CPP-PS-18: “The County and cities should work collaboratively at a local  
33 and countywide level to promote equitable access of public services and  
34 facilities for all residents, especially those that are historically  
35 underserved.” This ordinance will permit or conditionally permit fire  
36 stations and sheriff precincts in more areas of unincorporated Snohomish  
37 County. This will both streamline the permitting process for these uses  
38 and is intended to allow these public services to be more accessible to all  
39 County residents. The ability to properly plan and site emergency  
40 response services, such as fire stations and sheriff precincts, allows for  
41 trained professionals to evaluate the risk, response times, and resources  
42 to all areas of the county.

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1 J. The proposed amendments are consistent with and supportive of the following  
2 Snohomish County Growth Management Act Comprehensive Plan (GMACP)  
3 objective and policy:  
4

- 5 1. Objective CUE 1.A: “Coordinate planning with and among providers of  
6 utilities, public facilities, and public services to provide urban service within  
7 urban growth areas (UGAs) and rural service outside of UGAs to support  
8 the future land use pattern indicated by the comprehensive plan, including  
9 consideration of projected climate change risks.” Allowing or conditionally  
10 allowing fire stations and sheriff precincts in more areas of unincorporated  
11 Snohomish County will facilitate coordinated and appropriate planning for  
12 public services that fire stations and sheriff precincts provide.
- 13 2. CUE Policy 1.A.5: “The County shall coordinate with providers such that  
14 utilities, public facilities, and public services in rural and resource areas  
15 are at a level, scale, and in locations that do not induce urban  
16 development pressures.” The proposed amendments do not allow fire  
17 stations or sheriff precincts in mobile home parks (MHP), Rural Freeway  
18 Service (RFS) or Agriculture-10 acre (A-10) and conditionally allow fire  
19 stations and sheriff precincts in Forestry (F), and Forestry and Recreation  
20 (F&R). This distinction allows for these services to be permitted in the  
21 more urban zones of the county, while conditionally allowing for these  
22 services in other areas of the county as needs for these services develop.  
23 By making uses conditional in certain rural and resource zones, there is  
24 additional process before the Hearing Examiner where the proposed use  
25 must demonstrate it meets the decision criteria established in SCC  
26 30.42C.100 before the uses may be permitted. This additional process  
27 allows the public to participate and will help to ensure that the use will not  
28 interfere with the long-term protection of these resource lands.
- 29 3. NE Policy 8.A.1: “The County shall consider natural hazards in all land use  
30 planning.” The proposed amendments clarify where fire stations and  
31 sheriff precincts will be allowed or conditionally allowed. These facilities  
32 provide the resources for natural hazard response, such as wind, fire and  
33 flood. For example, fire stations provide residents with access to sand for  
34 sandbags and filling in the event of flooding as well as medical care in the  
35 event of natural emergencies. Sheriff and fire personnel provide  
36 necessary emergency responses to wildfire deployments and evacuation  
37 strategies and assist with response to downed trees, powerlines, debris,  
38 vegetation and damage caused by wind events. Allowing or conditionally  
39 allowing these uses in more areas of unincorporated Snohomish County  
40 will allow for more efficient responses to natural hazards that occur in  
41 Snohomish County.  
42

43 K. Procedural requirements.  
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- 1 1. The proposal is a Type 3 legislative action pursuant to SCC 30.73.010.
- 2 2. Pursuant to RCW 36.70A.106(1), a notice of intent to adopt this ordinance
- 3 was transmitted to the Washington State Department of Commerce for
- 4 distribution to state agencies on \_\_\_\_\_, and assigned Submittal ID No.
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_.
- 6 3. State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), chapter 43.21C RCW requirements
- 7 with respect to this non-project action have been satisfied through the
- 8 completion of an environmental checklist and issuance of a
- 9 \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_.
- 10 4. The public participation process used in the adoption of this ordinance has
- 11 complied with all applicable requirements of the GMA and the SCC.
- 12 5. The Washington State Attorney General last issued an advisory
- 13 memorandum, as required by RCW 36.70A.370, in October of 2024 entitled
- 14 "Advisory Memorandum: Avoiding the Unconstitutional Takings of Private
- 15 Property" to help local governments avoid the unconstitutional taking of
- 16 private property. The process outlined in the State Attorney General's 2024
- 17 advisory memorandum was used by the County in objectively evaluating the
- 18 regulatory changes proposed by this ordinance.
- 19

20 **Section 2.** The County Council makes the following conclusions:

- 21
- 22 A. The proposal is consistent with the goals, objectives, and policies of the Snohomish
- 23 County Comprehensive Plan.
- 24
- 25 B. The proposal is consistent with Washington State law and the SCC.
- 26
- 27 C. The County has complied with all SEPA requirements in respect to this non-project
- 28 action.
- 29
- 30 D. The regulations proposed by this ordinance do not result in an unconstitutional
- 31 taking of private property for a public purpose.
- 32

33 **Section 3.** The County Council bases its findings and conclusions on the entire

34 record of the County Council, including all testimony and exhibits. Any finding, which

35 should be deemed a conclusion, and any conclusion which should be deemed a finding,

36 is hereby adopted as such.

37

38 **Section 4.** Snohomish County Code Section 30.22.100, last amended by

39 Amended Ordinance No. 25-033 on August 13, 2025, is amended to read:

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42 **30.22.100 Urban Zone Categories Use Matrix.** (Please note that the Matrix below have been

43 altered by previously approved ordinances and will need to be updated prior to Council action.)

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1           **Section 5.** Snohomish County Code Section 30.22.110, last amended by  
2 Ordinance No. 25-015, on March 19, 2025, is amended to read:

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4           **30.22.110 Rural and Resource Zone Categories Use Matrix.**

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6           **Section 6.** Snohomish County Code Section 30.22.120, last amended by  
7 Ordinance No. 24-055, on September 25, 2024, is amended to read:

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9           **30.22.120 Other Zone Categories Use Matrix.**

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11           **Section 7.** Snohomish County Code Section 30.23.200, last amended by  
12 Ordinance No. 18-011, on March 21, 2018, is amended to read:

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14           **30.23.200 Reductions to lot area.**

15  
16           (1) No minimum lot area shall be reduced or diminished so that the setbacks or  
17 other open spaces are smaller than prescribed by this title, nor shall population  
18 density be increased in any manner except in conformity with the regulations  
19 established by this title.

20  
21           (2) No minimum lot dimension shall be required for the development of  
22 governmental structures and facilities, fire stations, sheriff precincts, utility  
23 structures and facilities, or personal wireless service facilities.

24  
25           **Section 8.** A new section is added to Chapter 30.91F of the Snohomish County  
26 Code to read:

27  
28           **30.91F.302 Fire station.**

29  
30           “Fire station” means a structure or other area for storing firefighting apparatus such as  
31 fire engines and related vehicles, personal protective equipment, fire hoses and other  
32 specialized firefighting equipment. Fire stations may contain working and living space  
33 for firefighters and support staff. These types of facilities are also known as a fire  
34 house, fire hall, firefighter’s hall, or engine house.

35  
36           **Section 9.** Snohomish County Code Section 30.91G.060, adopted by Amended  
37 Ordinance No 02-064, on December 9, 2002, is amended to read:

38  
39           **30.91G.060 Governmental facilities.**

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41           “Governmental facilities” means a facility owned and operated by an agency of the  
42 federal, state, or local government. Government facilities do not include fire stations or  
43 sheriff precincts.

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Approved as to form only:

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Deputy Prosecuting Attorney

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