
Chapter 1: Introduction

OVERVIEW OF THE PLAN AREA

South Hill is centrally located in Pierce County and encompasses approximately 19 square miles. The community is known as South Hill or ‘the Hill’ due to its location south of the valley containing the City of Puyallup and west of the valley containing the City of Orting. While the eastern boundary is defined by the Orting Valley and the northern boundary by Puyallup’s urban growth area, the western boundary generally follows 70th Avenue and the southern boundary 176th Street East. The community is bisected by SR 161, which is also known as Meridian Avenue East.

South Hill has experienced a tremendous amount of growth in the past 30 years. The growth in population, homes, businesses, and activities has simultaneously resulted in the loss of trees, wildlife, open spaces, and the general peace and quiet of a rural setting. It is an area that has been transformed from a rural setting into a suburban community that, in 1998, initiated a movement for incorporation. The incorporation proposal was defeated 2 to 1. However, the issues that drove the incorporation movement remain in the community. The South Hill Community Plan attempts to define how Pierce County will manage and address impacts of a rapidly expanding population while retaining the attributes that make South Hill unique.

HISTORY OF SOUTH HILL

EARLY HISTORY THROUGH THE 1900’S

Native Americans utilized the area, evidenced by the Ancient Klickitat Trail or Cowlitz Trail that connects eastern Washington with the areas west of the mountains. This trail passed through the community somewhere along Old Military Road. Native Americans who used this trail included the Puyallup, Steilacoom, Nisqually, and Muckleshoot peoples from the west side of the mountains, as well as the Yakima from the east of the mountains. The trail was utilized for hundreds of years by Native Americans to engage in trade, pursuit of game, travel, and communication.



When Euro-Americans were exploring and establishing trading posts and forts in the 1840’s, the Naches Pass Trail was shared by Euro-Americans and Native Americans in the movement of people, as well as horses and cattle. The Naches Pass Trail was utilized by one of the first wagon

train immigrants (Naches Pass immigrant group or Longmire Party of 1853) in order to take a short cut from the Oregon Trail to the Puget Sound area over the Cascades Mountains. In the 1850's, Euro-American pioneers began to push for development of the Naches Pass Trail as an inland road connecting Fort Steilacoom and Puget Sound to Fort Walla Walla on the eastern side of the Cascade Mountains for settlement and commerce. Later, Snoqualmie Pass was favored over Naches Pass as the main movement corridor for military and commercial purposes and for future plans for a railroad route. Consequently, the Naches Pass Road remained in primitive conditions. In the meantime, the Naches Pass Road continued to be used by wagon train immigrants who settled in the Puget Sound area and by cattlemen who brought their animal stock from the east side of the mountains to markets in Puget Sound.

From the 1860's through the 1880's, the road was repaired and maintained through cattlemen's efforts and governmental funding, including Pierce and Thurston Counties and Olympia. In the 1870's, the Naches Pass Road was called Upper Puyallup to Steilacoom County Road. Only segments of this historic road remain in the area, including Snoqualmie National Forest and South Hill. A portion of the original Naches Pass Road was incorporated into the present-day Old Military Road. The original Naches Pass Road was one of the earliest roads in the State of Washington. Recently, seven plaques have been placed in South Hill at various locations along the original Naches Pass Road and Old Military Road to commemorate the significant history of this early road.

Although there were some donation land claimants in the vicinity in the 1850's, there was none inside the South Hill Community Plan area. But by the 1860's and 1870's, a few settlements of homesteads appeared in the South Hill community. The community was still largely forested, except those areas cleared by Euro-American settlers. Most settlers in the community engaged in the logging trade and agriculture. In addition to working in the hops industry, they also engaged in subsistence farming on their own lands.

Three Euro-American settlers' properties are shown in the 1872 survey map of the South Hill area. They were William Woederhold (Section 8, Township 19N, Range 4E), Charles Miller (Section 16, Township 19N, Range 4E), and Anton Drumblar (Section 16, Township 19N, Range 4E). It is speculated that the total population living in South Hill was under fifty in the late 1860's through the early 1870's. By contrast, more people settled in Puyallup which was platted in 1877. The population of Puyallup was 750 in 1878.

Hops became a very popular cash crop in the Puyallup Valley starting in the 1870's through the 1880's. Around this period, some in the South Hill community began to cultivate hops as well. Others engaged in diversified farming including pigs, rabbits, berries, dairy, and vegetables. Hops cultivation began to decline due to devastation from an epidemic of plant lice in 1891. A diverse berry crop replaced hops after the turn of the century and included strawberries, raspberries, and blueberries.

In the 1870's, the arrival of railroads to Tacoma and the spur lines extending to the outer communities benefited the area greatly. The discovery of coal deposits in Wilkeson drove construction of lines for the Northern Pacific Railroad; the railroad transported agricultural products, logs and other timber products, and coal products. The railroad reached Puyallup around 1880, and by the 1920's, it was served by several railroads--the Northern Pacific; Great

Northern; Union Pacific; the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul; the Interurban Rail; and a short line to Tacoma. These provided the area's farmers with a vital transport link to local and world markets for their produce of hops, berries, and daffodils throughout subsequent decades. Railroad spur lines came through the South Hill community, including the areas near the present day Hidden Valley and the area of 120th Avenue and 120th Street of the then Brew Logging Company's land to transport timber resources. No track remains exist in South Hill.

By the late 1880's, the population in South Hill increased to a level where it was necessary for the local people to request development of roads. In 1888, approximately 90 property owners in South Hill petitioned the Pierce County Board of Commissioners for the development of the street which became known as Meridian Avenue. Among the petitioners was Carl Muhler who cultivated hops on his farm. Behind road development petitions was the need to transport the hops crop to the market more easily. During this period, it is speculated the total population in South Hill was between 300 and 400 people.

The first independent school district in South Hill was established in 1895 near 136th Street E. and Meridian. Firgrove School, originally Patzner School, began on 2.5 acres purchased from the Northern Pacific Railroad for \$25. Like many one-room schools of the time, it accommodated children in grades 1 through 8. The school joined the Puyallup School District in June 1950 as the seventh elementary school in the district. Presently, enrollment at Firgrove tops 550 students. Woodland and Puyallup Heights Schools were also early schools that served the community, but they are now located outside of the South Hill community. Public schools continue to serve as centers for community life.

Although its actual age has not been determined, a historic log cabin on Blyton Farm, at 152nd Street and 78th Ave. E., appears to be more than 100 years old. If it is, the cabin would be one of the oldest intact structures in South Hill.

THE EARLY 1900'S THROUGH THE EARLY 1950'S

South Hill remained rural throughout the early 1900's to the early 1950's. There were scattered residents on farms or wooded lots. Timber operations by companies such as Weyerhaeuser or individual timber land owners were carried out in South Hill. A variety of income-supplementing farms in the community included rabbits, chickens, mink, dairy, vegetables, and holly trees.

Meridian Avenue was the main access road to reach Puyallup, Graham, and Eatonville. Until the 1940's, Meridian Avenue was a "farm-to-market" road. It was paved in the northbound direction in order to minimize the damage to the farmers' produce while transporting it to the market. The southbound road was an eight-foot-wide lane of gravel and mud that went to Eatonville.

McMillan Reservoir was built in South Hill in the early 1910's. It was a municipal water storage facility for the City of Tacoma. It stores water from the White River to be transported through two underground aqueducts in South Hill to Tacoma to be utilized as part of the City's water supply.

Bonneville Electric Power transmission lines were constructed to run diagonally across South Hill in the 1940's, as was a natural gas pipeline.

The Summit-Woodland-Collins Fire Department, the first fire district (Pierce County Fire District #9) in South Hill, was formed in 1948. At the beginning, it was staffed by 18 volunteer firefighters and was located at Airport Way (present-day 112th St.) and Canyon Road.

Many old timers in South Hill and the surrounding community fondly remember Willows Corner located at Meridian Avenue and 112th Street. It was originally the Kupfer Homestead of more than 240 acres. In the 1920's, the intersection of 112th and Meridian had a gas station and grocery stores and became the community's commercial center. The Willows Dance Hall was added later near one of the grocery stores. The dance hall was a popular place in the prohibition era of the 1930's and drew couples from all over the Pierce County area. It was called a destination resort in some advertisements. The dance hall later burned to the ground. In 1973, Willows Shopping Center was built at Willows Corner, followed by the South Hill Shopping Center. Now, the old Willows Corner is a part of the City of Puyallup.

In 1944, several businessmen from Puyallup purchased approximately 250 acres of an old logging camp located northeast of the present-day Frederickson community and immediately east of Meridian (SR 161), and established an airport with a 4,700 foot runway. At that time, it was the longest non-military airstrip in the area. In 1949, John Thun purchased the airport and began to operate a flying instruction business from the airport. With the additional purchase of land, the airport expanded to nearly 500 acres in 1967. Eventually after two additional ownership changes, approximately 150 acres of area including the airport and surrounding area were sold to Pierce County in 1979 and renamed Pierce County Airport-Thun Field. The airport is still owned and operated by Pierce County.

In 1948, the community was still relatively small, considering the fact that less than one bus load of senior high school students from South Hill went to Puyallup High School.

The community grew during this period as more people moved further south, densifying the area from the Puyallup vicinity toward Graham and Orting. Farms were subdivided to make way for residential developments. More roads were developed in the area meeting local community needs.

THE LATE 1950'S THROUGH THE EARLY 1970'S

South Hill's population began to increase dramatically with the beginning of the development of SR 512 in 1956 and its completion in 1972. This east-west connection made travel relatively easy from residential locations in South Hill to major employment and commercial centers on I-5, SR 7 (Pacific Avenue), and SR 161 (Meridian Avenue). It provided the community with crucial connections to urban centers in nearly every direction. South Hill, as a suburban bedroom community, began to take shape in earnest during this period.

Approximately 7,000 people are estimated to have lived in South Hill in the early 1970's. Major real estate speculation and boom began during this period. Many individuals with properties would short plat their properties taking advantage of the rapid appreciation of land prices.

Large tracts of land began to be purchased by real estate interests to be developed into residential and commercial developments.

THE MID-1970'S THROUGH THE 1990'S

Development activities in South Hill accelerated during the mid 1970's through the 1990's. The main thoroughfare of Meridian (SR 161) became intensely developed as a continuous strip of commercial developments. South Hill Mall, as a regional shopping center, opened in the 1980's, drawing customers from all over the Puget Sound region.

In the late 1970's, the growth rate of South Hill equaled or exceeded those in major urbanized areas such as University Place, Lakewood, and Gig Harbor. Some of the major impacts from fast growth were evidenced in the traffic congestion on Meridian Avenue and severe drainage problems in pockets of South Hill from runoff in the surrounding developments. It was not unusual for developers to subdivide large tracts of land into hundreds or thousands of residential lots.

Puyallup Raceway Park near Thun Field was closed down partly due to community opposition protesting the noise and other impacts from the auto race track.

Major subdivisions or planned developments such as Gem Heights and Rainier Terrace, later renamed to Sunrise, came into existence during the 1980's. The Gem Heights development included approximately 2,000 housing units; the Sunrise development included approximately 4,200 residential dwelling units in its build-out scenario, and has been proceeding in phases. At the completion of Sunrise, the residents projected to live in the development would comprise more than 30% of the population growth of 10,260 households projected for the South Hill census tract. Overall, residential developments intensified near the commercial strips and further out in South Hill, bringing the population to approximately 20,000 by the end of the 1980's.

The annexation issue came to a head in the early 1980's to address infrastructure improvements including sewers, water, roads, surface water drainage, and police protection. Ultimately, the commercial strip along Meridian and the area south of 39th Avenue SW were annexed into the City of Puyallup. At times, the residents surrounding the commercial area opposed annexation and remained in Pierce County, fearing higher taxes, requirements to hook up to sewers, higher utility costs, and duplication of government.

The community is currently attempting to address the long-standing central issue of how to manage impacts from rapid growth through planning efforts mandated by the Washington State Growth Management Act. The population in the South Hill community is now estimated at approximately 35,000 people.

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 Plan did not offer much protection from incompatible uses and did not recognize the unique individuality of communities.

In 1992, some areas of South Hill were rezoned from General to the Suburban Agriculture zone (Ordinance 90-123S). The Suburban Agriculture zone was more restrictive than the General zone.

1994 PIERCE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Growth Management Act (GMA) was passed by the Washington State Legislature in 1990. It required Pierce County to update its existing Comprehensive Plan and Development Regulations in a manner that would control residential, commercial, and industrial growth.

In 1991, Interim Growth Management Policies were adopted as a transition between the 1962 Comprehensive Plan and the more complex plan developed under the Growth Management Act. In 1992, the County-Wide Planning Policies were adopted. The policies provided the framework and process by which Pierce County and the cities and towns within the County would establish urban growth areas, provide infrastructure and services, and preserve agricultural and natural resource lands.

In 1994, Pierce County adopted the 1994 Pierce County Comprehensive Plan which replaced the 1962 Pierce County Comprehensive Plan in its entirety. The Plan established population projections, urban growth areas, and rural areas. The implementing Development Regulations-Zoning became effective in July 1995.

COMMUNITY PLANNING

The Community Plans Element of the 1994 Pierce County Comprehensive Plan envisions a local voice in how the Comprehensive Plan and its Development Regulations will be carried out in communities. It indicates specific land use designations, appropriate densities, and the design standards that should apply in community planning areas. Preserving and building community character while ensuring an efficient and predictable development approval process is a central theme.

Although the Growth Management Act does not require comprehensive plans to provide for community plans, Pierce County Ordinance 90-47S directs County officials to prepare a community plans element of the Comprehensive Plan. The majority of unincorporated County

population reside in community plan areas. Community plans must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the GMA.

SCOPE OF THE COMMUNITY PLAN

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY TO DEVELOP THE PLAN

In the Community Plans Element of the 1994 Pierce County Comprehensive Plan, South Hill was identified as a community that would receive a community plan. In August 1999, the Pierce County Council directed the Department of Planning and Land Services to initiate a community plan for the South Hill community through Resolution R99-66S. The process for developing the South Hill Community Plan began with the formation of a Community Planning Board. The Board was comprised of business owners, residents, and organizations consisting of a broad range of interests. The County Council modified the boundaries of the South Hill Community Plan with Ordinance 2001-21s. The modification excluded Canyon Road and the area known as Summit View and ensured all of the Sunrise development was included in the plan.

PURPOSE AND USE OF THE COMMUNITY PLAN

The South Hill Community Plan gives residents, businesses, property owners, and Pierce County a clearer, more detailed sense of how the community wants future growth and development to occur. It details what standards should be utilized in order to create and maintain the character and amenities identified through the policies and goals of the plan. The South Hill Community Plan accomplishes the following:

- Sets distinct goals and visions for the South Hill community;
- Provides design standards for architecture, site layout, signs, and landscaping to all development;
- Provides tree retention or replacement standards to ensure significant vegetation is provided for each site;
- Establishes recreation standards to ensure a recreation is provided for every new residential development and that the recreation area is not just a small tot lot;
- Requires pedestrian connections through commercial and residential areas so that citizens may travel on foot or bicycle to any destination within the community; and,
- Identifies implementation actions necessary to carry the plan to full completion over the course of the next 20 years.

COMPONENTS OF THE COMMUNITY PLAN

The vision statements and all of the policies (goals, objectives, principles, and standards) were developed through citizen input. When applying the policy statements, each should be afforded equal weight and consideration.