

Chapter 7 UTILITIES

EXISTING UTILITIES

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The Utilities Element of the Comprehensive Plan was developed in accordance with Section 36.70A.070(4) of the Growth Management Act (GMA). It is intended to address utility service needs in the Friday Harbor Urban Growth Area and represents the community's policy plan for the next 20 years.

The Utilities Element was also developed to be consistent with the Joint Planning Policy, and integrated with all other plan elements to ensure consistency throughout the Comprehensive Plan. The Utilities Element specifically considers the general location and capacity of all existing and proposed utilities, including but not limited to electrical power distribution, and telecommunications distribution systems and facilities.

Urban Growth Area

The boundary of the Friday Harbor Urban Growth Area was selected to ensure that urban services will be available to all development. This includes the provision of utilities. The Town recognizes that planning for utilities as defined by GMA is the primary responsibility of the utility service providers (OPALCO, Adelphia, PTI, and others). However, the Town incorporated the plans of the providers into its planning effort in order to identify ways of improving the quality and delivery of services provided in the Town UGA.

Overview

Utility services provided to residents of the Town of Friday Harbor include electric power, standard and cellular telephone communications, and cable television and fiber optics. *Water, sewer, stormwater, and solid waste disposal, although normally considered utilities, are considered capital facilities by GMA and, therefore, are discussed in Chapter 6 of this Comprehensive Plan.*

Friday Harbor is not connected to the extensive network of natural gas lines that serve the western United States. However, OPALCO has made plans to install a value in the Georgia Straight Pipeline. This could provide natural gas to the San Juan Islands in the future. Presently fuels such as liquid propane and diesel can be obtained from a number of suppliers in the Town.

Electric Power

Electrical power is provided in the Town of Friday Harbor by Orcas Power and Light Company (OPALCO). OPALCO purchases power from the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA).

OPALCO is a member-owned, private, non-profit Rural Electric Administration (REA) Cooperative that provides electric service to its members in San Juan County. OPALCO was formed in 1937 and currently maintains offices in Friday Harbor, Eastsound and on Lopez Island, with headquarters in Eastsound. OPALCO is primarily an electric power distribution utility at present, but does maintain a small generation capacity for emergency purposes at its original generation plant in Eastsound.

OPALCO reports that the utility's existing electric facilities in San Juan County have adequate capacity to serve existing loads, and that a comprehensive system plan to expand capacity as load growth occurs is maintained. OPALCO Substation No. 5, a 12/16/20 megawatt facility, is located in Friday Harbor on tax parcel #351391410. A new substation that will double the capacity is currently under construction, a 12/16/20 megawatt facility, and is located in Friday Harbor on tax parcel #351391323. OPALCO is currently building a fiber optic system that will interconnect San Juan Island and Orcas Island to the mainland.

In March 1993 the Bonneville Power Administration developed a 20-year load forecast for OPALCO. BPA's assumption for new residential accounts was based on the historical relationship between County population and residential accounts. Its average annual growth rate for new residential accounts through the year 2013 was 3.1%.

Telecommunications

CenturyTel of Inter-Island, based in Monroe, Louisiana, provides local standard telephone service. CenturyTel also provides DSL service, Internet services as well as Private Dedicated services, which meet the needs of telecommunications customers throughout the County.

In 2002 CenturyTel maintained 7,283 standard telephone service accounts for San Juan Island alone. This represents nearly half (49%) of the 15,002 service accounts for San Juan County.

CenturyTel provides service to the County via a fiber optic cable network that connects all of the major islands to the mainland. It provides all the essential services to meet the needs of telecommuters and those who run businesses from their homes. Service is currently provided to Blakely, Brown, Center, Crane, Decatur, Henry, Lopez, Obstruction, Orcas, Pearl, San Juan and Shaw Islands.

The technology used by CenturyTel facilities in San Juan County assures that capacity constraints are not a problem in providing standard service locally. Geographic isolation and comparatively small resident populations have historically inhibited the extension of telephone service to some islands within San Juan County, such as Stuart and Waldron Islands.

CenturyTel plans for growth within its service area by projecting growth based on known development activity, past growth history, current Town and County land use designations, and system capacity. Based on these studies, expansion projects are planned and included in annual plans. Five year "Forecasts" of capital spending requirements needed to address projected growth are made in CenturyTel's capital plan, which is filed with the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission.

Nationally, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulates the airwaves and the cellular industry, and is responsible for issuing construction permits for transmission facilities and licenses to operate cellular systems. The FCC awards two operating licenses to cellular communications providers within each Rural Service Area (RSA). The Friday Harbor/San Juan County RAS is currently served by AT&T Cellular (Cellular One) and Air-Touch Cellular Communications.

Local governments regulate development of the cellular network by specifying where facilities can locate, applying buffering, setback and other requirements except in the case of facilities covered by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The FAA regulates towers that exceed 200 feet in height, and smaller towers within 20,000 feet of major airports or within 10,000 feet of general aviation airports.

Where feasible, cellular facilities use existing tower structures, poles and buildings where antennas can be mounted on rooftops and electronic equipment can be installed within the building itself. Topography and other engineering factors influence specific site selection because of the need for cell sites to “hand off” the signal so that it can be picked up by another facility.

Unlike other utilities, the cellular telephone industry does not plan facilities far into the future. Market demand is analyzed to determine expansions into new service areas. Cellular service can be expanded to provide better service to cellular customers by extending the coverage to new areas or by increasing the capacity of the system within the current service area.

A decision to expand the system depends on a number of factors. Those include the number of current customers within the area and the capacity of the current system, the quality level of the service currently being provided, and FCC license requirements which specify that cellular service carriers must provide service to at least 75 percent of their Cellular Geographic Service Area (CGSA) within

five years from the date the license is granted.

Cable Television

Cable television is provided by Adelphia, a privately owned franchise, to residents of the Town of Friday Harbor and several areas of San Juan Island

UTILITY GOALS

UTL-1 To coordinate all long-range planning efforts between utility service providers and the Town of Friday Harbor.

UTL-2 To ensure the timely and cost effective provision of utility services to Friday Harbor residents through joint project planning and availability of utility corridors within public rights-of-way.

UTL-3 To allow for the siting, placement, continuing operation, maintenance, and expansion of utility services consistent with the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

UTL-4 To ensure timely processing of permit applications for new utility facilities or utility service work.

UTL-5 To minimize adverse impacts of siting, placement or operation of utility facilities to new development or the character of Friday Harbor and its neighborhoods.

UTL-6 To protect and preserve critical areas and other features of the natural environment while providing for the extension of necessary facilities.

UTL-7 To save money and promote reliability of existing utilities by conserving existing energy resources, and promoting the feasible conversion to energy-conserving technologies.

UTL-8 To assist the Orcas Power and Light Company (OPALCO) achieve its goal of providing electric energy to its customers efficiently and at the lowest cost consistent with the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

UTL-9 To promote the availability of telecommunication systems to the public, institutions, businesses and government agencies and the related benefits for public service and economic opportunity consistent with the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

UTILITY POLICIES

Long Range Planning

UTL-10 Encourage utility service providers to assist Friday Harbor in future comprehensive planning efforts.

UTL-11 Friday Harbor should obtain the most up-to-date information on the existing and planned location of utility facilities from the service providers.

UTL-12 Friday Harbor should provide utility service providers with annual status reports on the six-year capital improvement financing plan.

Project Coordination

UTL-13 Encourage and facilitate inter-agency coordination in the siting,

installation and maintenance of utility facilities.

UTL-14 Provide timely notification to utility service providers of proposed projects in public rights-of-way.

UTL-15 Provide for utility services in the dedication of new rights-of-way.

Location and Siting

UTL-16 New utility facilities should conform to the policies of the Land Use Element.

UTL-17 Utility facilities should be sited and located to minimize negative impact to the character of Friday Harbor or its neighborhoods.

UTL-18 Where necessary, new development approved adjacent to existing utility facilities should provide vegetative screening or buffers.

UTL-19 Utility installations to serve new development should be installed underground.

UTL-20 New development should be designed so that utility easements are accessible and have sufficient capacity for installation of the full range of required utility services.

UTL-21 New transmission facilities, substations and submarine transmission cable terminal facilities should be located and sited to minimize adverse impacts to Friday Harbor's shorelines or the character of its neighborhoods.

Environmental Protection

UTL-22 New utility facilities should be located away from, or constructed in a manner compatible with, designated critical areas and shorelines.

UTL-23 Friday Harbor should attach appropriate conditions to the approval of new utility facilities in order to mitigate impacts to critical areas, shorelines, or the character of Friday Harbor neighborhoods.

Telecommunications

UTL-24 Friday Harbor should work with San Juan County to develop specific standards and criteria for the siting, size and height of telecommunications antennae and towers.

UTL-25 The joint use of existing telecommunications antennae and towers should be maximized to the extent feasible prior to the approval of new facilities.