

June 2025 RRL Workshop Notes

South Kitsap Workshop (SK). Held Tuesday, June 24, 2025 – Kitsap County Administrative Building, Port Orchard.

Central Kitsap Workshop (CK). Held Wednesday, June 25, 2025 – Eagle's Nest, Bremerton.

North Kitsap Workshop (NK). Held Thursday, June 26, 2025 – Village Green, Kingston.

A. Questions & Answers (Q & A)

A sample of questions taken from Zoom chat or Zoom Q&A.

South Kitsap, Central Kitsap, and North Kitsap

Q: How can I develop my legacy lot (e.g., 2.5 acres) under the new Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO)?

A: Noting the question for further investigation, discussion, and education.

Q: We currently have zoning for forest resource lands and mineral lands, but not agricultural. Shouldn't the language be updated to say we have undesignated agricultural lands, not agricultural resource lands?

A: Noted. Agricultural lands are considered a type of resource land. However, the lack of designation currently applies only to agricultural resource lands.

Q: When the ordinance goes out for public comment, how will the public be notified?

A: If you signed up for the "Year of the Rural" Gov Delivery list, you will be notified that way. The timeline for engagement leading up to adoption of the ordinance, including public comment and public testimony, will be published on the Kitsap County "Year of the Rural" webpage along with other outlets including the DCD newsletter, presentations at several Community Advisory Council meetings, and a flyer distributed to Kitsap Regional Libraries.

Q: Open space taxation is not currently enforced. How will this be handled in the future?

A: We will investigate the process for initial application and subsequent monitoring or enforcement (or perhaps a better term—how do we determine if the land continues to qualify?).

Q: You should identify heritage parks as working lands. Additionally, City of Bremerton utility lands function as working forests.

A: Agreed.

Q: Will you review rural-designated open space within Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) for removal? For example, 60+ acres currently within a UGA are designated as open space and zoned Urban Low (UL). This should be at least Urban Restricted (UR), if not greenbelt.

A: Illahee specific suggestion. Noted that the work for this project relates to Rural and Resource Lands.

Q: Forestry requires access to mills or onsite milling. Will you consider provisions for small-scale industrial zoning within Rural Wooded areas?

A: Agreed. The same consideration applies to agriculture.

Q: Will there be provisions to protect critical aquifer recharge areas? Our groundwater is important to the entire county, and development on a critical aquifer could have widespread impacts.

A: Aquifer recharge areas are on our list for protection, and the Squaxin Island Tribe and our colleagues in the Environmental Programs Division are advocating additional work in this area.

Q: In areas already subdivided into conforming 5-acre tracts, why does the zoning not match the subdivision? For example, why are five-acre tracts zoned Rural Wooded?

A: These were created prior to current zoning regulations. Also, we will investigate tax parcel divisions that are not related to land use or zoning standards.

Q: Will incentives be provided to preserve connected tree canopy lands to help mitigate rising temperatures?

A: Noted. Kitsap County recently passed the Tree Canopy Code that applies to Urban Growth Areas. There are no plans currently to apply a similar method to rural lands; however, other means of conservation and preservation are considered – either promoting existing tools or developing new tools.

Q: Can you explain how the timber industry has reportedly changed?

A: Reclassification Request Applicants that included property owners historically in the timber industry business stated as much in their applications. Additionally, an interview with the Parks Department Forester indicated the difficulty in revenue from timber harvested through sustainable, thinning practices. This is a topic we will continue to investigate as maintaining working lands is a conservation method.

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A: Agreed. The same consideration applies to agriculture.

B. Workshop Prompts

1. What does rural character mean to you?

According to South Kitsap participants, rural character is defined by access to green space, agricultural uses, low traffic volumes, and quiet surroundings. They emphasized privacy, wildlife corridors, community gathering spaces, and rural traditions such as horseback riding. There was a strong desire to protect the natural environment and limit light pollution.

Central Kitsap participants associated rural character with tranquility, low-density development, and visual access to natural features such as water, trees, and mountains. They expressed pride in individual and community identity, emphasized the need for fire resilience, and stressed coexistence with wildlife. Some noted challenges with new residents who may not understand or value rural lifestyles.

North Kitsap participants highlighted concerns over increasing urban traffic on rural roads and emphasized protecting agriculture explicitly in the comprehensive plan. They noted the importance of rural sounds and dark skies and expressed concern about urban encroachment through LAMIRDs. Social cohesion and shared rural lifestyle were also important themes.

2. Rural Business - Event facilities: scale options and impacts

South Kitsap participants supported agritourism, farm-to-table activities, and rural event spaces. They raised concerns about increasing regulations, restrictive definitions of 'event,' and inconsistent enforcement of complaints. Many expressed a desire to maintain rural hospitality while allowing flexibility for gatherings.

In Central Kitsap, participants focused on concerns around 'activity creep'—where small rural events grow into larger operations without sufficient oversight. They emphasized the importance of siting venues off main roads and maintaining appropriate scale.

North Kitsap participants acknowledged the importance of gathering places like granges and supported arts and music venues that benefit the local economy. However, they also emphasized the need to balance this with neighbor impacts, life safety, parking, and wildlife. There was concern over regulatory clarity and the line between residential and commercial standards.

3. Rural Business – Childcare

South Kitsap participants stressed the importance of collaborating with school districts and local churches to expand childcare options. They noted the difficulties posed by septic and water requirements for home-based care and emphasized maintaining a rural home-like atmosphere.

Central Kitsap participants advocated lowering regulatory barriers and streamlining processes for starting childcare centers. They cited high demand, especially for infant care, and called for more zoning flexibility and partnerships with local institutions.

North Kitsap participants highlighted the high cost of land and barriers posed by conditional use permits. Safety concerns were raised about isolation from emergency services. Participants recommended partnerships with schools and churches and noted that lack of housing affects staffing availability.

4. Service and Infrastructure - Energy Siting

Note – Someone asked us what we meant by the term “siting.” In urban planning, siting refers to the process of selecting or determining the location for buildings, projects, or infrastructure. It involves considering various factors such as zoning laws, access to services, environmental impact, and community needs to ensure that the chosen location is suitable for sustainability and accessibility.

In South Kitsap, participants raised questions about battery safety, groundwater contamination, emergency response, and ownership of long-term maintenance responsibilities. There was skepticism about siting near residential areas and a desire for more transparency from utilities like PSE (Puget Sound Energy) and BPA (Bonneville Power Administration).

Central Kitsap participants expressed health concerns over electromagnetic fields and chemical leaching. They supported concentrating energy facilities in industrial zones and asked about battery replacement protocols and appropriate buffers.

North Kitsap participants cited the Blue Lake, Texas case as a cautionary tale. They supported siting near highways or other noisy infrastructure and encouraged distributed solar. Fire risk, sound impacts, and long-term costs were key concerns.

5. Service and Infrastructure – Transportation

South Kitsap participants were frustrated by declining rural transit services, especially for disabled residents and those without cars. They noted that other counties, such as Jefferson, provide better rural access and emphasized the need to restore service equity.

Central Kitsap participants focused on improving non-motorized safety, including the addition of off-road trails and widened shoulders. They called for enforcement of traffic laws and separation of pedestrian routes from vehicle lanes.

North Kitsap participants supported expanded walkability and bikeability in rural areas. They emphasized the need for a transportation plan that aligns with rural venues and services, reinforcing non-vehicular access.