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# Belfair Urban Growth Area Plan

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Introduction

Background/Purpose

Unincorporated Belfair is the primary commercial center in the Northeast corner of North Mason County. Mason County recently identified Belfair as an Urban Growth Area (UGA) of approximately 2,400 acres. The current population within the UGA is approximately 900. However, Belfair serves residents within a larger rural geographic area with a population of approximately 23,000 as well as tourists visiting the Hood Canal and unique Theler Wetlands.

Given the recent UGA designation, Belfair’s location and market conditions, a substantial increase in population and land use activities are expected within the UGA boundaries over the next twenty-plus years. Mason County’s 1994 population estimate for the UGA projected up to 4,000 people by 2014. No new population projections from the State or Mason County for the UGA beyond 2020 have been made. The Market Analysis (see Appendix 2) completed with this plan projects a growth rate ranging from 3-5% annually. At the high end, this would suggest a population just under 2,000 for the UGA by 2020 – much less than Mason County’s earlier estimate. However, the Market Analysis identifies several reasons why the growth rate could be higher: Available developable land, proposed improvements and amenities, and demand for multifamily housing. While the general planning horizon of this Plan is twenty years, a key goal of the Belfair Planning Committee was to consider a much longer time period in the formulation of the Plan and its recommendations. Consequently, this means planning for ultimate populations that are more than 2,000 or even 4,000.

While new development is on the rise in Belfair, the town is in the midst of trying to develop a particular character or ‘theme’ based around the Theler Wetlands as the town’s anchor. Plans are currently underway for the development of the Pacific Northwest Salmon Center, a 36,000 square feet facility which will significantly increase the tourist draw. It is anticipated that 300,000 people will visit the Salmon Center annually.
Belfair is home to over 150 businesses located mostly along State Route 3 (SR-3), which is overwhelmed by power lines and competitive signage. The town’s prior and present planning efforts have focused on a desire to make the town more attractive and pedestrian-friendly by allowing continued infill development and housing near the commercial village. The planned construction of a sewer system in conjunction with SR-3 improvements will be a stimulus for such downtown development while assisting environmental clean-up of pollution in several lower rivers and streams in and around Belfair.

The future of Belfair appears to be one of consistent growth. The immediate impacts of the sewer will serve as a stimulus for downtown development while the more regional projects, such as the Tacoma Narrows Bridge and the industrial development of South Kitsap Industrial Area (SKIA) to the north, will create added growth pressures to the entire Belfair UGA. The addition of a proposed ‘Industrial Park’ west of SR-3 will add much needed family-wage jobs for area residents. The addition of pedestrian facilities, continued development of a consistent town theme, an improved local economy and the completion of the Pacific Northwest Salmon Center will serve to make Belfair a destination well into the foreseeable future.

**Planning Process**

The County hired the consultant team of MAKERS Architecture and Urban Design (lead consultant), Berk and Associates, Heffron Transportation, and MacLeod Reckord in November 2002 to assist the community in developing the Belfair sub-area plan. The consultant team worked directly with Mason County and Belfair Planning Committee members to facilitate the process.

Specific events and activities included:

- **November 26 – Planning Committee Meeting:** This was the project kick-off meeting and included introduction of the consultant team, County staff members, and Planning Committee members. Together, the team discussed the project scope and procedures, direction for economic study, and committee members’ individual thoughts and objectives, and summarized information collected to date.

- **January 21 – Planning Committee Meeting:** Following up the last meeting, the project team summarized planning activities including site visit, review of background planning information and base map preparation. The team then reported on the existing conditions, “Mirror on the Community,” from an outsiders’ perspective. Chris Mefford of Berk and Associates presented the findings from market study. The team discussed the upcoming workshop.

- **February 8 – Workshop #1:** There were about 80 people attending the first workshop at Belfair Assembly of God Church. Following introductions about

\[Figure 2. Workshop #1: Map exercise (left) and visual preference survey (right).\]
the plan by Makers, Chris Mefford summarized economic conditions and opportunities. The workshop involved small group sessions taking part in mapping exercise and visual preference surveys. The mapping exercise gave each group a chance to identify problems, issues, and opportunities related to land use and development, streetscape and circulation, and parks and recreation on the map which then be hung up on the wall and be presented to the group as a whole.

- **February 18 – Planning Committee Meeting:** The consultant team summarized results from the first workshop. Makers led a discussion on sketch preliminary alternatives related to redevelopment ideas, circulation improvements, land use/population patterns, connections, and design character.

- **March 18 – Planning Committee Meeting:** Makers presented land use concept alternatives based on the previous meeting and the results from the first workshop. Terry Reckord of McLeod Reckord presented trails and open spaces plan. A discussion and refinement with the team were followed.

- **April 15 – Planning Committee Meeting:** Marnie Heffron of Heffron Transportation presented transportation report findings and circulation concept alternatives followed by team discussion. Before adjourning, the team discussed the format and outreach for the second workshop.

- **April 26 – Workshop #2:** Makers presented a summary the results from the first workshop to the numerous community participants. The consultant team then presented three land use alternatives, transportation options, and trails and open spaces options. Afterward, the participants were broken into small groups to evaluate land use alternatives and circulation options, and prioritize trails and open spaces options.

- **May 20 – Planning Committee Meeting:** Makers presented the results of the second workshop and presented preliminary ideas for preferred alternative including plan concept, land use, circulation, parks and trails, and community design.

- **July 15 – Planning Committee Meeting:** Makers presented a preferred plan followed by team discussion and refinement.

- **August 19 – Planning Committee Meeting:** Makers summarized comments on draft plan and draft design standards. Meeting participants discussed proposed zoning district boundaries and designations.

- **August 26 – Planning Committee Meeting:** Participants reviewed the draft design standards.

- **October 27 – Updated UGA Plan Draft and Development Regulations are submitted to the Planning Committee:** Committee members have the opportunity to review the plan and draft development regulations prior to the final public workshop.
• **November 8 – Workshop #3:** More than 130 participants attended this workshop to review the final draft plan and development regulations. Participants completed surveys prioritizing key plan actions and provided a range of comments on plan and development regulation details.

• **November 18 – Planning Committee Meeting:** After reviewing survey results from the workshop and discussing final changes to the plan, the Planning Committee voted to recommend adoption of the plan.
Existing Conditions

Land Uses

Within the UGA, Belfair’s commercial area is a three mile stretch along SR-3. From outsider’s perspectives, physically, this corridor can be divided into 3 nodes or areas. The most prominent commercial node is what is often referred to as Belfair’s downtown, centered around the Old Belfair Highway and Clifton Lane intersections. The downtown is anchored by two grocery stores and contains local and franchise restaurants, gas stations, car dealers, convenience and personal service uses, etc. The second node is an area at the south end of the UGA around the community center, school, and library. Just south of Theler Wetlands is where Pacific Northwest Salmon Center is proposed. It will serve not only as a regional environmental learning center but also a tourist draw to the community. Together, these core uses functions as Belfair’s civic center and are in good physical condition. Most of the areas surrounding it, on the other hand, are underutilized and thus, potentially redevelopable. The third commercial area includes the properties between these two nodes and includes a hodge-podge of small scale retail, service, offices, churches, and residential uses.

Commercial and residential development opportunities are currently limited due to the lack of sewer system. With the UGA designation, infrastructure upgrades over the next decade are likely to improve this condition (planned for 2007 with SR-3 improvements). While most sites within the downtown area and SR-3 corridor to the south feature some form of development, there are numerous opportunities for commercial infill development and redevelopment. The SR-3 corridor east of the railroad up on the plateau provides substantial future commercial development opportunities.

Belfair currently contains fewer than 300 residential units within the UGA. Single family homes make up the majority of the units. These uses are scattered mostly along the SR-3 corridor west of the railroad and in the vicinity of Old Belfair Highway in the northwest portion of the UGA.

While new housing within the UGA over the last ten years has been limited,
residential growth in the rural areas outside of the UGA has been substantial. As a result of the Growth Management Act and subsequent development regulations, this trend is expected to change – resulting in an increase in residential growth within the UGA. Due in part to the size of the UGA, there are many areas that provide future opportunities for new housing. First and foremost is the area surrounding the downtown commercial core – where sites can accommodate a variety of housing within walking distance of services and amenities. Other housing opportunities are the lower flanks of the hillsides east of SR-3 – which contain substantial view opportunities towards the Olympic Mountains and Hood Canal. Both of these areas contain environmental constraints, however, including some wetlands, waterways, and steep slopes. While these factors may limit some development, they can provide opportunities to enhance the quality of housing and environment if designed well.

The most substantial housing opportunities in the UGA may be up on the plateau, east of the SR-3 corridor – where the land is relatively flat and there are few environmental constraints. Here there is a great opportunity to create cohesive new residential neighborhoods. Connections to the rest of the community will be important.

Also on the plateau – mostly west of SR-3 – are the UGA’s current industrial sites. These are likely to continue in this use due to the highway and rail access and limited environmental and land use constraints.

**Circulation**

There are only two main north-south roads in Belfair; SR-3 and NE Old Belfair Hwy. SR-3 is the primary access to town which also functions as a state highway connecting to Shelton to the south and Bremerton to the north. Because there is no parallel route through the whole UGA, accidents on SR-3 can cause extensive delays. Based on the Plan’s transportation analysis, most of the accidents happening along the corridor are at driveway intersections. There are approximately 103 driveways on SR-3 between Cokelet Lane and SR-106 alone. NE Old Belfair Highway, the other north-south access road extends from SR-3 northward, serves mostly local uses. The SR-300/Clifton Lane corridor is one of the few east-west corridors in the UGA. SR-300 links rural areas to the west with Old Belfair Highway, and Clifton Lane links both with SR-3 in the downtown core. The recently completed Romance Hill Road, close to a half mile south of the downtown area is the only public roadway connecting with SR-3 south of downtown. All other streets south of downtown are private dead-end roads.

With the lack of street grid system, local access relies solely on SR-3 and NE Old Belfair Highway. There is no other alternative route. A planned alternative north/south route on the plateau, however, would provide a second route through the Belfair area. The planned route extends from SR-3 near the UGA’s eastern boundary and travels southwesterly on the plateau to connect back with SR-3 south of the UGA. Romance Hill Road provides one possible connection to SR-3 within the UGA. Considering growth projections for the UGA and current traffic conditions, major transportation improvement in Belfair will be needed over time. This includes improvements to SR-3, and probably the planned alternative north/south route as well as other local access roads.
Natural Environment

Belfair has tremendous amount of natural habitat within the UGA. The Theler Wetland at the far west end of the UGA is a 135 acre natural jewel for Belfair. It provides trails along Hood Canal, Union River Wildlife area and wetland center including a future Salmon Center west of SR-3.

To the north, extensive and sensitive stream and wetland systems continue (note the light green areas in Figure 5). Low lying areas along the Union River in the northwest corner of the UGA have been designated by the County as a Class II Critical Aquifer Recharge Area (see Figure 4-1 in Appendix 4).

Steep hillsides parallel much of the east side of the SR-3 corridor from the downtown area southward – providing substantial view opportunities towards the water and mountains. A relatively flat plateau lies to the east of the ridge. Much of the UGA is well-forested. These areas are colored dark green in Figure 5.

The community members proudly consider these wetlands, waterways, hillsides and forest land areas as the treasure for their community that need to be protected for next generation to enjoy. Considering population projections, however, participants recognize that structured open space with ballfields and active recreational uses are sorely needed within the UGA.

The uncolored areas in Figure 5 are developed sites, while the medium shade of green includes other wooded areas (secondary growth). The light brown areas illustrate recently logged areas or dry meadows.
Pedestrian Network and Trails

The pedestrian network in Belfair is limited. There is no sidewalk in general and thus it’s difficult to walk safely and comfortably along SR-3 and elsewhere within the community. Although Theler Wetland trail system is a wonderful exception, it does not connect to other natural habitat and neighborhood areas. There is a strong support from community members to expand the trail system throughout the community in different loops that connects different land uses together. This trail system can be used as another alternative route for pedestrians and bikers to get around in town.

Economic Conditions

According to the economic analysis, the Belfair UGA experienced very low growth in the past decade, while rapid growth occurred in the rural areas around the UGA. New land-use policies for Mason County, related to GMA, suggest that growth will come to Belfair UGA at a higher rate than previously experienced. Large amounts of vacant land within the UGA present an opportunity for a housing developer to exploit economies of scale; developing a substantial pool of housing stock in the same area helps keep prices down. Among potential opportunities, the absence of multi-family housing is most notable and reportedly in strong demand. A strong influx of seniors provides a strong demand in senior housing. Increased demands for retail space will come with the population growth. Though much of this demand will likely occur in existing commercial centers that currently attract Belfair shoppers, new retail in Belfair attracted by this growth would also benefit from changes in spending habits of existing residents, thereby increasing capture rates for the trade area. In addition, lodging opportunities appear to exist, based on strong intra-regional tourism and limited competition from existing lodging establishments. Industrial uses appear challenged by large amounts of competing commercial land available nearby. The UGA’s large, undeveloped parcels, however, are also an asset for industrial development and may prove attractive to businesses that do not need the apparent accessibility advantages offered nearby.
Plan Overview

Vision

The community’s vision for Belfair’s future begins with a feeling for the land. This feeling is reflected not only by an appreciation for the area’s scenic natural setting, precious water resources, and diverse wildlife habitats, but also by the knowledge that the land is an important human resource. Care for the land is critical to the community’s economic health and long-term sustainability. For this reason, the plan emphasizes measures to protect local streams and wetlands, locates growth where conditions are most suitable, includes sustainable development standards, and takes greatest advantage of the area’s assets as an attraction to visitors and an amenity for residents and workers.

Economic vitality is a second critical community goal. For Belfair to grow and prosper, local jobs must accompany residential growth, and the economy must diversify to include industrial, professional and service, and tourist-based businesses. To this end, the plan includes three separate concentrations of commercial activity, each appealing to a different economic sector. Additionally, recommendations for development standards, design guidelines, and public works focus on supporting new development that is compatible with Belfair’s unique assets and economic potentials. A two-phased approach to highway improvements will assist the downtown core in the short term and allow larger, diverse growth in the plateau over time, as well as address critical near- and long-term transportation challenges.

Finally, participants in this planning process have expressed a desire for a more cohesive community with a more integrated, positive identity. This means enhancing the area’s visual quality. It means ensuring that new buildings are friendly in their design and planning new residential development to create neighborhoods, not just housing. It means providing the pedestrian and bicycle routes so that people can use local businesses and enjoy the community amenities without having to get in their cars. It also means protecting green belts of trees so that the area retains its “community in a forest” character. These are the issues toward which many of the design and park and open space recommendations are directed.

The community’s vision is not a passive one. It cannot be attained without a lot of hard work and cooperative effort. But the raw materials are there to make this vision a reality. The area will grow over time, and this growth can be shaped so that the whole community will benefit. The sewer line and improvements to SR-3 will give the central part of the community opportunities it has not had in the past, and the Salmon Center, library, and clinic will help to activate the south part of the UGA. The challenge is to make the most of this opportunity in time. And in the long term, the community’s potential is even more dramatic. Positive, cooperative master planning of the lands on the plateau early can reap big rewards for the participants.
The illustrations on the following pages depict some of these opportunities. They show what Belfair’s future could be like. The development of the individual properties is not likely to be like what is shown. This is a conceptual plan that will change over time, but the overall qualities and general patterns of development are a distinct possibility if the plan’s recommendations are implemented.

Figure 8. Belfair 20-year vision.
A Look at the Future

So what will a visitor to Belfair see if he or she returns to the area in about 15 or 20 years? Our fictional visitor, let’s say it’s a “she,” might well start at the south end where the new Salmon Center is located. Here is truly a regional attraction, explaining the ecology of the area and providing children of all ages many opportunities to engage in the learning about the land that supports them. There is a small cluster of shops and services nearby and an inn where she can spend the night. Heading north, our visitor has the option of following the scenic trail along the marsh or the walkway along SR-3. She chooses the walkway so that she can enjoy the street’s boulevard-like character and new array of mixed-use buildings. She notices that traffic is steady but not congested, thanks to the new bypass and the fact that many of the local property owners have made a special effort to consolidate their driveways and landscape their street fronts. It makes a huge difference from what she remembers at the turn of the century. Even with the new buildings, she can see views of the inlet to the west.

Figure 9. Illustrating the Salmon Center area planning objectives.
Entering the downtown, our visitor is surprised to see a number of multi-story residences surrounding a small but lively shopping area. The new residential neighborhood that has grown up around the old core provides a lot of people and activity. Some of the old landmarks are still there, in many cases spruced up to fit with the newer development. She notices that it is easy to walk around the downtown, small pathways providing easy access to inviting shops, cafes, professional services, and studios. The little plaza in the center with the outdoor seating is just the place to meet a friend for a cup of coffee. Right across the highway, the Saturday flea market is really hopping. There seem to be people from all over looking for treasures. Maybe she should stop and look for that old Johnny Cash record she needs for her collection. But she decides that, if she wants to visit the whole community, she’d better see what’s happened on the plateau.

Figure 10. Illustrating the downtown area planning objectives.
It’s a bit of a walk up from the downtown, but the footpath is pleasant. She notices that even with the new development, there is a lot of green left. The creeks seem as free flowing as ever, with a lot of native vegetation around them to help them stay healthy and protect the water quality. Our wandering visitor also notices that the new residential development really seems to fit in with the surroundings. The smaller streets, swales, rural footpaths, landscaping with native vegetation, and sensitive site planning really make a difference. Here is proof that sustainable development makes sense, not only for the environment, but for the lifestyles as well.

Figure 11. Illustrating the plateau area planning objectives.
Finally she reaches the crest of the ridge, and here she sees the biggest changes. There is a new, attractive shopping center integrated with a business park, several ball fields and a new neighborhood with a wide mix of housing types. It may not have the intimate charm of the downtown, but someone has really done a good job of planning and designing the area. Jobs, services, amenities, and residences are all here. The wetlands provide an interesting backdrop, and all the major features seem connected with ribbons of open space. And, located near the intersection of old SR-3 and the new route, it is convenient for all. Looking across the highway, she can see new retail development and perhaps just a glimpse or two of the light industrial activities lined up along the rail siding.

Heading back toward her room at the Salmon Center Inn, she wishes that she had brought her bike with her. It would be an easy roll along either the SR-3 trail or the Romance Hill connection. But the walk gives her time to consider what she’s seen. What strikes her is that, for a rural community, Belfair is really a place of contrasts; old and new, a small town setting with some sophisticated aspects, and a place where the old hamburger joint and the new Starbucks can coexist. Most importantly, she ponders about how the three centers complement one another, each adding to the community as a whole. It provides more choices, a richer mix of experiences and, literally, something for everyone.

Maybe, she thinks, she’ll stay another day or two, maybe kayak the canal, maybe look for that old Johnny Cash record, perhaps explore the job market a bit, and—what the heck—it can’t hurt to do a bit of house hunting. Just for fun…

**Strategic Concept**

The planning concept translates the community’s vision described on the previous pages into a set of key ideas that, in turn, form the basis for the individual planning recommendations. In Belfair, the community’s vision means that public and private partners work together to develop a linear sequence of nodes—each with its own function and character—linked with an extensive trail system. Belfair’s downtown area will be the most important of these nodes and the focal point for civic and cultural activities.

Actions to encourage the Salmon Center development will attract visitors from all over the region, helping to fuel the local economy. And, the northern node will provide room to grow over the decades. Establishing zoning and guidelines that will direct new development to create a high-quality development with a mix of uses is critical. Improvements to SR-3 and guidelines to direct growth along the highway form another set of actions that are necessary to ensure good circulation and that the three nodes work together as a unified whole. The third major direction framing a number of planning recommendations and design standards is the community’s desire for a high-quality, sustainable environment.
Plan Concept

1. Focus more diverse, intense development in Three centers:
   - North end to accommodate larger footprint commercial
   - Downtown to provide mix of pedestrian/local commuting/mixed-use development
   - Salmon center to emphasize educational and recreational activities

2. Upgrade SR-3 corridor
   - Complete 3 lane configuration
   - Install sewer utilities and pedestrian and safety improvements
   - Encourage alternative appropriate development
   - Plan for alternative North/South route

3. Insure quality living and Natural environment
   - Initiate water quality program
   - Insure new development fits with small-town and natural character
   - Connect and support neighborhoods with trails, parks and public services.

Belfair Sub-Area Plan

Figure 12. Plan concept.
Specific Recommendations

Land Use and Community Design Recommendations

Zoning regulations and design standards will be a critical tool in implementing the community’s design objectives. Five different land use designations are proposed and sited to concentrate development in the three commercial nodes, allow for residential development to accommodate projected growth, and protect sensitive natural areas. These designations include:

- Festival Retail – intended for the downtown core and focal point of pedestrian activity in the Belfair area. The designation promotes small scale retail uses and eating and drinking places with office and residential uses on upper floors.
- Mixed-Use – intended to provide for a wide variety of uses along much of the SR-3 corridor and other areas.
- General Commercial – intended to provide for the full range of commercial uses to serve Belfair and the surrounding region.
- Business-Industrial – intended to provide for employment growth in the Belfair area by encouraging manufacturing, wholesale trade, and office uses.
- Residential – intended to provide opportunities for residential development within the Urban Growth Area. Includes subdesignations of R-4, R-5, and R-10 (numbers referring to the average number of units allowed per acre). Regulations provide flexibility by encouraging clustering of development on the sites that can best support development.

The chart on the following page identifies the difference between the zones, while the map on page 19 identifies the locations of each designation.

Recommendations for each of the districts including specific lists of permitted uses, density, and development standards are attached in Appendix 1.
Table 1. Comparison of Zoning Designations

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<th>Use (see descriptions on the following page) and Key Provisions</th>
<th>Proposed Zones</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Festival Retail (FR)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STREET LEVEL USES</strong>*</td>
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<td>Pedestrian Retail</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Commercial</td>
<td>λ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office</td>
<td>λ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>λ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industrial/Manufacturing/Wholesale</td>
<td><em>(all floors)</em></td>
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<td><strong>DENSITY PROVISIONS AND KEY DESIGN STANDARDS</strong>*</td>
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<td>Residential density (units/acre)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Front yard landscaping area*</td>
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λ = Permitted use; *(all floors)* = Permitted only in the GC-BI Overlay Area; No Symbol = Use not permitted

* = See Appendix 1: Belfair Development Regulations for details

Description of Uses
- **Pedestrian Retail** – Small scale retail trade uses (excluding auto-oriented uses), eating and drinking places, hotels and motels, personal service uses.
- **General Commercial** – The full range of commercial uses including retail trade and shops, eating and drinking places, hotels and motels, auto-oriented uses, finance, insurance, and real estate uses, and service uses.
- **Office** – Professional office.
- **Residential** – Multi-family and/or single family residential uses.
- **Industrial/Manufacturing/Wholesale** – Manufacturing, assembling, warehousing, repairing, fabricating, and processing.
This Figure and the following map figures illustrating the land use districts represent the original proposal adopted by the Belfair Sub-Area Planning Committee. These maps are only intended to show general areas of a given zone and may be modified by the zoning maps.
LU-1: Create the Festival Retail (FR) Land Use Designation

**Purpose:** The primary purpose of the Festival Retail designation is to combine business, cultural, civic, and residential activities into a cohesive community focal point which promotes pedestrian activity. The district encourages small scale retail trade uses (excluding auto-oriented uses), eating and drinking places, hotels and motels, personal service uses, civic and educational uses, and special events (including a farmers’ market). Professional offices and residential uses are permitted on upper floors to add vitality to the area and support businesses. Proposed development regulations are intended to promote pedestrian-oriented facades, walkways between developments, landscaping to buffer parking areas and add interest, and building standards to encourage quality and human scale buildings.

**Location:** Centered around the central triangle area in downtown.

**Permitted Uses:** Small scale retail trade uses (excluding auto-oriented uses), eating and drinking places, hotels and motels, personal service uses, civic and educational uses. Professional offices and residential uses are permitted on upper floors.

**Height Limits and Density:** Building heights are generally limited to four-stories. However, five story buildings may be allowed if they provide a centralized pedestrian plaza space per design standards. Overall densities are limited by height limits, parking, site constraints, and design standards.

**Design Standards:** Design standards will be critical to encourage pedestrian-oriented site and building design, good pedestrian and vehicular access, pedestrian amenities and open space, parking lot landscaping, and the integration of developments with the natural environment. Outdoor spaces within these areas should function as social settings for a variety of experiences, adding to the comfort and complexity of life in an village center environment, while maintaining a human scale and an ability for easy pedestrian circulation.

*Figure 14. FR Land Use Designation.*

*Figure 15. Development examples consistent with the vision for the Festival Retail area.*