

SNOHOMISH COUNTY COUNCIL
Snohomish County, Washington

MOTION NO. 26-189

REFERRING A PROPOSED ORDINANCE RELATING TO GROWTH MANAGEMENT;
REVISING REGULATIONS FOR SHERIFF PRECINCTS AND FIRE STATIONS;
AMENDING CHAPTERS 30.22, 30.23, 30.91F, AND 30.91G
OF THE SNOHOMISH COUNTY CODE; AND ADDING NEW SECTIONS
SCC 30.91F.302 AND SCC 30.91S.177

WHEREAS, the County Council wishes to obtain a recommendation from the Snohomish County Planning Commission regarding proposed code amendments related to permitted and conditionally permitted uses within title 30 of the Snohomish County code; and

WHEREAS, the code revisions are Type 3 legislative actions pursuant to Chapter 30.73 SCC; and

WHEREAS, SCC 30.73.040 provides that the planning commission shall hold a public hearing on a Type 3 proposal referred to it by the County Council within 90 days or within a time specified by the County Council; and

WHEREAS, the County Council requests a prompt review of the proposed code amendments by the Planning Commission, but wishes to provide flexibility in timing in recognition of the Planning Commission's existing workload; and

WHEREAS, the subject matter experts in PDS and other county departments could offer suggestions to the proposed code language and findings; and

WHEREAS, the logical time for input from county departments would be prior County Council receipt of an approved as to form recommendation from the Planning Commission;

NOW, THEREFORE, ON MOTION, the County Council hereby refers the potential code revisions, as attached as "Exhibit A", to the Departments of Planning and Development Services (PDS) and the Department of Public Works (DPW) for action as follows:

1. Pursuant to chapters 2.08 and 30.73 SCC, the County Council refers the potential code revisions to the Director of PDS acting the capacity of Secretary to the Snohomish County Planning Commission for its review, consideration, and a recommendation to County Council.

2. As provided in SCC 30.73.045, the County Council will be the department responsible for preparing a report summarizing the proposal for transmittal to the Planning Commission and that the Council staff is hereby directed to seek and include information from the county departments including PDS and DPW in the report to Planning Commission.

3. The County Council requests that a public hearing be held before the planning commission and a recommendation be provided to the County Council prior to July 2, 2026.

DATED this ____ day of _____, 2026.

SNOHOMISH COUNTY COUNCIL
Snohomish County, Washington

Council Chair

ATTEST:

Deputy Clerk of the Council

EXHIBIT A

SNOHOMISH COUNTY COUNCIL
Snohomish County, Washington

ORDINANCE NO. 26-XXX

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS, the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update included the continuation of the Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP), which includes partnerships with federal, state, and local jurisdictions to advance risk reduction through proactive mitigation and planning 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
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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
7

8 WHEREAS, Snohomish County’s HMP has four main goals:
9

- 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;

3
4 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED:

5
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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30.91S.177 -- 4

- 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:

40

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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.**

5
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:

8
9 **30.22.120 Other Zone Categories Use Matrix.**

10
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:

13
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:

Deputy Prosecuting Attorney

DRAFT

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