

Chapter 2

Community

Character



INTRODUCTION

Ruston values its distinctive character and strong sense of community, evident in its public participation, festivals, celebrations, and special events. Residents cherish Ruston's history, unique charm, and small-town atmosphere, striving to preserve and enhance its "sense of place." Based on public input, key community treasures contributing to Ruston's character generally fall into two categories: form and celebrations.

- Form includes elements such as buildings, architecture, historically or culturally significant sites, streets, sidewalks, districts, scenic views, signage, public art, parks, trails, and open spaces.
- Celebrations encompass community festivals and events that foster connections, honor traditions, and highlight moments from both the present and the past.

Preserving and enhancing these elements inspires community engagement and pride, strengthens relationships, promotes stewardship, and connects Ruston to its heritage. This commitment fosters a distinctive environment where residents, visitors, and businesses thrive and flourish.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

In recent years, preserving and enhancing Ruston's walkability has been a primary focus. The city has applied for numerous grants, securing significant funding for improvements to its valuable grid of streets and sidewalks. Streets have been repaved, sidewalks repaired, and new features—such as street signs, lighting, bulb-outs, and bollards—have been installed to create a more walkable community. Most recently, funding has been secured for a public engagement process and long-awaited environmental remediation and recreation improvements to Rust Park.

Ruston's economy has benefited from the environmental cleanup and redevelopment of the ASARCO industrial site and the initial revitalization of the Pearl District.

However, as development progresses, it remains critical to prioritize the community's character. Strategies to enhance and protect Ruston's "sense of place" include:

- Protecting and enhancing walkability, bike paths, and transit through Complete Streets policies, codes, and designs by prioritizing pedestrians and cyclists over vehicles. This approach emphasizes traffic calming, alley-accessed garages, and the removal of vehicle priority to create vibrant, walkable streetscapes.
- Prioritizing pedestrian-oriented, human-scaled architecture and site designs by reducing vehicle dominance.
- Preserving and enhancing Ruston's parks, trails, plazas, and open spaces.
- Protect scenic views while allowing development.
- Safeguarding sites of historical, cultural, civic, or environmental significance.
- Developing and implementing a unique "brand" for Ruston that differentiates it from surrounding communities.
- Continuing community events like the Easter Egg Hunt, 4th of July Parade, National Night Out block parties, and the Tree Lighting.
- Exploring additional community events and collaborations with businesses or other agencies.

FUTURE VISION

Ruston continues to evolve as a community that balances growth with preservation, fostering a distinct "sense of place" that sets it apart from neighboring communities. Its natural hills provide breathtaking views of Commencement Bay, Mount Rainier, and the Olympic Mountains. Once an industrial company town, Ruston has revitalized the ASARCO site into a thriving urban center that seamlessly integrates residential and commercial developments. The Pearl District has also been transformed into a vibrant corridor offering local dining and services while strengthening connections to nearby neighborhoods. Ruston collaborates with Metro Parks, Tacoma, and local tribes to provide regional shopping, recreation, tourism, and cultural experiences.

Ruston remains true to its small-town charm. Neighborhoods feature thoughtfully designed Arts and Crafts-style homes, welcoming front porches, and pedestrian-

friendly streetscapes. Alleys primarily access garages, enhancing walkability and promoting vibrant streets.

The community emphasizes pedestrian-oriented, human-scaled architecture and site designs while prioritizing seamless connections through bikeable routes and transit-friendly infrastructure that integrate walkability, health, and human interaction. Hillside developments blend into natural slopes, preserving scenic views while maintaining aesthetic appeal.

Ruston is dedicated to preserving and enhancing parks, trails, plazas, and open spaces, safeguarding sites of historical, cultural, civic, or environmental significance, and fostering a sense of pride in its history and character. A distinct "brand" sets Ruston apart, reflected in city communications, signage, and public spaces.

The city hosts cherished events like the Easter Egg Hunt, the 4th of July Parade, National Night Out, and the Tree Lighting while collaborating with businesses and agencies to create new activities. Balancing growth and preservation, Ruston responsibly manages resources and fosters a sustainable, vibrant community for generations to come.

GOALS AND POLICIES

Community Character Goal 1: Preserve and enhance neighborhood charm and vibrancy while supporting new developments that harmonize with the area's design, prioritizing form alongside function.

CC Policy 1.1 Allow development that is compatible in scale and character with the existing neighborhood. Require architecturally thoughtful transitions between new and existing structures that are visually appealing and allow for adequate light and open space.

- CC Policy 1.2** Allow infill development when lot and home size are in proportion and similar to existing neighborhood character.
- CC Policy 1.3** Design residential developments with arts and crafts-style homes (i.e. Craftsman, Tudor, and Pacific Northwest Timber Frame). Visible building materials should reflect human handicraft (cedar lap siding or shingles) over plywood siding such as T-1-11.
- CC Policy 1.4** Neighboring uses should be compatible through the application of architectural treatments.
- CC Policy 1.5** Homes should provide living space as the dominant feature of the street elevation. Front porches, dormers, stonework/masonry, arbors, and architectural features should orient homes toward the street instead of garages. Garages should be accessed from alleys to enhance the pedestrian-friendly character of the street front.
- CC Policy 1.6** Help preserve Ruston's small-town character by encouraging cottage industries or live-work units where employees work from home offices or shops.
- CC Policy 1.7** Encourage low impact live-work units and accessory dwelling units by simplifying the permitting process. Provide architectural examples that show good integration with the existing neighborhood.
- CC Policy 1.8** Promote residential design that is environmentally sensitive, energy efficient, and aesthetically pleasing.
- CC Policy 1.9** Emphasize pedestrian-oriented, human-scaled architecture and site designs through Ruston's codes and standards.

Community Character Goal 2: Protect scenic views while allowing development.

- CC Policy 2.1** Hillside development should be terraced into existing slopes and provide architectural treatments from all significant viewpoints. Structures should be placed with minimal impact to scenic views. Roof tops should be designed to be aesthetically pleasing, provide screening, and may include “green uses” such as gardens, landscaping or stormwater treatment.
- CC Policy 2.2** Ensure scenic views will be maintained by limiting the height of structures and vegetation. Structures and vegetation should not exceed the maximum height permitted for structures per Ruston’s code.
- CC Policy 2.3** Ensure scenic view corridors will be maintained when allowing development. Provide modulation or varying roof designs to minimize encroachment on view corridors for existing uses. Plan appropriate landscaping to avoid encroachment on views.
- CC Policy 2.4** Enhance the scenic views and aesthetic quality of Ruston by placing overhead utilities underground.

Community Character Goal 3: Preserve and enhance sites of historical, cultural, civic, or environmental significance that contribute to the community’s identity and sense of place, including designated landmark opportunity sites.

- CC Policy 3.1** Identify sites of significance and seek funding to enhance them.
- CC Policy 3.2** Ensure civic buildings, other landmark opportunity sites, and gathering places are prominently visible in character and location-unique from the vernacular architecture (i.e. additional building height or unique landmark quality architecture).

- CC Policy 3.3** Develop a Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) plan to assess community needs and preferences for buildings, parks, trails, plazas, and open spaces.
- CC Policy 3.4** Improve existing community gathering places with landscaping and recreational amenities.
- CC Policy 3.5** Seek new locations for community gathering places such as a community garden. Explore the use of city parks and undeveloped rights-of-way.
- CC Policy 3.6** Celebrate city history and culture through public art, photos, plaques, and educational initiatives.

Community Character Goal 4: Preserve and enhance Ruston's celebrations that foster community, strengthen local identity, boost economic vitality, and honor past and present moments.

- CC Policy 4.1** Gather community input regarding events, celebrations and recreational programs.
- CC Policy 4.2** Encourage local partnerships with businesses and organizations to plan and implement community events and programs.
- CC Policy 4.3** Seek grants and partnerships to fund community events and programs.
- CC Policy 4.4** Encourage and facilitate community-building events by permitting temporary street closures to create safe and vibrant gathering spaces.
- CC Policy 4.5** Permit food trucks to operate as one-time food providers at community events, enhancing the variety and accessibility of food options for attendees.

Community Character Goal 5: Protect and enhance pedestrian, biking, and transit connectivity by prioritizing Complete Streets concepts and codes.

- CC Policy 5.1** Allow development that encourages pedestrian-oriented architecture.
- CC Policy 5.2** Design commercial streetscapes with wide sidewalks, landscaping, street lighting, and room for outdoor seating to encourage pedestrian traffic.
- CC Policy 5.3** Design residential streetscapes with traditional sidewalks that include two-foot scoring patterns, landscaping, street lighting, and connectivity to other neighborhoods and commercial zones.
- CC Policy 5.4** Create an excellent pedestrian experience through the use of safely defined walkways, landscaping, architecture, and art. Pedestrian connections are important and should be required between all uses, encouraging a more walkable and healthful community.
- CC Policy 5.5** Require developer mitigation that supports complete streets along project frontages.
- CC Policy 5.6** Seek funding to implement Complete Streets concepts.

Community Character Goal 6: Develop and implement a unique “brand” for Ruston that differentiates itself from surrounding areas.

- CC Policy 6.1** Develop and implement a marketing and wayfinding plan that establishes Ruston’s “brand” and includes coordinated standards throughout city communication, buildings, crosswalks, bollards, wayfinding, signage, light fixtures, manhole covers, garbage cans, benches, street furnishings, sidewalk scoring and paving patterns, etc.

CC Policy 6.2 Seek funding for development and implementation of Ruston's marketing and wayfinding plan.

POLICY CONNECTIONS

The Community Character Element is key to preserving Ruston's unique identity while planning for future growth. It works alongside other elements of the Comprehensive Plan to protect and enhance the city's character.

The **Land Use** and **Housing Elements** promote pedestrian-friendly, human-scale development that fits Ruston's small-town charm. These policies help protect scenic views, foster walkability, and integrate the city's character into residential and commercial areas. Similarly, the **Transportation Element** focuses on Complete Streets policies and designs to improve walkability, bikeability, and transit connections, supporting vibrant and accessible streetscapes.

The **Capital Facilities Element** ensures that parks, trails, open spaces, and city buildings are preserved and improved. These spaces are essential to Ruston's charm and provide venues for community events. The **Economic Vitality Element** builds on this by promoting Ruston's unique "brand" to attract visitors, businesses, and investment while ensuring that growth complements the city's character.

The **Shoreline Element** emphasizes protecting and enhancing Ruston's waterfront, ensuring development aligns with the community's identity. It prioritizes scenic views, public access, and environmental stewardship, making the shoreline a valued part of Ruston.

By connecting these elements, the Community Character Element guides decisions that honor Ruston's past, enhance its present, and shape a future that retains its unique character.