

# CHAPTER 5

## LAND USE ELEMENT

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Purpose of the Land Use Element**

The Land Use Element addresses land uses within the Town limits and Urban Growth Area (UGA) established by the Town of LaConner. It represents the community's policy plan for growth over the next 20 years. The Land Use Element describes how the goals in the other plan elements will be implemented through land use policies and regulations, and thus, is a key element in implementing the Comprehensive Plan.

The general distribution and location of land uses, appropriate intensity and density of land uses given current development trends, the provision of public services, and stormwater runoff were considered for this element.

#### **Urban Growth Area**

The planning area includes the lands to which the Town of LaConner provides urban services or public utility infrastructure. In 1995, the Town of LaConner chose not to have an Urban Growth Area for the purpose of development. The Town intended to establish two small Urban Growth Areas totaling 16.5 acres. The first area is 2 acres in the northwest corner between the Port of Skagit County and the Swinomish Channel. The second area is a 14.5-acre area extending east along Chilberg Road to Sullivan Slough and south ½ mile, encompassing the area between the slough dike and the dike protecting the farmland and Town to the west. The 14.5-acre parcel is the site for the Town's Wastewater Treatment Facility, Stormwater Treatment Facility, the Public Works facilities, and a new Fire Hall jointly owned with Skagit County Fire Protection District #13.

When Skagit County adopted a Growth Management Act (GMA) Comprehensive Plan in 1997, the LaConner Urban Growth Area was not included. In 2003, the Town proposed a 44-acre UGA, and in 2004, the Town applied to amend the County Comprehensive Plan Map to include the LaConner UGA. This decision was continued and combined with the 2005 amendments. The Town has reduced the UGA size request to Skagit County from 44 to 14 acres in the 2005 amendment process.

The Town corporate limits and UGA are represented on the maps in Appendix D as Maps 1 (Zoning), 2 (Comprehensive Plan), and 3 (Critical Areas).

The Urban Growth Boundary was established with Skagit County to ensure that the Town would be able to provide urban services to all existing and new development. The location of the boundary was based on environmental constraints, concentration of existing development, existing infrastructure and services, and the location of agricultural resource lands. Town sewer and water, drainage facilities, utilities, communication lines, and local roads would be available to develop within the Urban Growth Boundary.

### **Major Land Use Considerations and Goals**

The Town periodically experiences development pressure that calls for efficient planning and explicit land use decisions. The Town residents and officials respect the need to preserve farmlands and have chosen not to project the Town boundaries beyond the current Town limits for Residential, Commercial or Industrial development. Due to this policy, the Town is constrained by the availability of land and financial resources, and quality of development is a concern. Therefore, the allocation of available land among competing uses is a critical factor in the Town's decision-making process. The Town has chosen the following strategies to accommodate this policy:

- A. **Densification** – The Town single-family dimensional standards allow for a unit density of 8.7 units per acre. This is twice the GMA requirement.
- B. **Ensure affordable housing availability for local working families.**
- C. **Allow for innovative development to meet growth needs and demands.**
- D. **Allow for appropriate Essential Facilities to meet community needs.**

The goals and policies of the Land Use Element are a combination of essential components of the Vision Statement and RCW requirements. The goals and policies are divided into the following topics:

- **Growth Management**
- **Economic Development**
- **Neighborhood Conservation**
- **Environmental Preservation, Conservation and Critical Areas**
- **Open space, Parks and Recreation**
- **Shoreline**
- **Historic and Cultural Preservation**
- **Community Design**

## **GOALS AND POLICIES**

The goals and policies set out in this element, and the community goals outlined in the Vision Statement, will guide all local government decisions affecting land use. The Town will ensure that the character of land use optimizes the combined potentials for economic and social benefits. The following goals and policies are intended to provide the enjoyment and protection of natural resources while minimizing threats to health, safety and welfare posed by hazards, nuisances, incompatible land uses, and environmental degradation.

### **Growth Management**

#### **GOAL A**

*Manage growth so that the delivery of public facilities and services occurs in a fiscally responsible and timely manner to support existing and new development.*

#### **Policies**

- 5A-1 Upon adoption of this plan, the area outlined on Maps 1 and 2 in Appendix D shall be designated as the Urban Growth Boundary for the Town of LaConner.
- 5A-2 Update zoning ordinances to conform to the Comprehensive Plan goals and policies for the Land Use Element.
- 5A-3 Make public facilities and services available to meet the needs of the community and provide for future growth through improvements and expansion.
- 5A-4 Address impacts on public services and facilities of new development and redevelopment and determine those impacts concurrently with any proposals for development.
- 5A-5 Developers should have the primary fiscal responsibility to extend facilities and services to serve new development and redevelopment, and to mitigate impacts created by their development.
- 5A-6 Essential public facilities will not be precluded from being sited in town. The Town will enforce the Comprehensive Plan and regulations to ensure compatibility of the facility with surrounding uses and development.

- 5A-7 Developers should have the primary fiscal responsibility to provide parks, recreation, and open space to mitigate the impacts created by their development.

## GOAL B

*Ensure that public facilities and services necessary to support existing and future development are adequate to serve the community without decreasing current service levels below established minimum standards.*

### Policies

- 5B-1 Require developers to provide information relating to impacts that the proposed development will have on public facilities and services. The Town will conduct a thorough evaluation of that analysis.
- 5B-2 The Town of LaConner shall not issue any development permits which result in a reduction of the Level of Service (LOS) Standards for public facilities identified in the Capital Facilities Element.
- 5B-3 Consider the impacts on personnel, equipment, training and other needs for adequate levels of service for police and fire protection in the community for any development proposal.
- 5B-4 Ensure appropriate identification of public improvements, which are needed to properly serve existing and planned future growth and the means to finance these improvements.

## GOAL C

*Seek to provide equitable distribution and maximum utilization of Town resources in the delivery of services and protection to the community.*

### Policies

- 5C-1 New and existing developments should contribute to the cost of provision of general capital facilities and services commensurate with their impacts.

## GOAL D

*Protect private citizen rights while also protecting the welfare of the community as a whole.*

### Policies

- 5D-1 Enforce the Comprehensive Plan and development regulations to ensure reasonable compatibility with other land uses.
- 5D-2 Protect individual property rights in the course of developing and maintaining Town properties.
- 5D-3 Ensure that developers receive full disclosure of all applicable rules, regulations and utility guidebooks. Provide ample opportunity for consultation with Town staff, and a time to present the project and any perceived problems in a public forum.

## GOAL E

*Protect life and property from natural or manmade disasters and ensure public safety.*

### Policies

- 5E-1 Develop and implement emergency response plans for natural and manmade disasters.
- 5E-2 Coordinate planning activities with local, State and Federal agencies

## GOAL F

*Encourage citizen involvement in the planning process and ensure coordination among local, State and Federal jurisdictions.*

### Policies

- 5F-1 Coordinate growth and development planning with applicable jurisdictions to promote and protect interjurisdictional interests.

- 5F-2 Coordinate the review and approval of development proposals with applicable Federal, State and local permitting agencies.
- 5F-3 Conduct an annual forum with the Town Council and Planning Commission to discuss future growth and development in the Town and consistency with the Comprehensive Plan.
- 5F-4 Promote cooperation between the Town and the LaConner School District to provide adequate opportunities for community use of school facilities.
- 5F-5 The Planning Commission should hold public workshops and public hearings with the involvement of the Town Council on important matters pertaining to growth management and development in town.
- 5F-6 Encourage use of community surveys and questionnaires in order to ascertain the preferences and concerns of all citizens.

## GOAL G

*Ensure that public facilities are well designed and compatible with the Town's natural and man-made environment.*

### Policies

- 5G-1 Facilitate and improve access and circulation by vehicles and pedestrians whenever possible to new school facilities, and existing facilities.
- 5G-2 Locate, design, and construct public utilities and facilities to be compatible with designated land uses and natural systems such as drainage ways and shorelines.
- 5G-3 Siting of proposed public buildings and other facilities should conform to land use policies and regulations. The Town of LaConner should not be exempt from its own requirements.
- 5G-4 Encourage the development of pedestrian corridors along the shoreline connecting activity centers, open spaces, and parks.

## **Economic Development**

### **GOAL H**

*Promote a stable and diversified economy offering a wide variety of services and employment opportunities to the citizens of LaConner.*

#### **Policies**

- 5H-1 Promote an interdependent local economy.
- 5H-2 Encourage a predictable development atmosphere through the provision of consistent, well-organized plans and regulations.
- 5H-3 Encourage diversity in the range of goods and services to meet local and regional needs, including those of the traveling public.
- 5H-4 Support an economic development program in coordination with the State Department of Community Trade and Economic Development.
- 5H-5 Coordinate and seek economic development assistance from the Economic Development Association of Skagit County, the Small Business Development Office, State Department of Community Trade and Economic Development, Trade Commissions, Port of Skagit County and other entities in the economic development area.

### **GOAL I**

*The Town should identify and adopt policies and practices that encourage productive, creative, and artistic activities and uses and adjust land use policies to enhance these uses within the Growth Management and surrounding area.*

#### **Policies**

- 5I-1 Make publicly owned land available for placing works of art and cultural attractions.
- 5I-2 Maintain an outdoor sculpture tour that is periodically changed.

## GOAL J

*Achieve a balance between commercial and industrial interests to avoid over-concentration in one particular segment of the economy.*

### Policies

- 5J-1 Expand and recruit additional commercial services which primarily serve the needs of the residents.
- 5J-2 Encourage light industrial uses within designated zones.
- 5J-3 Land uses and activities located within the industrial zone shall contribute to the economic diversity and social health of the community.
- 5J-4 Encourage a diversity of uses within the industrial zone emphasizing both emerging technology and traditional industrial uses that have always been associated with LaConner.

## Neighborhood Conservation

### GOAL K

*Encourage a balanced and organized combination of open space, commercial, industrial, recreation and public uses served by a convenient and efficient transportation network, while protecting the fabric and character of residential neighborhoods.*

### Policies

- 5K-1 Protect residential zones from encroachment by commercial or industrial uses.
- 5K-2 Maintain stable neighborhoods with sound housing stock and viable commercial and industrial districts.
- 5K-3 Encourage siting and designing of new construction to minimize disruption of visual amenities and solar resources to adjacent property owners, public roadways, parks, and waterways.

- 5K-4 Mitigate incompatible adjacent uses, including commercial and industrial uses, with landscape buffers, or recreation and open space corridors.
- 5K-5 Encourage livability, pedestrian orientation, and retain the historic character of the community, limiting stress factors such as noise pollution and traffic congestion.

## **Environmental Preservation, Conservation and Critical Areas**

### **GOAL L**

*Protect and conserve significant landscape features, fish and wildlife habitat, natural systems and critical areas.*

### **Policies**

- 5L-1 Recognizing the fact that the Town will have special needs in the future for urban services, the Town shall continue to enforce, amend and adopt land development regulations which ensure the protection of the attributes, functions, and amenities of the natural environment. Of particular concern are the Swinomish Channel, its shorelines, Pioneer Park, sloped areas, established greenbelts, tree canopy, and other critical areas including adjacent agricultural lands.
- 5L-2 Assess the impact of any proposed development upon the stormwater drainage basins and require mitigation of negative impacts.
- 5L-3 Ensure land use compatibility in all permitting and enforcement activities with topography, geology, soil suitability, surface water, frequently flooded areas, wetlands, vegetation and wildlife.
- 5L-4 Protect environmentally sensitive areas, such as wetlands and regulated slopes, to retain open space and natural areas whenever possible.
- 5L-5 Site and design development to avoid impacts to environmentally sensitive areas such as wetlands and regulated slopes.
- 5L-6 Promote Best Management Practices and Best Available Science to preserve the natural environment and conserve natural resources.
- 5L-7 Participate with County, State, and Federal agencies in formulating and executing the Emergency Management Disaster Preparedness Plan for the area.

- 5L-8 Prevent unnecessary disturbance of natural vegetation in new development and encourage retention of trees and other vegetation.
- 5L-9 Pursue the installation of a dike to protect LaConner from Skagit River flooding from the northeast.

## **Open Space, Parks and Recreation**

### **GOAL M**

*Encourage the retention of open space and development of recreational opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat and increase public access to natural resource lands and the Swinomish Channel.*

### **Policies**

- 5M-1 Maintain and support existing and future recreational and cultural activities through the dedication of public properties to such uses.
- 5M-2 Maintain or set aside publicly owned land suitable for recreation purposes.
- 5M-3 Maintain or develop available street-ends and undeveloped right-of-ways to allow public access for viewing, recreation, greenways or added tree canopy.
- 5M-4 Develop a pedestrian corridor along the shoreline to connect activity centers, open spaces, and parks.
- 5M-5 Acquire, preserve and develop land and waterfront areas for public recreation based on area demand, public support, and use potential.
- 5M-6 Maintain public access to publicly owned property.

### **GOAL N**

*Encourage the acquisition and development of parks, open space, and recreation facilities, both active and passive that are attractive, safe, functional, and available to all segments of the community.*

## Policies

- 5N-1 Pedestrian access to public spaces, pathways and facilities located within the industrial zone shall be safely accommodated to the greatest extent possible. Special emphasis shall be placed on establishing pedestrian corridors and vibrant, amenity-rich pathways along the water's edge.
- 5N-2 Maintain and update the Parks and Recreation Plan.
- 5N-3 Develop additional cultural resources, programs and activities at Maple Hall and Maple Center.
- 5N-4 Distribute parks and/or open spaces throughout commercial, residential, and industrial zones in an attempt to more equitably serve the entire community.
- 5N-5 Use existing school district facilities or other public facilities to maximize recreational and cultural opportunities whenever possible.
- 5N-6 Identify and develop bicycle corridors on main streets where feasible.

## GOAL O

*Enhance the quality of life in the community by encouraging or providing recreation programs that are creative, productive, and responsive to the needs of the public.*

## Policies

- 5O-1 Encourage citizen participation in the design and development of public facilities and/or recreation areas.
- 5O-2 Encourage and promote cultural facilities and social services compatible with recreational use.
- 5O-3 Encourage opportunities for recreational and cultural activities for all ages.
- 5O-4 Maintain and support existing and future recreational and cultural activities through the dedication of properties for such uses.

## **Shoreline**

### **GOAL P**

*Reserve designated shoreline areas for water-oriented uses.*

### **Policies**

- 5P-1 Encourage preferred shoreline uses while protecting and preserving the shoreline environment.
- 5P-2 Restrict new development over-water commercial and industrial uses to those which are water-dependent or related and provide public access where appropriate.

### **GOAL Q**

*Encourage uses, densities and development patterns on lands adjacent to shorelines that are compatible with shoreline uses and resource values and reinforce the policies of the Shoreline Management Act and Shoreline Master Program.*

### **GOAL R**

*Protect the economic viability and resource values of the shoreline.*

### **Policies**

- 5R-1 Encourage renovation and reuse of under-utilized or obsolete structures.
- 5R-2 Provide adequate access, utilities and public services to serve existing and future shoreline development.
- 5R-3 Encourage appropriate innovative development (including open space and recreational uses/facilities) to help sustain the economic viability of the urban shoreline.

- 5R-4 Work with the Swinomish Tribe and the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation (IAC) to enhance recreational uses of the Swinomish Channel and its shorelines.

## GOAL S

*Protect and enhance shoreline visual and physical access consistent with the Shoreline Management Act and Public Trust Doctrine principles.*

### Policies

- 5S-1 Restrict over-water commercial and industrial uses to those which are water-dependent or water-related and provide public access where at all feasible.
- 5S-2 Site and design new development and redevelopment to minimize impacts on views of the Swinomish Channel and shoreline.
- 5S-3 Give priority to uses and developments which maximize public visual and physical access to the shoreline.

## GOAL T

*Protect the quality and quantity of water in the Swinomish Channel by minimizing soil disturbance, erosion, sedimentation, and non-point runoff affecting water quality.*

### Policies

- 5T-1 Encourage restoration of degraded waterfronts to minimize erosion, sedimentation and flooding.
- 5T-2 Require Best Management Practices (BMPs) contained in the Department of Ecology's Puget Sound Stormwater Quality Manual be implemented for all new development and redevelopment.
- 5T-3 Conduct dredging and fill activities to minimize the introduction of suspended solids, leaching contaminants or habitat disturbance into adjacent waterways.

## GOAL U

*Ensure consistent application of the Floodplain Ordinance, Stormwater Drainage Comprehensive Plan, State and Federal policies to shoreline areas and adjacent lands.*

## **Historic and Cultural Preservation**

### GOAL V

*Preserve and protect historic and cultural resources of significance to the Town and Swinomish Tribal Community and support the cultural values, language, and art forms of the Swinomish people.*

### GOAL W

*Protect and preserve the historic character of LaConner's historic district.*

## Policies

- 5W-1 Define and document the existing forms, design, styles and other characteristics, which form an integral part of the historic district.
- 5W-2 Reflect historic development patterns with consistent zoning standards.
- 5W-3 Encourage building forms and design consistent with historic design including scale, massing, architectural details and roof style.
- 5W-4 Limit the mass, size and scale of new structures and additions to the historic standards addressing scale, forms and proportions.
- 5W-5 Encourage the use of colors and building materials characteristic of LaConner's historic structures.
- 5W-6 Preserve the historic spatial relationship of buildings to site, natural features, open space, views and surrounding development.

5W-7 Identify historic view corridors and adopt development regulations that ensure their protection.

5W-8 Preserve the historic district through strict enforcement of the Historic Preservation District ordinance.

## GOAL X

*Encourage the preservation, restoration, rehabilitation and renovation of historic sites and structures.*

### Policies

5X-1 Encourage the adaptive reuse of existing historic structures through development regulations and financial incentives when a historic use is no longer possible.

5X-2 Become a Certified Local Government to enable the owners of historic buildings and sites to take advantage of state and national tax incentives.

5X-3 Strongly discourage the demolition or destruction of historic sites and structures.

5X-4 Provide incentives for historic buildings outside of the Historic District to be nominated for, and listed on, the state or national historic register, or to be recognized as local historic landmarks.

5X-5 Strongly discourage new construction attempts to reproduce or replicate historic structures within the Historic Preservation District.

## Community Design

### GOAL Y

*Encourage the development of spaces that attract residents and promote social and community interaction.*

## Policies

- 5Y-1 Commercial and multi-family development should provide improved, useable open space areas such as plazas, common areas, and colonnades as a component of the design.

## GOAL Z

*Create commercial and higher density residential areas, which provide high levels of public amenities.*

## Policies

- 5Z-1 Commercial and multi-family development, which do not have appropriate areas for useable open space on site, should contribute to the development of public or private common areas in close proximity.
- 5Z-2 Locate open space and common areas to preserve existing views and vistas, or other significant site features.
- 5Z-3 Develop minimum common area standards for both small and large-scale commercial development.

## GOAL AA

*Encourage architectural styles that reflect the Town's built and natural environment.*

## Policies

- 5AA-1 Maintain a small town scale for structures. New structures should not overpower existing structures or visually dominate LaConner's small town streetscapes.
- 5AA-2 Discourage boxy, single mass building design. Identify appropriate design forms for new structures.
- 5AA-3 Develop design guidelines for commercial, multi-family and high-density development outside of the historic district.

- 5AA-4 Keep impervious surfaces to a minimum in order to achieve open space, greenery, and reduce impact on drainage system.

## GOAL BB

*Encourage building and site designs, which define and respect the human scale and enhance the pedestrian experience.*

### Policies

- 5BB-1 Scale buildings in relation to the human form, particularly at the sidewalk level.
- 5BB-2 Encourage mixed-use structures. Mixing uses within a structure enhances the ability to give interesting form and character to a building.
- 5BB-3 Discourage the location of new off-street parking lots between the street and front façade. Parking should be located alongside or to the rear of buildings.
- 5BB-4 Use landscaping to screen parking lots from pedestrian ways and building entrances.
- 5BB-5 Include entrances, storefronts, plazas or common areas on sides adjacent to public right-of-ways in commercial buildings.

## GOAL CC

*Preserve existing view corridors and vistas of the Swinomish Channel and Skagit Valley.*

### Policies

- 5CC-1 Identify and map important view corridors and vistas and adopt land use policies that protect them.
- 5CC-2 Incorporate view corridors into regulations controlling building and site design.
- 5CC-3 Identify and adopt regulations that encourage building and site designs that frame views and vistas.

- 5CC-4** Encourage trees to be part of the view. Panoramic views are not necessarily void of trees.
  
- 5CC-5** Require and use architectural standards by such means as sign ordinances for aesthetic and view protection.

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## Appendix 5A

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# Inventory and Analysis

### **Physical Description**

#### **Topography and Geology**

The Town of LaConner is located on the east bank of the Swinomish Channel near the mouth of the Skagit River in the northern region of Puget Sound. The elevation of the Town ranges from 0 feet at sea level to approximately 150 feet at the highest point. The central part of the Town is hilly with steeply sloping bluffs. The surrounding area consists of agricultural floodplains, rock outcroppings, forested uplands, wetlands, and a complex system of river and marine waters.

The Swinomish Channel is a navigable waterway 6.5 miles long connecting Skagit Bay to the south with Padilla Bay to the north. Throughout the entire length a 100-foot wide, 12-foot deep channel is maintained as part of a longer 11-mile long federal navigation project maintained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE). The channel is subject to strong tidal currents. Bank erosion is common due to LaConner's position on an outside bend of the Channel and COE dredging activities. Federal, State, and local jurisdictions govern all development within 200 feet landward of the ordinary high water mark. The LaConner Shoreline Management Program, hereby incorporated by reference, regulates development of the Town limits within 200 feet of the Swinomish Channel. The Department of Ecology has designated the area north of the No. 12 navigation light on the Swinomish Channel as a Shoreline of Statewide Significance.

Some potentially geological hazardous areas, regulated by the Critical Areas Ordinance, within and surrounding the Town of LaConner have been identified and mapped. (Reference Map 3 at Appendix D). Damage to life and property could occur from potentially unstable slopes, liquefaction due to unstable soils, and possible earthquake activity. Areas with potentially unstable slopes may require geological surveys and engineering before any development may occur.

#### **Surface Water**

The Swinomish Channel and the rivers and sloughs that drain into it are important industrial and recreational transportation resources, as well as valuable environmental and scenic areas. The quality of water is vital to maintaining a healthy aquatic habitat for marine life and plant systems. Improvements in water quality through drainage treatment systems, and redirection of wastewater treatment plant outfall, will enhance both the environmental and scenic value of these waterways.

In LaConner the quality of surface water, the channel, river and sloughs is generally good; however, future development must consider point source discharges, non-point source discharges, soil erosion, and any development that could damage the viability of the ecological system.

### Frequently Flooded Areas

LaConner is located within the Skagit River Floodplain and adjacent to the Swinomish Channel estuarine system, which at very high tides subjects the waterward streets of the Town to flooding. The source of major flooding in the delta area fronting Samish, Padilla, and Skagit Bays, is the Skagit River. Flooding may occur in LaConner when high tides from Skagit Bay and/or overland floodflows from the Skagit River outflank, overtop, or breach levees along the northern, eastern, and southern sides of the Town. (Reference year 2000 Skagit County/Corps of Engineers Flood Threat Modeling Report).

Tide levels and rainfall are important in determining the extent of flooding, as well as determining pumping requirements and the extent of gravity flow in a drainage system. The following Table 5-1 shows the tide levels in the Swinomish Channel based on National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Mean Lower Low Water datum and U.S. Army Corps of Engineer surveys.

**TABLE 5-1**

DATUM PLANE	ELEVATION REFERENCED TO MLLW IN FEET	
	NGVD '29 Datum	NOAA Tidal Datum
Highest Tide (Estimated)	7.77	13.15
Mean Higher High Water	4.96	10.34
Mean High Water	4.05	9.43
Mean (Half) Tide Level	0.68	6.06
Mean Sea Level	0.0	5.38
Mean Low Water	-2.69	2.69
Mean Lower Low Water	-5.38	0.00
Lowest Tide (Estimated)	-7.68	-2.30

Approximately 196.7 acres (77% of the Town) of land surrounding the Town's hills and slopes are in the floodplain.

Three elevation landmark monuments are available for reference in LaConner. Reference Marker 1 is at the southwest corner property of the Washington-Second Street intersection. It is set at the top of the rockery facing Washington Street; Reference Marker 2 is at the rear of the old Chevron Station property on Morris at the northwest corner of the property; and Reference Marker 3 is at the northeast corner of the Post Office loading dock.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency/Department of Homeland Security (FEMA/DHS) has defined areas showing the extent of the 100-year floodplain in order to establish flood insurance rates and assist communities in efforts to promote sound floodplain management. The base flood elevation for the Town is 8 feet. This is typically 3 to 4 feet above grade. LaConner is a participant in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). LaConner also participates in NFIP's Community Rating System, which helps to lower flood insurance premiums for homeowners. The Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) depicting the official floodplain zones for LaConner is available at Town Hall. The Town enlists a number of mitigation measures to minimize the potential for loss of life and property damage.

### **Wetlands**

Wetlands provide an important habitat for wildlife, plants and fisheries as well as help reduce erosion, flooding, and ground and surface water pollution. LaConner has approximately 1.5 acres of potential wetlands located southeast of town on private property in a residential zone. The area is not considered to be a high quality wetland, as it was created many years ago through the cessation of agricultural activity and the construction of the approach to the Rainbow Bridge. A portion of the land was used as a disposition site for dredged spoils from the Swinomish Channel in the early part of the century. Local, State, and Federal guidelines for regulating development in this area would apply. Army Corps of Engineer permits will be necessary for property development in this area.

### **Climate**

Temperatures in LaConner are relatively mild with summer daytime highs around 65 degrees and nighttime lows in the 40's. Average winter temperatures range from 49 degrees during the day to 37 degrees at night. Precipitation during winter averages 3.56 inches of rainfall per month and 1.26 inches per month in summer.

### **Vegetation**

Due to increased development of the available land in LaConner, much of its natural vegetation has been lost. However, the Town does support a wide variety

of trees, grasses, shrubs and flowers in its landscaped areas as well as a park of old growth deciduous and evergreen trees located at the south end of town (Pioneer Park). The wetland area at the southeast corner of town is dominated by non-native invasive species and supports a limited selection of wetland plants.

## **Wildlife**

Although the Town has no designated wildlife conservation areas within its boundaries, it is home to a variety of wildlife, marine and aquatic plant species. The Swinomish Channel provides migratory habitat for a variety of resident and anadromous fish species. Anadromous fish, including chinook, coho, pink and chum salmon, steelhead, and sea-run cutthroat trout are species of special concern to fisheries management agencies. Dungeness crab, herring and surf smelt may also be found in the channel. The area is home to a variety of aquatic birds, such as seagulls, great blue herons, cormorants, shorebirds, and waterfowl. Endangered species that may occur in the area include the bald eagle and peregrine falcon. River otter and harbor seals may also be found in the Channel. Small mammals, such as squirrels and birds, are common in the Town's developed areas.

## **Land Use Classifications**

### **Residential**

LaConner's residential zone includes single-family dwellings; accessory dwelling units; manufactured homes; and multi-family units, such as apartments and condominiums. Density is between 2 and 12 units per acre (medium density) in this zone. In addition, there are 29 boats moored at Town and Port of Skagit County docks that serve as "liveaboard" residences.

Total Residential Land Use: Approximately 108 acres (42.4%) are designated Residential Use. Of that acreage, 34 acres are either undeveloped, underdeveloped or used for public right-of-way. The net land currently developed for residential purposes is approximately 75 acres (29% of the total).

Number of Dwelling Units by Type: In 2005, the Town of LaConner had 316 single-family units (19 manufactured homes), 29 liveaboard boats, and 158 multi-family units, for a total of 503 housing units.

Build-out Potential<sup>1</sup>: The Town has limited potential for building within the existing land boundaries. There are 15 acres of vacant and underutilized land in the residentially zoned area, available for development of single and multi-family housing. The current single-family development standard density for the Town is 8.7 dwelling units per acre for lots under 14,000 square feet, and multi-family is 10.1 dwelling units for lots over 14,000 square feet. This equates to an additional

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<sup>1</sup> Reference 2002 Population Land Use and Capacity Report

137 dwelling units to accommodate the future build-out within the Town limits under current residential development densities. Accessory dwelling units and commercial conditional use can augment this number beyond the 137 units. A significant factor in the capacity is the status of the wetland area. There are 10 to 20 platted lots that may be impacted by this designation. If these lots are not developable due to this designation, the residential capacity of the Town could be reduced by approximately 15%.

## **Commercial**

This category includes land used for retail and wholesale trade, offices, hotels, restaurants, service outlets, gas stations, and repair facilities. Morris Street and First Street are the Town's high-density commercial areas. The Skagit Port facilities have a medium level of commercial density, and Maple Avenue has some non-conforming commercial uses in the residential area.

Total Commercial Use: 54 acres (21% of total 255 acre land area).

Heavy Commercial Use: The historic central business district on First and Morris Streets consists of approximately 17 acres. This area contains mixed use residential as a secondary conditional use and retail sales establishments, restaurants, a bank, art galleries, a museum, and a post office. Morris Street consists primarily of retail shops mixed with residential use, the Town newspaper, and service businesses.

First Street has always been primarily commercial. However, Morris Street was predominantly residential prior to being rezoned to commercial. Most of the residences on Morris have been converted to commercial use. The Port of Skagit County has a commercial area extending from the South Basin parking area to South Pearle Jensen Way.

In 2002, 3.2 acres of Industrial properties were rezoned to create a new commercial zone (Commercial Transition Zone). While enlisting most of the commercial zone features and some of the Historic District design standards, the new zone also requires design review and site plan review.

Neighborhood Commercial Use: Approximately 3.4 acres are used for businesses along Maple Avenue. This does not take into account home-based businesses.

## **Industrial**

This category includes land used for light manufacturing, processing, and warehousing. There is no heavy industry in LaConner.

Total Industrial Land Use: 37.8 acres developed (14.8% of total). Approximately 12.5 acres are located south of Town; 8 acres of which are bounded by the Swinomish Channel on the west; Sherman Avenue on the south; Third Street on

the east; and Caledonia Street on the north. The 8 acres are privately owned fee simple properties. Approximately 4.5 acres south of the Rainbow Bridge are bounded by the Swinomish Channel to the west, Pioneer Park on the east, and Sherman Avenue on the north. The north industrial area consists of 25.4 acres bounded by the Channel on the west; S. Pearle Jensen Way on the south, agricultural land on the east and the Town limits on the north.

### **Public Use**

This category includes land for public facilities and services such as Town Hall, Maple Hall/Center, Garden Club, Gaches Mansion, public parking, schools, water and sewer utilities, museums, right-of-ways, public parks, school practice fields and open space owned and/or preserved by the Skagit Historical Museum. Approximately 55.1 acres, or 21.6% of the total acres is in parks and open space.

Open spaces are important to quality of life by acting as buffers between various land uses. In LaConner utilitarian open space includes roads, critical areas, parks, and Town property such as street ends that have not been developed. Pioneer Park, with approximately 12 acres at the south end of town, is the largest undeveloped area available for recreational use. The shoreline along the Swinomish Channel is mostly privately owned with few public access corridors. There are approximately 1.50 acres of wetlands in the southeast section of LaConner and approximately 26.8 acres of regulated steep slopes. The Town's Critical Areas Ordinance regulates wetlands and geologically hazardous areas within the Town boundaries. Open space corridors exist for interconnected utility lines. At present no pedestrian or bike trails exist in the Town. The following is a summary of parks and recreation facilities managed by the Town:

- Pioneer Park
- Calhoun and Benton Street Ends
- Washington Street End Float
- Bjorklund Park
- Jordan Street End
- Sherman Street Boat Ramp
- Totem Park
- Maple Hall/Center
- Youth League Field (the ball fields are leased by the Town)
- John Hammer Playground

LaConner Marina is owned and managed by the Port of Skagit County:

- Permanent Wet Moorage, Covered - 368
- Permanent Wet Moorage, Open – 105
- Two 600' Transient Moorage Floats
- Fishing Access on Transient Floats

RV Park, including Swimming Pool (Potlatch – Membership Only) – Leased from the Port of Skagit County.

### School Facilities (LaConner School District No. 311 available for community use)

- 2 Baseball Diamonds
- 2 Tennis Courts
- Track
- Play Area for Children
- 2 Softball Diamonds
- 2 Soccer Fields
- Football Field
- Covered outdoor basketball court
- 3 gymnasiums

### **Natural Resource Lands**

LaConner is surrounded by agricultural land that is used for crop production, produce sales, and single-family residences attached to farms. The quality of this agricultural land was a primary consideration in designating the Town's Urban Growth Boundary. The County has classified, designated, and protected all farmland according to the U.S. Soil Conservation Service's classification of prime farmland soils. The Town chose not to infringe on adjacent farmlands in the interest of agricultural conservation.

### **Historic and Archaeological Resources**

The first act commemorating LaConner's historic heritage was the establishment of Pioneer Park through a donation from Louisa A. Conner in the early 1930's. In the 1950's, the Town Beautification Committee began a call for landmark preservation. By the early 1970's landmark preservation achieved national recognition and had become a local concern. The Town of LaConner established a Historic Preservation District encompassing approximately 51.1 acres in 1972, which was nominated and accepted to the National Register of Historic Places the same year. The District includes the area bounded by the Swinomish Channel on the west, Douglas Street on the south, Whatcom Street on the east and Morris Street on the north as outlined on Map 1. Approximately 1600 feet of the waterfront is in the Historic Preservation District. Historic Design Review is required as a land use permit for additions or changes to buildings in the Historic Preservation District. An inventory of LaConner's historically significant structures, which were identified and plotted on a map in 1984, is available for review at Town Hall. The Town also shares a rich heritage with the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community. Having lived side by side for over 120 years, the people of LaConner and the Swinomish Tribe share a common interest in the preservation of cultural values, historic landmarks, and natural resources.

### **Critical Areas**

The location and size of these areas are an important consideration in planning for future development; therefore, each critical area is mapped. Specific Critical

Areas regulations are addressed in the Uniform Development Code, §15.65 Environmentally Sensitive and Critical Areas. Reference Map 3, Appendix D.

### **Shoreline**

LaConner has approximately 9,300 feet of shoreline, most of which is privately owned or leased in the commercial and industrial zones. Very little is publicly owned, and currently there are two single-family residential properties within the shoreline. However, residential uses are permitted along the shoreline in commercial zones by conditional use permit, as long as they are not over water.

## **Public Facilities and Services<sup>2</sup>**

### **Medical and Emergency Facilities**

The Town contains one medical clinic with general practice, and limited emergency service. The Town has two dentists and two full-time doctors with specialty services available. First Response Emergency Medical service is provided by the Volunteer Fire Department. Advanced life support is provided from Mount Vernon. Two hospitals are within 11 miles of Town, at Anacortes and Mount Vernon.

### **Police and Fire Protection**

In 2001, LaConner disbanded the Town's Police Department and contracted with the Skagit County Sheriff's Department for community policing services. The Sheriff's Department has created a LaConner Detachment that is based in LaConner, but responds to an adjacent patrol area surrounding the Town. There are four full-time officers assigned to the LaConner Detachment. The Detachment continues to use the County Jail facilities in Mount Vernon.

Fire protection for the LaConner area is provided by a mutual aid agreement between the LaConner Volunteer Fire Department and all other fire departments in the County. There is also a cost sharing agreement between Fire District 13 and the Town of LaConner. As development has progressed, and based on an analysis of the impact of growth in the near future, the Town will have to increase response capacity for fire and emergency medical demands. Accordingly, the Town and Fire District #13 have jointly built a new five-bay fire hall near the wastewater treatment plant with provisions for sleeping quarters.

The number and close proximity of older buildings along First Street, combined with severe access limitations along the Swinomish Channel, create a potentially hazardous situation in the event of fire or earthquake.

LaConner has an interlocal agreement with the Skagit County Permit Center for compliance with the Uniform Building Codes, and access to the County Fire Marshall for Fire Code inspections.

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<sup>2</sup> Public Utilities are addressed in the Utilities Element.

## **Emergency Management Disaster Preparedness**

The Town of LaConner is covered under the umbrella of the Skagit County Department of Emergency Management Disaster Preparedness Plan and the Emergency Management Council. The plan provides guidelines for coping with, and mitigating the effects of, a natural or manmade disaster or emergency in order to preserve lives and property. The Town completed an Emergency Response Plan in 2003 to coordinate with the June 1999 Skagit County Emergency Management Plan.

## **Public Education Facilities**

The Town has an elementary school housing kindergarten through fifth grade, a middle school housing grades six through eight, and a high school housing grades nine through twelve. The student-teacher ratio is 16.2 to 1 for the entire district. Sports facilities are available in the elementary school and the high school.

## **Library**

The LaConner Regional Library is located on Morris Street and provides services to residents of LaConner, the School District, and the surrounding area. This rural partial-County Library District was established on September 28, 1993. On November 2, 1993, residents of LaConner voted to be annexed into the new library district.

## **Other Services**

Public restrooms are located on First Street and on Morris Street.

## **Museums**

Skagit County Historical Museum on Fourth Street, the Museum of Northwest Arts, Quilt Museum on South Second, and the Volunteer Fireman's Museum on First Street.

## **Transportation Facilities**

A comprehensive Transportation and Parking Study was conducted for the Town of LaConner in 1988. Existing roadways and right-of-ways have remained relatively unchanged. There are no pedestrian or bicycle trails in town. Bus service became available in 1995. LaConner is served by the Countywide Skagit Area Transit (SKAT) system. Initial ridership of the LaConner routes was high when no fares were being charged. Since the imposition of rider fees, ridership has decreased and the trip frequency to LaConner has dropped in response. The location and quality of all transportation facilities are detailed in the Transportation Element.

Parking remains an issue in the commercial zones and adjacent residential neighborhoods. The Town Council received preliminary recommendations from a Parking Committee in 2002. Many of those recommendations were implemented, and the Town is proceeding with the development of a Comprehensive Parking Plan to ensure consistent policies and capacity development in the future.

### **Vacant/Underdeveloped Lands**

LaConner has approximately 26 acres of undeveloped or underdeveloped land within its boundaries. Approximately 15 acres in the residential zone could be developed in the future. Approximately 4 acres are available for industrial development or redevelopment, with 6 to 7 acres available for commercial development.

The following summary of the Acreage in Type of Land Use includes all of the uses described above, as well as the critical areas discussed in the Physical Description section. This acreage corresponds to the land use Zoning Map 1 at Appendix D.

**TABLE 5-2  
ACREAGE IN TYPE OF LAND USE  
(TOTAL - 255 ACRES)**

Land Use	Acreage*	Percent of Total
Residential	108	42.4%
Commercial	49.7	19.5%
Commercial, Transitional	4.3	1.7%
Industrial	37.8	14.8%
Public	55.1	21.6%
Totals	255	

\*Includes all rights-of-way.

Land Use Undeveloped or Underdeveloped	Acreage	% of Total Land	% of Underdeveloped Total
Residential	15	5.8 %	62%
Industrial	4	1.5 %	15%
Commercial, Transitional	3.2	1.3%	12%
Commercial	2.8	1.0%	11%
Total	26		

## **FUTURE NEEDS AND ALTERNATIVES**

Growth and development in LaConner is limited by its designated urban growth boundary and physical constraints peculiar to the land. The Town is entirely surrounded by natural open space corridors; agricultural lands to the north and east, the Swinomish Channel to the west, and Pioneer Park to the south. The Swinomish Channel runs along the entire western side of the Town, dividing the Town of LaConner and the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community. Pioneer Park, a naturally vegetated recreational area, is located along the most southerly portion of Town. It is a wooded rock outcrop with a combination of fir, cedar, and pine trees. A hilly, rocky area with steep slopes covers the central area of town bounded by First Street on the west, Caledonia Street to the south, Whatcom Street to the east and Morris Street to the north. Reference Map 1, Appendix D.

Plans for growth and development in LaConner were developed based on the following analysis:

- A. Population and demographics: Corresponding to the residential land use inventory.
- B. Economic conditions: Corresponding to the commercial, industrial, and resource lands inventory.
- C. Amenities: Corresponding to the historic resources, recreational lands, open spaces, and part of the public facilities inventory.
- D. Physical conditions: Corresponding to the physical description and the critical areas inventory.
- E. Infrastructure: Corresponding to part of the public facilities inventory. Examines overall land use compatibility, and coordinates land usage with the other elements of the Comprehensive Plan (Housing, Transportation, Capital Facilities, and Utilities).

### **Population and Demographics**

#### **Population Changes**

The analysis of population projections for the next 20 years is based on the LaConner/Skagit County estimated population growth rate of approximately 1.0%, the 1990 U.S. Census, Department of Commerce 1990 data on Selected Population and Housing Characteristics, the 1993 Town Census, and the 2000 U.S. Census. LaConner's population has increased slowly but steadily over the past 50 years as shown in Table 5-3 below.

**TABLE 5-3**  
**HISTORICAL POPULATION GROWTH**  
 (OFM Official Count)

YEAR	POPULATION	CHANGE
1890	398	
1900	564	+166
1920	516	- 48
1940	624	+108
1960	638	+14
1980	660	+22
1990	690	+30
1993	713	+23
1994	720	+7
1995	737	+17
1996	780	+43
1997	780	0
1998	775	-5
1999	800	+25
2000	761	-39
2001	765	+4
2002	775	+10
2003	760	-15
2004	785	+25
2005	795	+10

In contrast, Skagit County as a whole remained fairly constant through the 1960's, grew 37% in the 1970-1980 decade, and increased by 24% between 1980 and 1990. The 2000 census showed the population of Skagit County at 104,100. LaConner showed about a 4% increase in population growth from 1980 to 1990 and comprises less than 1% of the entire Skagit County population distribution. The Town's population increased primarily through immigration, which is also the trend for the county and state levels. In Skagit County as a whole, natural fluctuations (births and deaths) comprised only 27% of the population growth in the 90's. In-migration from other areas is responsible for the remainder of the growth. Growth in Skagit County peaked in 1991 at 4% but has dropped steadily to 1% in 2001. Over the same period of time, LaConner's growth has fluctuated from a high of 5.8% to a low of 4.5%; averaging 1%. While the population figures for the 1990's indicate a 1% growth rate, a more recent housing survey (2005), indicates that the population of LaConner may be larger than the 2000 Census and adjustments would indicate. In 2005, the Office of Financial Management (OFM) established the population number for LaConner at 795. However, the actual population figure for 2005 may be as high as 937.

The following projections are based on the 2000 Census data and subsequent adjustments.

**Projected Population Changes:** Growth projections have been estimated to be around 1.0% a year over the next 20 years. The Town is expected to grow from a population of 761 in the year 2000 to 844 by 2010, 887 by 2015, 932 by 2020 and 980 by 2025. While there have been annual swings in the population counts for the Town, the net rate is staying at 1%. This growth is consistent with the county expectations of stable social and economic trends. The surrounding area is expected to continue to grow, particularly the Mt. Vernon/Burlington area. LaConner may continue to attract individuals who prefer a small town lifestyle or want to be part of the tourism industry that provides a growing economic base for the community.

If the actual current figure is 937, the 2025 projection may be as high as 1,200 people.

## **Demographics**

**Development Patterns:** LaConner is situated on approximately 256.1 acres (.4 square miles) with a population density of 3 persons per acre in 2002. In 1993, the density was 2.8 persons per acre, and in 2015 it is estimated at 4 persons per acre. This compares to 0.07 per acre for Skagit County as a whole. The County's 1990 population was 79,555 on 1,735 square miles of 1,110,400 acres. In 2001, the County population was 104,100 increasing the density to 0.90 persons per acre. Settlement occurred uniformly around the center of town with industrial areas to the north and south. New residential development could occur through infilling (building on vacant lots), or through rehabilitation of older structures which could allow for multi-family growth.

**Age Distribution of Population<sup>3</sup>:** The largest age group in LaConner is the 45-54 age group which comprised 17.9% of the population in 2000, followed by age group 35-44, 13.4%; group 25-34, 9.5%; and 75-84, 8.8%. Comparatively, the largest age group in Skagit County is the 25-44 year age group. Skagit County's percentage of people over 65 has increased from 12.6% in 1970 to about 16% in 1990 and 2000. LaConner's over 65 group has increased from 16% in 1990 to 21% in 2000. For LaConner's population, 60% were over the age of 35 in 1990 and that same age group was 64% by 2000. If this trend continues, planning for the special considerations of an aging population would be needed for housing, transit and social services. A large retired population would contribute income dollars, but would not be looking for employment opportunities.

**Home Ownership:** Between 1980 and 1993 home ownership in LaConner increased by 31 new units. In 1992, LaConner had 224 single family units, 83 multi-family, and 38 mobile/manufactured homes for a total of 345 dwellings. In 1993, there were 219 single-family units, 98 multi-family, 22 mobile homes, and

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<sup>3</sup> 2000 Census

26 special (boats) units for a total of 365 dwellings. In 1995, there were 228 single-family units, 78 multi-family, 16 mobile/manufactured homes, and 28 special (boats) units for a total of 350 dwellings. The total number of dwelling units in 2002 rose to 491.<sup>4</sup> In 1990, the Skagit County Assessor rated 56% of the single-family units as average or above construction quality and 10% were rated low quality construction or below. 69% of the housing units were built before 1970. Home ownership outnumbered renters; 69% owners versus 30% renters in 1990. The median home value in LaConner was \$168,800 in 2000. The median value has doubled since 1990.

**Household Size:** In 2000, a typical household in LaConner was 2.25 persons per unit in owner occupied homes, and 1.8 in renter occupied units. The average household size decreased from 2.83 in 1970 to 2.1 in 1993, and 2 in 2000. It is anticipated that average household size will continue to remain consistent with state and national trends. Implications for housing planning are analyzed in the Housing Element.

**Education:** Of the Town's population over the age of 25 in 2000, 91.1% had a high school diploma and 34.9% had a Bachelor's degree or higher. This is a higher education level than that attained by Skagit County's population as a whole. The statistics for Skagit County show that 81% completed high school and 16.3% had a Bachelor's degree or higher. This indicates LaConner has been successful in attracting and keeping a well-educated populace who not only contribute to the economic welfare of the community but also the cultural climate as well.

**Income:** Per capita median income - According to the Washington State Office of Economic Development, the 1989 per capita income in LaConner was \$13,804. From the 2000 Census, that figure has risen to \$24,308. This is an indication of the buying power of the average resident and is important in determining the type of housing, retail businesses, recreational opportunities, capital improvements, and feasible transit alternatives that would be appropriate for the community. The 1990 median household income for LaConner was \$25,054 and for Skagit County was \$28,389. In 2000, LaConner's median household income was \$52,083 and Skagit County was \$48,347.

**Residential Land Use Needs:** The analysis in the Housing Element demonstrates that the available residential land is adequate to meet the projected need for 60 residential units by the year 2015, or 78 by 2020.

The location of current and planned housing in relation to critical areas, public facilities, transportation, retail and service centers, recreational lands, open space, and employment centers was examined. No particular concerns surfaced

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<sup>4</sup> Refer to 1999 Population, Land Use and Capacity Report, Erika Jenson; and 2002 Population and Land Use Analysis Report, John Doyle

that were not already experienced by the Town in the past, for example, effective parking management and well-paying local employment opportunities.

