

CHAPTER 6

PRIVATE UTILITIES

Introduction

The Growth Management Act requires the City of Auburn to include a utilities element within its Comprehensive Plan. The element should provide a framework for the efficient and predictable provision and siting of utility facilities and services within the City consistent with the serving utilities public service obligations. This element covers private utilities, (those not provided by the City of Auburn) and includes electricity, telecommunications, and natural gas. City owned water, sewer, and stormwater utilities are described within the Capital Facilities Element (Chapter 5) of this comprehensive plan.

Investor owned utilities in the State of Washington are regulated by the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (WUTC). State law regulates the rates, charges, services facilities and practices of utilities. Any changes in policies regarding these aspects of utility provision require WUTC approval.

The primary responsibility for planning for private utilities rests with the utility providers. Clearly, however, this planning can not take place without open lines of communication between the City and the utility providers. The City acknowledges that some private utility providers are not willing to provide capacity or future construction plans as some of this information may effect their competitiveness or be considered to be proprietary. The utilities, however, must recognize that this may hinder the City's ability to assist them in their projects.

Background

Electricity and Natural Gas

Puget Sound Energy (PSE) provides electrical and natural gas service to the City of Auburn and its potential annexation area. PSE is an investor-owned private utility which provides service to approximately 1.2 million customers in a service area that covers 6,000 square miles.

With respect to electrical service, PSE builds, operates and maintains an electrical system consisting of generation, transmission and distribution facilities. Facility technology for electricity transmission may change in the future in response to the need to create more efficient facilities and in response to various electromagnetic field and health concerns and diversification of resources. Utility policies should be updated in the future to take into consideration changes in technology, facilities, and services.

Map 6.1 shows existing and proposed electrical service facilities within the City of Auburn and its potential annexation areas.

Natural Gas

The Northwest Pipeline Corporation and Enumclaw Gas also have gas lines in the southeastern portion of the City. While the Northwest Pipeline Corporation does not serve any customers within the City, Enumclaw Gas has some residential customers in the area of the Adventist Academy.

Map 6.2 shows existing major natural gas pipelines within the City and its potential annexation areas.

Telecommunications

Telecommunications include a wide range of services including conventional telephone, cellular telephone and cable television. Technology in the field of telecommunications continues to change rapidly.

Conventional Telephone

Conventional local telephone service to the City is provided by Qwest. Qwest offers service to 25 million customers in 14 Western States.

The facilities in which calls are switched are called central offices. Typically there are four main lines heading out from each central office - one in each direction. Auburn's central office is located in downtown Auburn.

Long distance service is provided in the area by several providers. These providers have underground fiber optic cables passing through the City of Auburn.

Cellular Telephone

Cellular telecommunications provide mobile telephone communications via radios that send and receive signals from a network of receivers mounted on utility poles, towers, buildings or other structures on private

property or within the right of way. Cellular communication companies offer digital voice, messaging and high speed wireless data services to customers.

Cellular telephone service within the City and its potential annexation areas is provided by approximately 20 private companies providing service throughout the Puget Sound region. Regulation of cellular providers is provided by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Technology and business practices in the area of telecommunications continues to change rapidly.

Map 6.3 shows the location of both Cellular and conventional telephone facilities within Auburn.

Cable Television

Cable television service is provided by Comcast through a combination of aerial and underground cables. The location of existing and planned cable lines are shown on Map 6.4.

GOAL 15

PRIVATE UTILITIES

To ensure safe, efficient provision of private utilities to serve all segments and activities of the community.

Objective 15.1

To allow the development of private utilities to meet the needs of the existing community and provide for its planned growth consistent with the serving utilities public service obligations.

Policies:

PU-1 Private utility companies are recognized as providers of important services necessary to maintain current and future lifestyles.

PU-2 Private utility providers should refer to the City's Comprehensive Plan Map for guidance regarding future land uses and intensities. Private utility facilities and systems should be consistent with the uses and densities allowed by the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code. The City will regularly provide this information and information on pending development proposals (both public and private) to the appropriate provider. In return, the City expects there to be a cooperative posture towards coordinated and sensitive expansion of the infrastructure.

PU-3 Private utility companies should strive to provide utility services to all segments of the Auburn population and areas of the community.

Objective 15.2 To improve the safety, visual quality, and efficiency of private utility facilities consistent with the serving utilities public service.

Policies:

PU-4 The City shall require that new private utility distribution, service and telecommunication lines be located underground within all new developments. The City will also work with the utility companies to relocate existing distribution, service and telecommunication lines underground as a part of system upgrading or urban revitalization projects, whenever it is economically and technologically feasible.

PU-5 Common utility trenches should be encouraged and coordinated by both private and public providers whenever possible.

PU-6 To reduce visual clutter, antennas, relay mechanisms and similar structures should be located on existing poles, structures, or buildings whenever possible. When deemed feasible and necessary to minimize impacts on adjacent uses or views by the City, visual screening may be required.

PU-7 The City shall consider the environmental impacts of proposed utility facilities as a part of its environmental review process. When requested by the City, the utility provider shall furnish documentation of current research results and/or provide additional information related to determining the environmental impacts, if any, of the proposed facilities.

PU-8 The construction of facilities and provision of services by private utility providers within the City of Auburn shall be in compliance with all of the goals and policies of this comprehensive plan.

PU-9 Decisions regarding private utility facilities within Auburn should consider the safe, adequate and efficient availability of these utilities to other jurisdictions.

PU-10 The location of utility facilities is often dependent upon the physical requirements of the utility system. All utility facilities should be sited, designed, and buffered (through extensive screening and/or landscaping) to fit in with their surroundings harmoniously and safely. When sited within or adjacent to residential areas, special attention should be given to minimizing noise, light and glare impacts.

