

HISTORY OF ALDERTON-McMILLIN

Alderton-McMillin lies within the traditional lands of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians and the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe. The original name of the Puyallup tribe was “spwiya’laphabsh” which meant people were generous or welcoming. The Puyallup people spoke Puyallup Nisqually, one of the languages spoken by the Salish people who inhabited the Puget Sound area before Europeans arrived. Both the Muckleshoot and the Puyallup people engaged in fishing, hunting, and gathering. Salmon was the most significant food and became an object held in reverence and incorporated into the traditional ceremony. The people also hunted and gathered food in the hills and valleys. Permanent villages were located along the river bank. The Puyallup River valley was an important trading center for many tribes.

EARLY SETTLEMENT BY EURO-AMERICANS STARTING IN 1850s

In 1850, the U.S. Congress passed the Donation Land Claim Act to promote homestead settlement in the Oregon territory which was comprised of the present-day states of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. The statute granted 320 acres to a single white male and 640 acres to a married couple, if they settled before December 1, 1846. If settled after 1846, the law granted only half of the amount. The law expired in 1855. The claimants had to cultivate the land for a few years in order to own the land outright.

The Oregon Trail was the main land route for the emigrants coming west wishing to claim donated land to settle. The first emigrant wagon train that crossed the Cascades brought early settlers to Pierce County in 1853. Some of these early settlers took the Naches (Pass) trail which was a short-cut branch off the Oregon Trail. Many of these pioneers settled in the Puyallup River valley area including the Woolery and Lane families. The historical Naches Trail, which led many early emigrants to Pierce County, traveled between Alderton and McMillin in the vicinity of Military Road.

Homesteaders cleared the land and created subsistence farms which typically included fields where oats, rye, and barley, potatoes, peas, or other vegetables were planted, and pasture for livestock, and orchards with a variety of fruit trees were established. After living on and cultivating the land for the required time to own the land outright, some owners divided the land and sold parcels of land to others.

AGRICULTURE

Hops presented an unprecedented economic opportunity to the local settlers when first introduced to the valley in the latter half of the 19th century. Charles Wood, who operated a brewery in Olympia, brought in hops roots from England in 1865. He sent some roots to John Meeker who then gave some to his brother, Ezra Meeker. Ezra Meeker grew some hops on his land. By the 1870s he successfully turned his large fields to growing hops. Other settlers in the area soon followed suit and the entire valley area became full with hops farms by the 1880s. In addition to the local farmers and family members, Native American pickers were hired to help harvest the crops. For a while, Chinese workers were brought in to work in the hop fields.

Hop kilns were used to dry the harvested hops. Sulfur was used to bleach them and stop fermentation. Large barn structures were erected on many hop farms to house the kilns. In 1892, hop lice infested the fields and the farmers were unable to find ways to eradicate the blight. In the 1890s the economic depression hit the valley area hard. The adoption of the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1919 prohibiting manufacture, sale, or transportation of alcoholic beverages in combination with the economic depression led to the decline of the hops as a successful cash crop.

Flower bulbs replaced hops as a viable commercial crop. In the early 1920s the U.S. Department of Agriculture determined that the local climate and soils in the valley area was ideal for growing bulbs. Cultivation of bulbs such as hyacinths, tulips, narcissus (daffodils), and gladiolus began in Pierce County between 1910 and 1920. By the early 1920s, farmers in the valley area began cultivating these bulbs in small acreages. By 1920, Pierce County grew nearly 60% of the more than 40 million bulbs planted that year in the state. By 1928, approximately 150 acres of land in the Puyallup River valley was devoted to bulb cultivation and 90% were daffodil fields. Acreage devoted to bulbs in the area continued to expand. In 1930, the 120-acre Van Zonneveld farm at Orting was reported to be the largest in the state and sold 190 tons of narcissus bulbs.

Starting bulbs were imported from Europe. Many of these farmers grew hundreds of varieties of bulb flowers. For example, Karl Koehler, who earlier cultivated hops, cultivated 1,800 varieties on his farm, including those varieties he created through hybridization. The Van Lierop family began farming bulbs in 1934 and continues the farm still at a smaller scale. Twelve bulb farmers, the majority of whom were located in the Puyallup valley area, formed the Puget Sound Bulb Exchange in 1926 to sell, pack, and transport the members' produce. The successful cooperative continued its operation for more than seven decades.

The Puyallup Valley Daffodil Festival developed slowly beginning in the 1920s. The festival celebrating the blooming of the flowers has been held annually in the spring since 1926 except during World War II. A parade, a part of the Festival, still starts in Tacoma, passes through Puyallup and Sumner and ends in Orting. This annual festival has helped the local bulb farmers promote their products to the public.

Other flowers such as irises, roses, and lilies were also grown in the valley starting in the 1920s. In addition, local farmers in the valley diversified to dairy, berry, vegetables, and fruit orchards.

Fruits and vegetables such as strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, rhubarb, lettuce, squash, potatoes, pumpkin, corn, peas, beans, beets, carrots, cucumbers, onions, celery, and radishes have been grown in the valley in the past decades. Cultivation of fruits such as grapes, apples, pears, prunes, and cherries still continue. In recent decades, Christmas tree farms have become more numerous.

Over time agricultural activities in the valley have decreased. However, hundreds of acres of area lands are still devoted to agriculture. Agriculture and agriculture-related businesses continue to be an important economic base of the area.

RAILROADS & RESOURCE-BASED INDUSTRIES

Arrival of the Northern Pacific Railroad in the valley area in 1877 was an important stimulant to the area's development. It brought immigrants to the community earlier than other isolated areas, stimulated development of towns in the vicinity, and spurred development of a variety of resource-based industries and commerce servicing the residents, workers, and industries. Logging became more active and a number of mills developed in the area. The railroad cars transported logs and coal as well as passengers. Northern Pacific Railroad established sidings at McMillin and Alderton. These two crossroad centers included a post office, store, and school. They served as a service center for miners who worked in coal mines and the sandstone quarry after the railroad connected the area with Wilkeson.

The following centers in the area experienced a major growth after the arrival of the railroad.

McMILLIN

John McMillin operated lime kilns and owned surrounding land across the Puyallup River from present-day McMillin. The post office established in 1890 in the present day McMillin location was originally named Lime Kiln but was renamed McMillin in the following year. The lime mine claim was abandoned in the 1920s when the lime deposit was exhausted. Stone Mill was another establishment which produced a variety of building materials made from the timber harvested in the area.

Hale's Grocery and another grocery store built by Henry L. Ball across the highway were the early stores existing in the late 1890s. In the Polk Business Directory 1915-1916, McMillin is described as a village on the Northern Pacific Railroad Railway and Puyallup River, settled in 1888 with a population of 200.

The McMillin grocery store was first established by Ball. It had a post office and functioned as the community meeting place. The McMillin Grange was formed in 1927 to promote the interest and wellbeing of farmers and families in the area. The Grange is still in operation, located in the old McMillin School, built in 1927. For many decades, the building served as an eight-grade school during the day and as a Grange Hall during the evening. The school building was sold to the Grange by the Sumner School District in the 1960s. A variety of events are hosted in the Grange including history conferences, aerobic classes, and quilting groups. McMillin School (Grange) is designated on the National and Pierce County Registers of Historic Places.

ALDERTON

Orson Annis settled in the Alderton area in 1869, naming it Alderton because of the numerous alder trees growing in the area. He was a railroad agent and postmaster for about a decade. He built the first general store, a hotel, and livery stable in 1870s. By the early 1890s, he had planted an orchard with two thousand fruit trees. He later sold his land to the Hatch family in 1900, which then became a well-known bulb farm. Oro Oliver built a new Alderton Store in 1920. The store had the post office and Oro Oliver served as the postmaster for about 20 years. The Alderton Store still exists.

According to the Polk Business Directory 1915-1916, Alderton is described as a town with a population of 50, located 12 miles southeast of Tacoma and four miles southeast of Puyallup on the Northern Pacific Railway.

The first school in Alderton was a one-room log structure. A school district was split from the Elhi School District. The Alderton School served students of multiple grades from elementary to high school from about the 1910s to 1950s. It was then consolidated into the Sumner School District and is still standing. The main school building and gymnasium are designated on the National and Pierce County Register of Historic Places.

CITIES IN THE AREA

Due to rich fertile river valley soil, the valley area was chosen by early settlers as homesteads beginning in the 1850s. In addition to the early settlement, plentiful timber resources in the surrounding area and the arrival of railroads to the valley area in 1877 contributed to the development of Orting, Puyallup, and Sumner within the valley area. These towns became service and distribution centers for the surrounding area.

PLANNING HISTORY

COUNTY PLANNING

1962 PIERCE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND ZONING

The first Pierce County Comprehensive Land Use Plan and the Pierce County Zoning Code were adopted in 1962. Zoning districts were established that dictated the appropriate location for commercial business and residential homes. However, the 1962 plan did not offer much protection from incompatible uses nor recognize the unique individuality of communities. Under this plan, most of the plan area was zoned General, which allowed a variety of use types and higher levels of residential density than what is currently allowed in the rural and resource zones.

1994 PIERCE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Growth Management Act (GMA) was passed by the Washington State Legislature in 1990. This legislation required Pierce County to engage in countywide planning with the cities and towns located within Pierce County and to update its existing comprehensive plan and development regulations in conformance with the requirements outlined in the new law.

In 1991, Interim Growth Management Policies were adopted as a transition between the 1962 Comprehensive Plan and the new planning required under the GMA. The Pierce County Countywide Planning Policies were adopted in 1992, which provided the framework and process by which Pierce County and the cities and towns within the County established urban growth areas, provided infrastructure and services, and preserved agricultural and natural resource lands.

In 1994, per the requirements of the GMA, Pierce County adopted a new Comprehensive Plan, which replaced the 1962 Pierce County Comprehensive Plan in its entirety. This plan established population projections, urban growth areas, rural areas, and natural resource lands. The new countywide plan became effective January 1995, with its implementing development regulations becoming effective July 1995. The majority of the plan area was redesignated to Rural as a result of the 1994 Comprehensive Plan.

COMMUNITY PLANNING

Although the GMA does not require comprehensive plans to provide for community plans, Pierce County Ordinance No. 90-47s directed County officials to prepare a community plans element of the Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan Community Plans Element identifies which communities will receive a community plan; provides the framework for community planning; and establishes the flexibility for communities to refine comprehensive plan land use designations and associated densities, and apply design standards to achieve a local vision, while remaining consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the GMA.

Since 1994, several community plans have been adopted throughout unincorporated Pierce County. The majority of unincorporated County residents now live in community plan areas.

SCOPE OF THE COMMUNITY PLAN

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY TO DEVELOP THE PLAN

The 1994 Pierce County Comprehensive Plan Community Plans Element identifies the Puyallup River Valley as an area to receive a community plan. In 2001, the County Council authorized the initiation of a community plan for the area through Resolution No. R2001-73. Planning Staff began working with a Community Planning Board (CPB) in April, 2004.

PURPOSE AND USE OF THE COMMUNITY PLAN

The Alderton-McMillin Community Plan gives the residents, businesses, property owners, and the County a clear and more detailed sense of how the community should develop in the future. The purpose of the plan is to:

- Develop a long-range vision for the community;
- Evaluate the vision for the community in light of the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan and make refinements as necessary to ensure consistency between the overall countywide plan and the community plan; and
- Identify actions necessary to implement the community plan.

The policies contained in the plan are distinguished as goals, objectives, principles, and standards. Goals are a general vision statement by the community. Objectives are statements of what is desired to be achieved in the future or statements of what conditions should exist in the community. Principles set a particular course of action to accomplish objectives.

Standards, qualitative or quantitative, are specific benchmarks or targets to be accomplished in the ongoing development of the County.

All of the policy statements were developed through citizen comment and represent the will of the people translated into decision oriented statements. When applying the policy statements, each should be afforded equal weight and consideration.

CONSISTENCY WITH THE PIERCE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Growth Management Act requires consistency between plans and implementing development regulations. Furthermore, the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan Community Plans Element contains specific policies that require consistency between the Comprehensive Plan and community plans. The goals, objectives, principles, and standards in the Alderton-McMillin Community Plan are consistent with the provisions in the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

COMMUNITY PLANNING BOARD

The development of the Alderton-McMillin Community Plan could not have been accomplished without the Community Planning Board (CPB). Appointed in the winter of 2004, this board consisted of eleven members representing a variety of interests and geographic locations throughout the community plan area. Through Ordinance No. 2005-8s2 the boundaries of the community plan were expanded to include the area south of Orting and subsequently, Resolution No. R2005-47 expanded the CPB to a thirteen-member board.

This group was charged with the following responsibilities: 1) serving as a sounding board for the community; 2) developing a community plan that addresses community concerns while remaining consistent with the Comprehensive Plan; and 3) forwarding a recommended plan to the Pierce County Planning Commission and Pierce County Council.

The CPB conducted bi-monthly public meetings starting in April 2004 and continuing through February 2007. A total of 67 CPB meetings were held during this time period and many members of the community attended, enriching the planning process. In addition, a history committee conducted separate meetings to work on development of the historic resources section of the plan.

OPEN HOUSES

The CPB worked on developing an overall vision for the community and goal statements for each element throughout 2004. In July 2005, the CPB held its first open house at the McMillin Grange. This open house was used to provide information to the general public on the community planning process and receive public opinion on the draft vision and goal

statements. Many members of the community attended and offered feedback and some suggested changes to the draft documents.

A second open house was held at McMillin Grange on March 1, 2007, to present the CPB's final recommendations. This open house gave the public an opportunity to review and comment on the draft plan prior to its transmittal to the Pierce County Planning Commission and County Council. The CPB used the open house forum to solicit important community feedback regarding their proposed recommendations.

SURVEYS, ASSESSMENTS, AND OTHER COMMUNITY INPUT

ALDERTON-MCMILLIN COMMUNITY PLAN SURVEYS

Surveys were distributed at both the 2005 and the 2007 open houses. The intent of the 2005 survey was to solicit input on a variety of issues including perceived quality of life; adequacy of facilities and services within the plan area; quality of the natural environment; and location and intensity of residential, commercial, and industrial uses. The 2007 survey was intended to gather input on the proposed community plan. Respondents were provided space at the end of each survey to add their own comments.

AGRICULTURAL STRATEGIC PLAN

During the 2004 review of the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan to ensure compliance with the state Growth Management Act, Pierce County made substantial changes to the way agricultural lands were designated. A number of questions and issues arose from the discussions regarding the future of agriculture in Pierce County. Pierce County completed two studies to assess the future of agriculture and potential strategies that were needed to address significant issues facing the agriculture industry.

The Phase I report was conducted from July-August 2004 by American Farmland Trust and was intended to initially answer questions raised during the 2004 Comprehensive Plan update and layout a description of the costs, timelines and information needed to carry out a more detailed comprehensive report. The Phase II report was contracted to Barney and Worth, Inc. and Globalwise, Inc. and carried out from August 2005 to January 2006.

The Phase I report entitled "The Suitability, Viability, Needs, and Economic Future of Pierce County Agriculture" examined agricultural issues related to the: 1) Suitability, protectability, and reclaimability of County farm soils; 2) Economic viability of County agriculture; 3) Needs and strategies to support and protect agriculture; and 4) A strategic plan for economic development for County agriculture.

The Phase II report entitled, "Preserving Farmland and Farmers – Pierce County Agriculture Strategic Plan" provides a summary report of the comprehensive research conducted to prepare the strategic plan along with the supporting technical documentation. The research included a quantitative and qualitative assessment of Pierce County agriculture; a strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats (SWOT) analysis; a study of the agricultural industry's trends; a summary of the policies and regulations that impact local agriculture; an examination of entry

barriers for farmers; a review of case studies of peer communities; identification of benchmarks to be used to measure the Agriculture Sector’s viability; a summary of stakeholder interviews; and a summary report of a farm community survey. The research led to a series of policy options intended to improve the economic environment for agriculture.

RHODES LAKE ROAD

In response to the anticipated growth on the Orting Plateau, the County Council passed Resolution 2001-80 in 2001 directing the County Engineer to begin investigating the possibility of establishing a new roadway in the vicinity of the existing Rhodes Lake Road East. As part of the process, Pierce County Public Works and Utilities Department is conducting a programmatic level environmental impact statement (EIS) to examine the need and means by which to meet the County Council’s direction for an “adequate, efficient, and safe roadway” for public use.

The Alderton-McMillin CPB has been involved with the development of the EIS through a variety of meetings, open houses, and newsletters. Public input included open houses on May 13, 2003; October 22, 2003; October 5, 2004 (EIS Scoping Meeting); and, October 20, 2005. Five informal community forums were held between March and November 2003. The community forums were informal sessions for both gathering information on existing conditions in the corridor area and providing information on alternatives being considered. Two newsletters were produced and distributed throughout the community and multiple meetings were held with neighborhood groups and with individual property owners throughout the project life.

Several public agencies and other organizations helped guide the development of the alternatives through membership on the Project Leadership Team (PLT). The PLT met 21 times since February 2003, and has been the primary avenue for organizations with a direct stake in the project to provide input. As an advisory group, the PLT has reached consensus on almost every element of the alternatives screening process and the alternatives evaluated in this Draft EIS. PLT membership has included: Pierce County, WSDOT, City of Bonney Lake, City of Orting, City of Sumner, and the Puyallup Tribe. In the early stages of RLR discussions, Tacoma Public Utilities, Puyallup Valley Preservation Group, Cascadia Development, and Falling Water development participated on the PLT but were not included as the project moved into the EIS phase as they have no jurisdictional responsibility.

Input from the public weighed heavily in decisions on what general geographical areas should be considered for build alternatives. Based on this input, the County considered alternatives well outside the original corridor area. Some of these alternatives included widening the 214th Ave. corridor, building an SR 410/Angeline Road Interchange, and building a South Plateau Connection (SPC). Public input also shaped the criteria used to evaluate and screen alternatives.