
LAND USE ELEMENT

Essential Public Facilities

The term “essential public facilities” is a specialized term (see definition in the Glossary). It refers to those facilities considered necessary to meet critical local, regional, or state needs for public services, whether or not such facilities are publicly owned including those that are difficult to site. Examples of these are: solid-waste handling facilities, correctional facilities, regional transportation facilities, group homes, secure community transition facilities¹, power substations, and public schools. While the City may identify certain locally needed structures or land as essential public facilities, other types are identified through a state or regional process. For example, certain transportation facilities are designated to have state-wide significance; all improvements to them are automatically considered to be essential public facilities under state law.

The very fact that certain public facilities are deemed “essential” implies that they need to be accommodated. However, sometimes siting them is not easy. State law requires local governments to allow essential public facilities to be sited, but recognizes that reasonable conditions may be imposed to control where and how they are sited.

Regional considerations are incorporated into the Countywide Planning Policies adopted through the Snohomish County Tomorrow (SCT) process. These require interlocal coordination for siting essential public facilities that have impacts on more than one jurisdiction. Furthermore, an interlocal agreement between Snohomish County and the City of Mountlake Terrace has established a common siting process as a specific means for addressing state and regional essential public facilities (see Appendix L). This is incorporated by reference into this plan. In the future, interlocal agreements with other jurisdictions also could be established.

Exactly where facilities can be sited depends on the nature of the facility and the availability of a suitable site. (For example, secure community transition facilities are considered problematic near schools. They may be limited to particular zones, for example, the City’s Light Industrial zone.) The City deals with siting essential public facilities through the application of local development regulations and permitting processes, including conditional permits. The siting of facilities for a regional or state purpose may also be subject to interlocal agreements and relevant state or federal statutes. Once an essential public facility is sited, it is subject to other applicable regulations, standards, and agreements.

¹ See Glossary.