

Chapter 3

Land Use



The Land Use Element is designed to help Ruston achieve its vision for a city that has accommodated growth in a smart fashion while ensuring that the community's high quality of life, small-town character and rich history is retained. The pattern of uses that make up Ruston help support the community's long-term vision and goals by describing locations where development is appropriate, what the general character of the development should be and its intensity. The policies and goals in the Land Use element provide the basis for land use designations, development regulations and zoning in the regulating plan that will implement the Comprehensive Plan.

The City's land use origins include an important fishing area for the S'Puyallupabsh (Puyallup) Indian Tribe that inhabited the general Commencement Bay area. Arrival of European settlers brought the smelting industry that established in the 1890s, including growing neighborhoods and commercial areas. The operations were subsequently sold to ASARCO and smelting activities continued. By 1906 Ruston incorporated into a well-established community with unique characteristics and amenities. In the 1990s the Federal Government designated ASARCO as a Superfund site and required it to be cleaned of contaminants including arsenic, lead and other toxins.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, Ruston has retained much of its valuable character and charm, developing into an urban city with an established land use pattern of primarily residential single-family and mixed-use commercial areas. Uniquely, Ruston is almost completely surrounded by the City of Tacoma and Commencement Bay and its urban growth area is contiguous with existing city boundaries. There are no designated potential annexation areas for Ruston. New growth is anticipated to occur through redevelopment of commercial areas, infill of residential areas, and new mixed use development in the Point Ruston Development, the former ASARCO industrial and environmental clean-up site.

Ruston's preferred land use pattern is summarized in the following policy themes:

- Preserve Ruston's heritage;
- Retain existing traditional neighborhood character as it relates to the Community Character Element;
- Strengthen Ruston's commercial core and ensure new and existing developments are integrated with each other so there are no pedestrian or architectural barriers within the city;
- Encourage infill development;
- Provide multimodal connections to commercial areas, residences and recreation amenities; and
- Develop community gathering places and a healthful walkable community.

Ruston's development standards implement the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan through regulations and other planning instruments such as maps, transportation thoroughfares, and other design requirements.

Growth Management and VISION 2050

Ruston's goals and vision are consistent with land use goals of the Growth Management Act (GMA) and VISION 2050 including: development in urban areas

(infill) to retain open space; encouragement of live-work dwelling units; providing a variety of housing types; address housing affordability across incomes; provide opportunities for all; sustainable economic growth; ensuring that public facilities and services are adequate; investing in transportation to support planned land use and to provide travel choices; and historic preservation. Ruston's Comprehensive Plan aligns with GMA and VISION 2050 goals to:

- Focus growth within urban areas to create walkable, compact and transit-oriented communities that maintain local character.
- Identify and protect significant visual and cultural resources that preserve community character and placemaking efforts.
- Design facilities throughout the region that advance community development.
- Advance redevelopment and infill as opportunities for revitalizing communities, including along linear corridors (such as low-scale retail strips along the thoroughfares).
- Designate open space and parks at a variety of scales, create public amenities, contribute to the character of communities, and provide opportunities for recreation and physical activity.

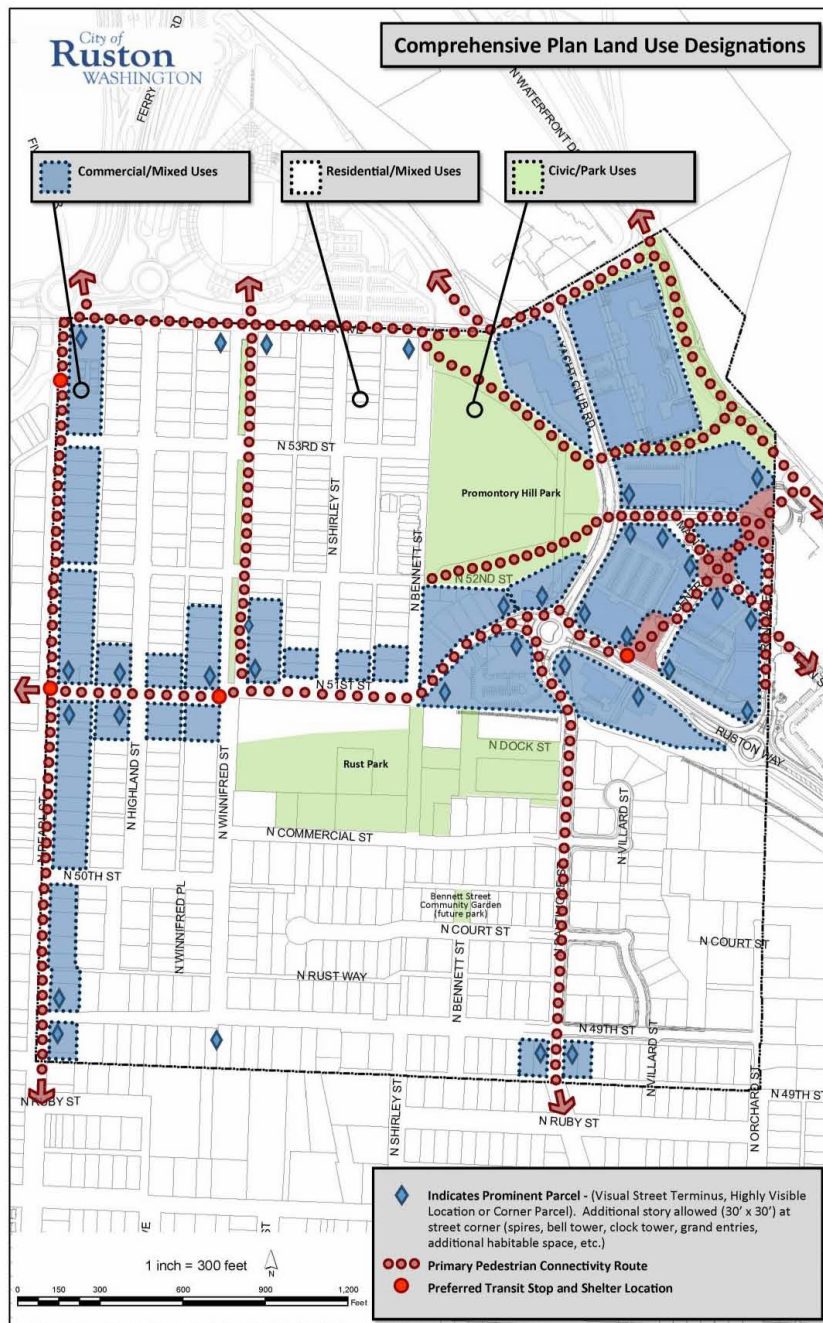
EXISTING LAND USE

General Land Uses and Zoning

Ruston is primarily built-out with a majority of land dedicated to low density residential homes and a modest amount of multifamily dwelling unit options. Core commercial areas include Pearl Street, North 51st Street, and Point Ruston. Ruston is surrounded by City of Tacoma residential and commercial uses to the north, south, east and west, with the exception of Commencement Bay which lies to the north and northeast, and Point Defiance Park which is located to the north and northwest. The Tacoma Yacht Club is also located to the north of Ruston. Across Pearl Street due west, Ruston is abutted by Tacoma commercial and residential

uses. To the south and east, Ruston is flanked by Tacoma single-family residential neighborhoods. See Figure 3.1 below for a map of existing land use.

Figure 3.1 Existing Land Use Map



Source: City of Ruston, 2025

Utility Services

Lands useful for public services are currently being utilized as such or are accommodated through inter-local agreements with the City of Tacoma. Ruston's water supply is provided through an inter-local agreement with the City of Tacoma. Therefore, provision for protection of the quality and quantity of Ruston's groundwater used for public water supplies falls within the City of Tacoma's rules and regulations. There are no wells present within city limits. Sanitary sewer services including treatment are also provided by the City of Tacoma through an inter-local agreement. Ruston has its own stormwater treatment facilities which tie into the City of Tacoma's systems. Ruston has adopted the 2006 Department of Ecology Stormwater Manual and follows those prescribed practices for stormwater treatment. Current existing utility corridors offer some room for natural gas and telecommunications facilities for future growth and upgrades. For more information and policies on utilities, see the Utilities Element of this plan.

Schools

There are no schools located within Ruston's boundaries. Residents are served by the Tacoma School District.

Recreation, Emergency, and Other City Services

Recreational opportunities are provided in dedicated open spaces within city limits including:

- Rust Park;
- Bennett Street Community Garden;
- Winnifred Street Park;
- Promontory Hill Park; and
- The Ruston Way Waterwalk, which is located along the shoreline of Commencement Bay.

As urban development continues, so will the need to maintain, preserve, and enhance open space, recreational facilities, and critical areas in Ruston. Policies to designate and protect critical areas including wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat

protection areas, frequently flooded areas, critical aquifer recharge areas, and geologically hazardous areas are addressed in the Land Use element of the Comprehensive Plan and implementing critical areas regulations. In developing these policies, Ruston included the best available science (BAS) to protect the functions and values of critical areas and give “special consideration” to conservation or protection measures necessary to preserve or enhance anadromous fisheries.

Additionally, other public service uses in Ruston including trash collection, maintenance, police, fire, medical aid, and city administration operate from various publicly owned lands and locations within city boundaries. The Fire Department and medical aid services are located on Winnifred Street. City Hall, Police, maintenance offices, and other administration services are in the former Ruston School Building on Shirley Street. Additional emergency services, such as urgent care and general hospitals, are located outside of city limits in neighboring Tacoma.

GROWTH POTENTIAL

Population forecasting is an integral part of the planning process, and the GMA requires jurisdictions to estimate the number of new households and jobs that will be accommodated in the future. GMA requires Ruston’s forecast to be consistent with regional targets. With Ruston being largely built out, growth potential is limited in the city to the Point Ruston Development, infill development, and any redevelopment.

Growth Accommodation

Since Ruston doesn’t have an urban growth area, allowing the city to become larger in area, our only option is to use the land within Ruston’s borders more efficiently. In some cases, redevelopment of underutilized sites may occur, but more than likely, additional growth will occur by allowing increased height in select locations and infill throughout the city.

Examples of residential infill are expected to include:

- Subdivision of larger single-family lots into smaller lots;
- Construction of accessory dwellings;
- Live-work units; and
- Duplex or triplex units.

In addition to targeted growth, redevelopment in the Point Ruston Development (MPD-PR) accounts for much of the citywide growth. The Point Ruston Development's status is partially built at the time this plan was prepared. The MPD-PR has 620 units in the works and is the major catalyst for redevelopment of commercial and residential areas throughout the community.

Buildable Lands Analysis Summary

In order to determine how Ruston may accommodate growth into 2044, we first must assess how much developable land is available and then designate it accordingly. To do so, Pierce County conducted a buildable lands analysis for Ruston in 2022, included in [Appendix X](#). This analysis categorized land by zoning classification to illustrate the total acreage per category, as shown in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2 City of Ruston Zone Classifications

| | Zone Classification | Zone Type¹ | Total Acres² |
|---------------|---|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| COM | Commercial | Commercial | 2.9 |
| COM-P | Commercial | Commercial | 4.5 |
| MPD | Master Planned Development | Planned Development | 1.0 |
| MPD-PR | Master Planned Development – Point Ruston | Planned Development | 41.2 |
| MPD-RL | Master Planned Development | Planned Development | 1.2 |
| MPD-SH | Master Planned Development – Stack Hill | Planned Development | 6.8 |
| RES | Residential | Residential | 64.1 |

Source: Pierce County Buildable Lands Analysis, 2022

¹For purposes of the buildable lands inventory and analysis; not a representation of the city zoning code.

²Represents parcel acreage, not zoning coverage.

These areas were then analyzed for vacant and underutilized lands, with deductions applied for critical areas, capital facilities, market factors, and plat constraints. The resulting analysis informed the housing and employment capacity tables presented in Figure 3.3 (Housing) and Figure 3.6 (Employment).

Housing Capacity

From the buildable land analysis, Pierce County determined Ruston's housing capacity across the city. In total, Ruston's housing capacity came out to be 653 units, with the overwhelming majority coming from the Point Ruston area with projected pipeline units.

Figure 3.3 City of Ruston Housing Capacity Summary (2020-2044)

| | Vacant Single Units | Pipeline Units | Vacant Housing Capacity | Underutilized Housing Capacity | Total Housing Capacity |
|--------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| COM | - | - | - | -1 | -1 |
| COM-P | - | - | - | -1 | -1 |
| MPD | - | - | - | - | - |
| MPD-PR | - | 620 | - | - | 620 |
| MPD-RL | - | - | - | - | - |
| MPD-SH | 2 | - | - | - | 2 |
| RES | 19 | - | 6 | 8 | 33 |
| Total | 21 | 620 | 6 | 6 | 653 |

Source: Pierce County Buildable Lands Analysis, 2022

Population Projections

After determining how much buildable land Ruston has to accommodate growth, **how much will Ruston's population increase between 2020 and 2044?**

In working with Pierce County and Puget Sound Regional Council, Ruston is forecasted to grow to a total population of 1,508 persons, 695 housing units, and 603 jobs by 2044. The breakdown of population, housing, and employment targets are found below in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4 2044 Population, Housing, Employment Targets

| Target | Estimated '20 Count | '20 -'44 Growth | '44 Total Allocation |
|-------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Population | 1,055 | 453 | 1,508 |
| Housing | 517 | 169 | 686 |
| Employment | 532 | 71 | 603 |

Source: PSRC Vision 2050

How does this compare to neighboring jurisdictions? A table comparison between projected growth in Ruston and growth in neighboring Tacoma is seen in Figure 3.5 below.

Figure 3.5 2044 Population Targets

| Jurisdiction | Estimated '20 Population | '20 -'44 Population Growth | '44 Total Population Allocation |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Ruston | 1,055 | 453 | 1,508 |
| Tacoma | 219,346 | 105,977 | 325,323 |

Source: PSRC Vision 2050

Employment Projections

As part of the buildable lands analysis, Pierce County also reviewed Ruston's capacity for employment. In total, Ruston's employment capacity came out to be 778 jobs, with the overwhelming majority coming from the Point Ruston area with projected jobs coming down the pipeline.

Figure 3.6 City of Ruston Employment Capacity Summary (2020-2044)

| | Vacant Employment Capacity | Underutilize d Employment Capacity | Pipeline Jobs | Total Employment Capacity |
|--------------|---|---|----------------------|--|
| COM | 9 | 6 | - | 15 |
| COM-P | 5 | 9 | - | 14 |
| MPD | - | - | - | - |
| MPD-PR | - | - | 749 | 749 |
| MPD-RL | - | - | - | - |
| MPD-SH | - | - | - | - |
| RES | - | - | - | - |
| Total | 14 | 15 | 749 | 778 |

Source: Pierce County Buildable Lands Analysis, 2022

For further land capacity analysis, see [Appendix X – Buildable Lands Analysis](#). For further housing analysis, see the Housing Element.

FUTURE VISION

Ruston is treasured for its independence, rich history, friendly atmosphere and unique character. Ruston is a residential mixed use community, urban in character and primarily built-out. The area has remained primarily residential and accommodated infill through live-work and accessory dwelling units that complement surrounding uses and have high quality architecture. Multifamily developments are largely in mixed use areas and are designed well with exceptional architectural features and treatments, fitting-in with existing neighborhood character. Ruston has a strong and healthy economy with vibrant retail businesses and services located in commercial and other mixed-use districts, many within a

five-minute walk of neighborhoods. Ruston is a very walkable city, and the built and natural environments are well connected. Various types of transportation thoroughfares provide passage for pedestrians, bicyclists, and autos throughout Ruston and nearby Tacoma and Point Defiance Park.

Ruston has long embraced the vision of a walkable community, rooted in its original architecture that reflects traditional neighborhoods with a grid street network, including sidewalks, alleys, and a diversity of uses throughout all areas of the city. As a result, Ruston remains an interesting, enjoyable community with a rich character that has endured for over a century. Moving forward, the city builds upon the successful principles of New Urbanism and form-based codes, ensuring that new development aligns with the community's historical context.

To address the challenges posed by mid-20th-century development patterns, Ruston prioritizes infill that integrates seamlessly with existing neighborhoods, avoiding sprawl. To enhance its walkability, the community's vision emphasizes three key principles: building new development at or near the sidewalk, creating building street-fronts that are visually and physically permeable, and locating parking behind, under, or above buildings. Ruston encourages accessory dwelling units and live-work opportunities that fit harmoniously with surrounding uses, as well as new commercial developments that are pedestrian-oriented and architecturally compatible with the area. By maintaining a focus on walkability and ecological sustainability, Ruston remains a balanced community that values both its heritage and future growth.

GOALS AND POLICIES

Land use goals and policies are essential for guiding the development and growth of Ruston in a manner that preserves its unique character and promotes a vibrant community. These policies establish a framework for balancing residential, commercial, and recreational spaces, ensuring that land use decisions align with the community's vision for sustainable growth.

Land Use Goal 1: Ruston guides growth through sustainable, well-planned development that balances housing, employment, and public facilities while preserving its small-town character and enhancing walkability.

- LU Policy 1.1** Provide sufficient land area and densities to meet Ruston's projected needs for housing, employment and public facilities over the next 20-year planning horizon.
- LU Policy 1.2** Ensure that development regulations, including the allowed density, uses and site requirements, provide for the achievement of Ruston's preferred land use pattern.
- LU Policy 1.3** Allow development only where adequate public facilities and services can be provided.
- LU Policy 1.4** Ensure development provides for adequate infrastructure, including telecommunication facilities and multi-modal linkages, to support the concept of live-work units and "live, work, play" in Ruston.
- LU Policy 1.5** Encourage sustainable development of both public and private lands and right-of-way in Ruston using techniques, such as green building and green infrastructure.
- LU Policy 1.6** Reduce impervious surfaces by encouraging green roofs, rain gardens and other pervious asphalt-like surfaces.
- LU Policy 1.7** Encourage infill development on suitable vacant parcels and the redevelopment of underutilized parcels. Ensure that the height, bulk and design of these projects are compatible with their surroundings.
- LU Policy 1.8** Promote infill development such as accessory dwelling units and live-work units that are designed to fit in well with surrounding neighborhoods.

- LU Policy 1.9** Encourage new commercial development and redevelopment of underutilized properties that architecturally fits well with nearby uses and is pedestrian-oriented toward street frontages.
- LU Policy 1.10** Provide opportunities for shops, services, recreation, and access to healthy food sources within walking or bicycling distance of homes, workplaces and other gathering places.
- LU Policy 1.11** Design developments to encourage access by modes of travel other than driving alone, such as walking, bicycling and transit, and to provide connections to the non-motorized system.
- LU Policy 1.12** Develop Ruston as a balanced community while maintaining its traditional small-town character.

Land Use Goal 2: Residential development in Ruston integrates with neighborhood character, respects scenic views and natural landscapes, and integrates sustainable and diverse housing options.

- LU Policy 2.1** Encourage multifamily developments in appropriate areas that offer convenient multimodal access to local stores and services. Multifamily developments should not block defined scenic view corridors and should be designed to architecturally integrate with the existing neighborhood.
- LU Policy 2.2** Encourage live-work units in areas where they have convenient multimodal access to local stores and services.
- LU Policy 2.3** Encourage affordable housing in appropriate areas where there is convenient pedestrian access to local stores and services. Affordable housing development should not detract from the established small-town atmosphere of the

community or block defined scenic view corridors.

LU Policy 2.4 Ensure that new development enhances the character and vitality of established residential neighborhoods.

LU Policy 2.5 Ensure that new development is designed to be environmentally sensitive, energy efficient, and aesthetically pleasing as specified in the community character element.

LU Policy 2.6 Encourage building types, designs, and height restrictions that support Ruston's preferred land use pattern, maintain scenic views and defined view corridors, protect community treasures, and respect existing residential neighborhoods while accommodating future density.

Land Use Goal 3: Commercial development in Ruston enhances the city's pedestrian-oriented character, minimizes impacts on nearby residential areas, and integrates mixed-use and multifamily housing to support a vibrant community that exemplifies the concept of "live, work, play."

LU Policy 3.1 Design buildings architecturally and functionally so frontages are pedestrian oriented toward the street with residential units included above or behind.

LU Policy 3.2 Avoid impacts on nearby residents such as noise and light by designing and placing buildings accordingly.

LU Policy 3.3 Design buildings to transition architecturally when near single-family residences. Examples include graduated building heights across alleys and properly screened parking.

LU Policy 3.4 Allow multifamily development in commercial areas. Locating multifamily residences near employment, commercial uses, and recreational amenities supports the concept of "live,

work, play” in Ruston.

LU Policy 3.5 Require commercial business pedestrian entrances along street frontages be the functional main entrance, unlocked during business hours, and connected by pedestrian pathways to parking areas.

LU Policy 3.6 Strengthen Ruston’s commercial core by encouraging development in designated commercial zones on Pearl Street, N. 51st Street, and the Point Ruston Development site.

LU Policy 3.7 Attract commercial development to Ruston by:

- Developing and implementing economic strategies;
- Implementing transportation plans that ensure multimodal access to businesses and effective parking management;
- Requiring pedestrian-oriented site planning, signage, and architectural treatments for buildings; and
- Mandating continuous pedestrian connections between commercial sites and across city rights-of-way.

LU Policy 3.8 Collaborate with the surrounding business community, the City of Tacoma, and Metro Parks Tacoma to attract businesses and tourists to the area.

LU Policy 3.9 Zone the north end of Pearl Street for commercial uses, with any conversion to a commercial land use designation occurring for the entire side of the block facing Pearl Street, rather than on a lot-by-lot basis.

LU Policy 3.10 Address parking requirements for commercial areas along Pearl Street and N. 51st Street by reducing or eliminating minimum parking requirements and allowing for parking to be located above, below, or behind buildings, acknowledging potential site constraints.

Land Use Goal 4: Ruston protects and enhances environmentally sensitive areas to ensure long-term ecological health and community well-being.

LU Policy 4.1 Use best available science to preserve and enhance the functions and values of critical areas through policies, regulations, programs, and incentives.

LU Policy 4.2 Conserve and protect environmentally critical areas from loss or degradation.

LU Policy 4.3 Maintain, and where possible improve, air quality, water quality, soil quality, and ecosystem function to ensure the health and well-being of people, plants, and animals.

LU Policy 4.4 Support sustainable development and strive toward becoming a sustainable community.

Land Use Goal 5: Ruston's network of parks, open spaces, and recreational facilities provides diverse opportunities for active and passive recreation, strengthens community connections, and supports a high quality of life for residents and visitors.

LU Policy 5.1 Require public and private open space suitable for active and passive recreation such as plazas, parks, trails, natural areas, rooftop gardens, private patios, verandas, and porches be integrated into the design of all new development. When physical open space cannot be provided the city may consider a fee in-lieu of. Funds would be used to acquire or improve existing or future recreational opportunities.

LU Policy 5.2 Actively seek opportunities to secure and improve open space for the purposes of providing recreational opportunities to the Ruston community.

- LU Policy 5.3** Work with Metro Parks Tacoma and the City of Tacoma to provide recreational opportunities within city boundaries and connections to Tacoma's recreational facilities and Point Defiance Park.
- LU Policy 5.4** Formalize Winnifred Street Park as a dedicated public park.
- LU Policy 5.5** Integrate park and playground facilities into civic buildings and spaces to enhance community gathering opportunities.
- LU Policy 5.6** Secure funding for developing open space between Rust Park and Baltimore Street, with potential improvements such as a creek crossing, rhododendron garden, or environmental education features.
- LU Policy 5.7** Identify and establish a community garden location, such as a pea patch, to promote local food production and community engagement.
- LU Policy 5.8** Improve park facilities at Winnifred Street Park and Rust City Park to support and enhance community celebrations.

POLICY CONNECTIONS

Land Use must be planned to accommodate future growth with other elements. The **Land Use Element** and **Housing Element** each include policies and information about projected growth and housing.

The **Capital Facilities and Utilities Element** each includes policies demonstrating how public services and utility infrastructure will serve existing and future land uses.

Land use and transportation must be coordinated to prevent unintended impacts. The **Transportation Element** outlines Ruston's Complete Streets approach, covering streets, bike facilities, sidewalks, on-street public parking, public transit facilities, wayfinding, and lighting.

The **Community Character Element** includes policies to preserve community character while planning land use.

The **Shoreline Element** includes guidance of development within the shoreline jurisdiction.

DRAFT