

Chapter 3 The Built Environment – Effects on People and Community Resources

What is addressed in this chapter?

This chapter describes the community's existing built environment and how the alternatives may impact that built environment. This chapter specifically addresses the following elements:

- Land Use
- Transportation
- Noise
- Public Utilities (water supply, wastewater, stormwater)
- Visual
- Historic and Cultural Resources
- Public Services (parks, schools, public safety)
- Fiscal Analysis

Visual Quality and Aesthetics

1 How is Visual Quality evaluated?

Visual quality is evaluated and discussed using three attributes: visual character, visual quality, and viewer response.

Visual Character

Visual Character describes the key features of the landscape and how the features relate to one another. Four key factors are used to identify relationships between elements of the visual environment: dominance, scale, diversity, and continuity. The integration of these factors results in a complete description of the character of a view and how elements such as vegetation, land uses, transportation and utility facilities, open space, and water bodies relate to one another.

Visual Quality

Visual Quality describes the value of the visual experience. This assessment asks, “Is this view ordinary, spectacular, or somewhere in between?” Terms used to describe visual quality include vividness, unity, and intactness.

Viewer Response

Viewer response is an individual’s response to the change in the visual character of the area. Viewer response is based primarily on the kinds of activities persons are engaged in. For residential areas near the site, viewer sensitivity is likely to be high because people tend to be concerned about the character of their neighborhoods. For persons engaged in recreational activities, the context is likely to be very important. For persons passing through on local highways and arterials, viewer response is related to how a particular view fits with a series of views in an integrated experience. Sensitivity is likely to be related to how regularly a person travels the route and the extent to which the character of the scenes is of value to the viewer. Residents travelling within the community will experience a series of views that will either support or be at variance with the dominant vision they have of their community. They are likely to be somewhat less sensitive than in the context of their home, but more sensitive than travelers passing through the community.

Appendix H

More information on the Visual Analysis is included in Appendix H.

2 What does the area look like now?

Several of the more prominent landscape features in the study area are discussed below and are shown in Exhibit 3-27. The exhibit also identifies the viewpoints used to assess impacts on visual quality and aesthetics.

Main Property – Lawson Hill

Lawson Hill includes the portion of the Main Property that lies to the east of Lawson Street. The Lawson Hill ridge provides a visual boundary at the northeast edge of the community for many areas from the south and west. The view is not vivid, but provides a unity of features in which native vegetation and natural landforms are the main integrating elements. The cell towers on the ridge encroach only slightly on the view. Because the ridge is at the visual boundary of the community, it contributes to the perception that the natural setting is a predominant element of the Black Diamond community.

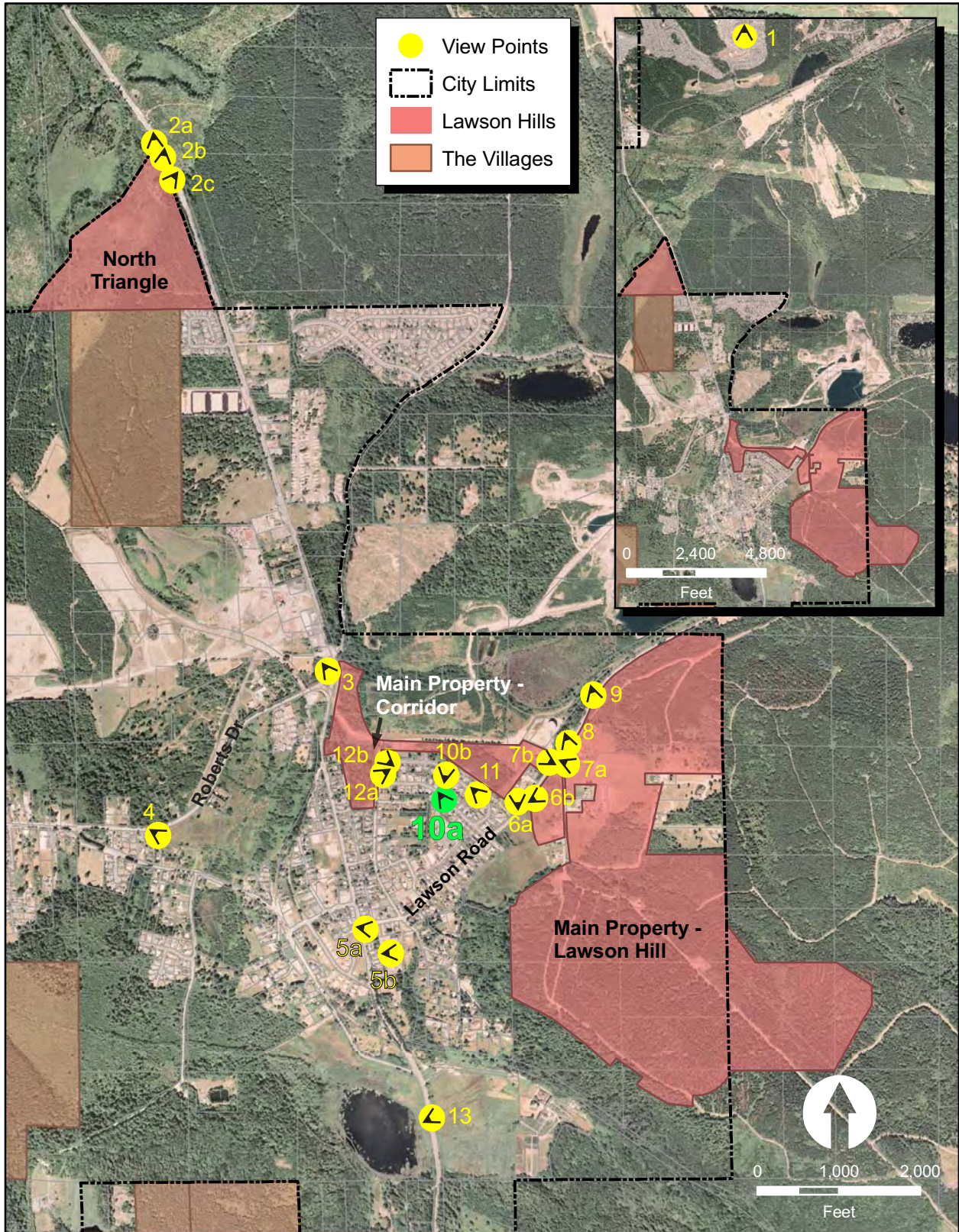
The existing view from Viewpoint 10a (shown in Exhibit 3-28) provides a relatively close view of the ridge from Newcastle Drive on the southwest side of Lawson Street. This viewpoint is about a half mile from the top of the ridge. The view shown is similar to views of Lawson Ridge from other points in the community. In general, the ridge is visible except where obscured by trees or structures or in valleys where topography blocks the view.

In some areas, the peaks of the Cascade Mountains are visible behind Lawson Hill, including views of Mount Rainier at some locations. Because of the distance to the mountain peaks, Lawson Hill continues to be a defining visual feature for the local community.

How were the viewpoints selected?

The viewpoints used in this Final EIS are discussed in the July 2008 Visual Analysis report by Primedia Group, included in Appendix H. The Visual Analysis report provides a discussion of the criteria used to select viewpoints.

Exhibit 3-27 Viewpoint Locations



Exhibits in this EIS are intended to provide a general graphical depiction of built and natural environment conditions and may not be accurate to the parcel level.

Exhibit 3-28**Existing View from Viewpoint 10a****Main Property – Corridor**

The Corridor includes the area between Lawson Street and SR 169 that is proposed to include a new arterial road and adjacent residential development. This corridor is generally visible from existing homes adjacent to the corridor. It is currently an area of existing open space characterized primarily by relatively sparse native and invasive vegetation. This corridor contributes to the rural character of the area primarily through the unity of vegetation. It is not a vivid element of any views.

North Triangle

The North Triangle property is visible primarily from SR 169 and adjacent properties. The site is at about the same elevation as the road and surrounding development; there are no distant features visible beyond the screen of foreground vegetation. The trees are the single integrating element of the view.

3 What standards have been established for views and aesthetics?

The City’s Comprehensive Plan addresses the visual character of the community through its overall vision, policies, and principles. The City’s vision in regards to views and aesthetics is as follows:

In the year 2025, Black Diamond will be a beautiful, friendly community based on a rich historic heritage and exceptional natural setting, and with a small-town atmosphere. Forested areas and open space remain, while development maintains a healthy balance of moderate growth and economic viability.

More specific discussion of views and aesthetics are included in the City’s Comprehensive Plan. See Policy LU-12 regarding view preservation from the valley floor and view of Mt. Rainier.

Comprehensive Plan policies and principles implement this vision and seek to preserve the quality of Black Diamond’s natural setting, its scenery and views, and forested areas and open spaces. Comprehensive Plan policies acknowledge that the community’s visual identity has clear edges and gateways that should be enhanced.

The Black Diamond Municipal Code states that MPDs will provide:

Preservation and enhancement of open space and views of Mt. Rainier. (18.98.020.D)

Natural open space shall be located and designed to form a coordinated open space network resulting in continuous greenbelt areas and buffers to minimize the visual impacts of development within the MPD, and provide connections to existing or planned open space networks, wildlife corridors, and trail corridors on adjacent properties and throughout the MPD. (18.98.140.B)

Additionally, the code requires an MPD to orient public building sites and parks to preserve and enhance views of Mt. Rainier and other views identified in the comprehensive plan. Major roads shall be designed to take advantage of the bearing lines for those views (18.98.080.A.9) and protect important community-identified viewsheds and scenic areas (18.98.135.F).

The MPD design guidelines include guidelines for clustering single-family residential housing, providing a variety of building sizes and styles, and bulk standards such as floor area ratio and structural setbacks, in order to ensure compatibility with Black Diamond’s small town character.

4 How would the alternatives change views in the study area?

Alternative 1

The single-family residential development anticipated in Alternative 1 is assumed to cover the entire site with no specific requirement for open space, except avoidance of sensitive areas including wetlands, streams, hazardous slopes, and coal mine hazards and associated buffers. In this case, residential development would replace the forested ridgeline and slope of Lawson Hill with structures and would include buildings at the crest, as well as further down the slopes.

The extent to which the replacement of native trees and vegetation by structures affects the character of the view is similar at most locations where the ridge is visible. At these locations, the view will be transformed from one reflecting the natural environment to one in which urban development predominates.

How viewers respond to this change in visual character depends on the extent to which the view of Lawson Hills is currently one of their principal views. For nearby residents, Lawson Hill is the prominent view on the horizon, and therefore, development would have greater impact on the visual quality they experience. For viewpoints further away, Lawson Hills is a narrower segment of the field of view, and is therefore likely to have a lesser impact.

Near views of the property are largely from public roads or nearby residential development. Views along Lawson Street would be of residences and yards. This will change the existing rural character of the area, but would be similar to existing development along the street.

Overall, the transformation of this site to prominent buildings visible from much of the community will contribute to loss of the perception of the community as having a natural setting, and will replace forested views as a major focus with buildings on the top of Lawson Hill.

Alternative 2

Main Property – Lawson Hill

The development proposed in Alternatives 2 would replace a portion of the forested ridgeline and portions of the slope of Lawson Hill with structures. The proposed development is largely medium- and high-density residential development.

The extent to which the replacement of native trees and vegetation by structures affects the character of the view differs depending on the locations where the ridge is visible. From some locations, the view will be transformed from one reflecting the natural environment to one in which urban development predominates. At other locations, development on Lawson Hill would largely be obscured by the existing off-site vegetation and on-site vegetation proposed to be retained in the foreground.

Views along Lawson Street will largely be of the proposed school site and two very large water detention ponds. This will change the existing rural character of the area. How significant a change in character depends on how the ponds are designed, whether they incorporate berms along the roadway, and the extent to which they incorporate slopes that can accommodate vegetation versus vertical walls. The presence of detention ponds and retention of the existing sparse vegetation pattern would result in residential structures being the dominant middle view as well as distant view component. If native vegetation is planted and maintained in open space areas, it can screen proposed residences on lower slopes from public roads and existing development. The orientation and size of open space provides little opportunity to screen residential development at the crest of the ridge.

Overall, the transformation of this site to include buildings, or portions of buildings, visible from much of the community will contribute to loss of the perception of the community as having a natural setting.

Exhibit 3-29**Viewpoint 10a with Proposed MPD****Main Property – Corridor**

The development area proposed between SR 169 and Lawson Road will feature a new roadway and residential development. Views from SR 169 would be readily apparent because proposed open stormwater ponds would remove vegetation not displaced by development. Existing lots immediately south of the proposed arterial will observe the new road and adjacent development as the primary element of view.

Alternatives 3 and 4 would have similar impacts, depending on the layout of development. If mitigating measures, including preservation of ridgetop trees, were implemented, impacts would be less.

North Triangle

Alternative 1 would result in the construction of single-family residential uses adjacent to the existing SR 169. The character of development would be similar to other residential development in the Area.

Alternative 2 impacts would include open space set-asides adjacent to SR 169 as required in the Black Diamond Urban Growth Area Agreement. Over time, views of the North Triangle Property from SR 169 will be obscured by new vegetation planted along the roadway’s open space buffer. At the new connector roadway providing access to the site, views are likely to be typical of an urban commercial area.

Alternative 3 would include less commercial use with impacts similar to Alternative 2, but with a larger area devoted to residential use.

Alternative 4 impacts would be the same as Alternative 2, since the amount and character of commercial development would be the same.

5 Would the alternatives generate light or glare that would impact surrounding areas?

Main Property – Lawson Hill

Light and glare generated from new residential buildings would be visible from lower elevation areas to the north, west, and south of the Main Property. Because of the elevation of the Main Property, lighting from the highest points on the site will be visible from considerable distances off-site. As a general rule, light or glare that is produced within any portion of the project that is currently viewable off-site will be visible at night.

Main Property – Corridor

Street lights will be a prominent feature of the new arterial as viewed from residential development. Light from low density residential areas is likely be similar to existing residential areas, with light and glare from high density residential areas largely dependent on the orientation of windows on upper stories and from security lighting.

Light and Glare Policies

The City’s MPD guidelines (BDMC 18.70) state that “all lighting shall be shielded from the sky and surrounding development and shall be of a consistent design throughout various clusters of the development.”

North Triangle

Parking lots, buildings, and signage to serve commercial and office uses would be significant in Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 (Alternative 1 assumes residential development only in the North Triangle). Under any of the alternatives, the open space areas along SR 169 and between the development and adjacent properties will have the potential over the long term to screen lighting from the roadway. Existing residential development is likely to be buffered by trees in buffers around sensitive areas.

6 What measures can reduce the adverse effects of the alternatives on the appearance of the area?

Main Property – Lawson Hill

The effects of development on the character of the area can be reduced by preserving mature trees along the ridgeline of Lawson Hill. Preserving those trees involves designing open space areas to be parallel to slopes at or near the top of the hill. Preservation of enough trees that extend above rooftops, and the survival of trees after clearing, would provide a significant enough mass of vegetation to reduce the effects of the proposed urban development at the ridge crest. Preservation of mature trees in open spaces parallel to the slope can reduce the appearance of a solid face of structures on the slopes and contribute to preservation of the rural character of the community.

Planting dense landscaping along Lawson Street and in other open space areas would eventually soften the building profiles somewhat, and screen lighting, but would not be effective until the vegetation reached sufficient size in 10 to 15 years.

North Triangle

The visibility of commercial development from SR 169 will be affected primarily by new vegetation that will fill in the gaps left in the existing mature trees left along the highway. Planting with larger specimens will speed that process somewhat.

The visual impacts of the commercial development from the new arterial connector will depend on design details of the development, including bulk, height, setbacks from streets, and the amount and location of landscaping.

The intent to preserve the view corridors is included in the City's Comprehensive Plan Land Use Goals and Policies:

The City now has a strong visual identity with clear edges and gateways defined by its natural setting. Preservation of this identity, gateways and edges should continue, and be enhanced. New development in the vicinity of a gateway should strengthen, or at least not diminish, these features. This concept has been further implemented along the City's northern SR 169 gateway through strict view protection requirements on adjacent lands as set forth in the Black Diamond Area Open Space Agreement in 2005.

This is further defined in the City's Zoning Code Chapter 18.76, as the Gateway Overlay District, which is intended to:

Protect the scenic character of the City's gateways along 1) the State Route 169 corridor, with its commanding views of Mount Rainier and other attractive natural features and 2) the Auburn-Black Diamond Road, where the transition into the heart of the city from the adjacent rural unincorporated area is now seamless.

Development within any of the Alternatives would need to meet these policies and codes.