

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 and Aesthetics
- Historic and Cultural Resources
- Public Services (parks and recreation, 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 passing through on local highways and arterials, and residents travelling within the community, the change in visual quality will be created by a series of views and will likely create a less significant viewer response.

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

The Main Property consists of an upland area between the Rock Creek stream and wetland complex to the north and the Green River valley to the south. The Main Property is bisected by Black Diamond Lake that extends in a valley generally to the southwest of Rock Creek. The area is covered by dense second and third growth forest.

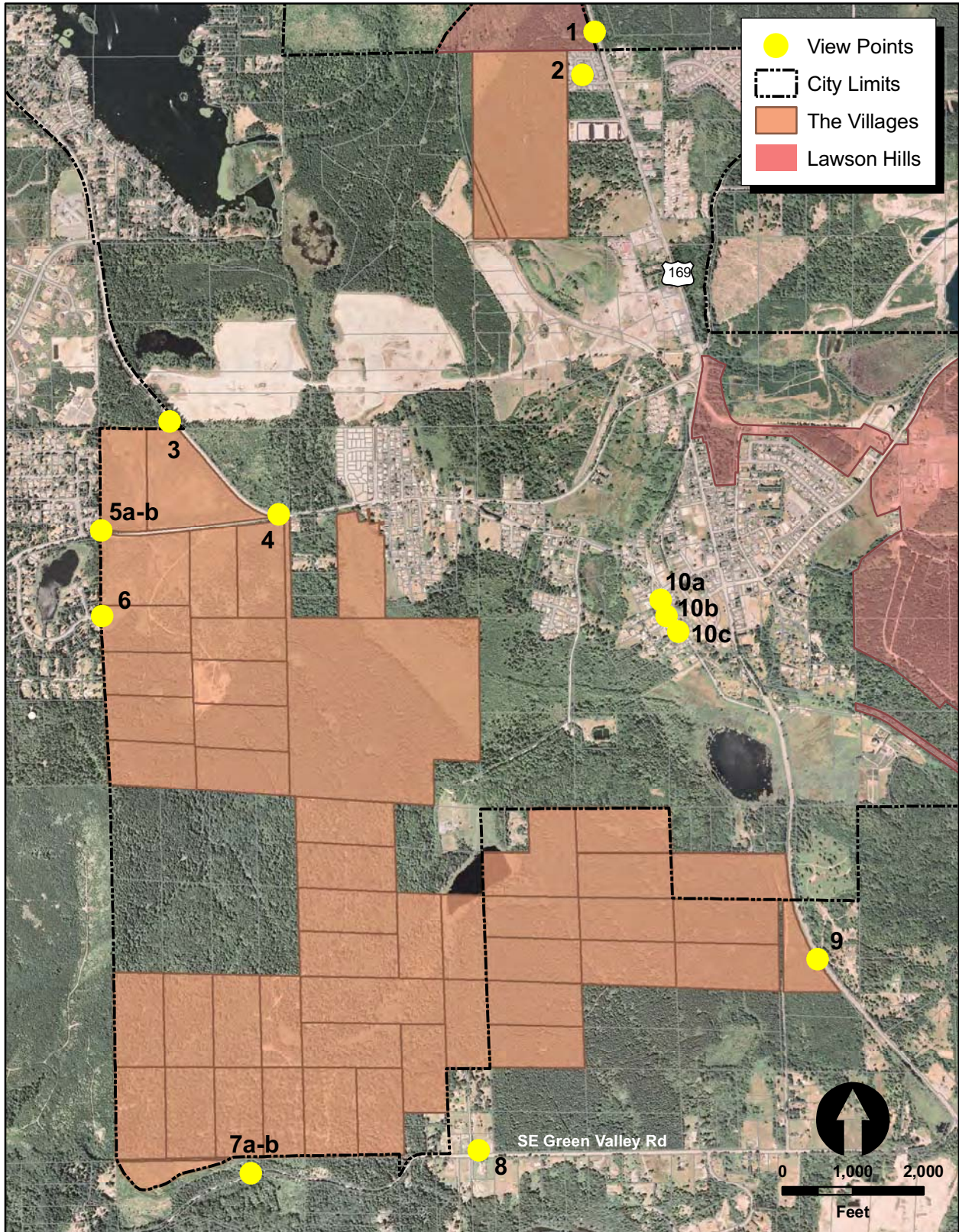
The Main Property is visible from the existing townsite of Black Diamond, and higher elevations to the east, as a heavily forested ridge (viewpoints 10 a, b, and c in Exhibit 3-27). The view is not vivid, but provides a unity of features in which native vegetation and natural landforms are the main integrating elements. The ridge contributes to the perception that the natural setting is a predominant element of the Black Diamond community. Those in the north, west, and south can only see the edges of the Main Property, and do not have views of the ridge.

Along Roberts Road/Black Diamond-Auburn Road, views are characterized by dense second growth forests on both sides of the road at approximately the same elevation as the road. The views along this gateway arterial to the City are largely framed by dense forests for several miles to the east to Rock Creek. Views from residential development to the west of the Main Property are also of the tree cover at generally the same elevation as surrounding property. Views from Green River Road at the far southwest corner of the site are of a steep vegetated slope above the roadway.

North Property

Views of the North Property are generally not available from existing roads. Views from adjacent land are of the forests on the site at the same elevation as the viewpoint.

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.

3 What mandates or 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.

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 provides incentives for MPDs to preserve open space in addition to sensitive areas. Open space areas, if carefully located and devoted to native vegetation, could provide visual relief from Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 (Alternative 1, which is not an MPD, assumes only sensitive areas will be preserved as open space). Additionally, the code requires that an approved MPD shall incorporate design guidelines that reduce the overall community impacts by “protecting important community-identified viewsheds and scenic areas.” The code also requires that street layouts be designed to preserve and enhance views of Mt. Rainier or other views identified in the City’s Comprehensive Plan.

The current 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?

None of the alternatives would alter views of the forested ridge from the existing Black Diamond townsite. The forested ridge is preserved under all of the alternatives, and the townsite is at a high enough elevation that new development will not obscure the view. Native trees would be required to be preserved adjacent to Rock Creek and other wetland areas, which would effectively screen development on the site from other viewpoints as well. The visual character and visual quality of the views to the west and southwest would also not be affected, and the role of the forested ridgeline in the perception that the natural setting is a predominant element of the Black Diamond community would not change.

Development of The Villages area is likely to be visible from proposed development on Lawson Hill southeast of the townsite, where elevations are higher than 900 feet. At those locations and angle of view, the development at the northeasterly portion of the site will not be effectively screened by retained vegetation. The view will be of urban development, framed in the background by forested rural lands in the Crisp Creek watershed. From these viewpoints, the visual character would be of a mosaic of forested and urban character areas with a larger expanse of forested area in the background. The views generally would support the perception that the natural setting is a predominant element of the Black Diamond community.

Existing near views from Roberts Drive and Lake Sawyer Road are that of a forested corridor. The alternatives will change the visual character of the roadway through the introduction of buildings; single-family homes in alternative 1 and medium- and high-density residential and commercial/office/retail in alternatives 2, 3, and 4. The degree of change will be mitigated by design review and compliance with the Gateway Overlay District regulations.

Views from residential properties to the east and west would be largely obscured by existing vegetation proposed to be retained as a buffer, except at the proposed site where clearing could presumably extend to the property line and feature turf areas with buildings at a moderate distance.

Views from Green Valley Road to the south are projected to be essentially the same because of intervening vegetation or preservation of vegetation on steep slopes where the property abuts the road. Residences immediately to the south of the site will have views of urban single family residences, to the extent that their residences are not screened by existing trees on the adjacent properties.

Exhibit 3-28

Existing View from Viewpoint 10a



Exhibit 3-29

Resulting View from Viewpoint 10a



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

Light and glare would be generated from new commercial, office, and residential uses under any of the alternatives. Most light or glare would be visible only from adjacent roadways or properties adjacent to The Villages.

Where a buffer of existing vegetation is retained on the edge of the site, light and glare impacts initially will be lessened largely by distance. Light generally will be visible between the trunks of mature trees when left as an isolated stand (these trees will not have foliage on their lower trunk). Over time, trees will grow at the perimeter of the cleared area with foliage extending to ground level, which will provide an effective screen for light and glare.

The commercial areas along Roberts Drive (Alternatives 2, 3, and 4) and in the North Property (all the alternatives) are likely to have the highest concentrations of light, as they would include parking lots, buildings, and signage to serve retail and office uses. Light and glare will be visible primarily from Roberts Road for the Main Property and along the proposed North Connector that passes through the Northern Property.

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.”

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

The rural character of the forested corridor along Roberts Drive and Lake Sawyer Road could be preserved by retaining a continuous buffer of existing forest vegetation along the road and shifting the retail, office, and mixed-use areas further from the road. To be effective in screening urban development, buffers would need to be between 50 and 100 feet in width, depending on the character of existing vegetation. The screen would be more effective over time if it included native conifers to provide a denser screen at the road edge.

An alternative approach to lessening development's visual impact is to set buildings back from the street or provide shorter buildings closer to the street with higher buildings behind them. Though this approach doesn't maintain the rural character, it would reduce the apparent scale of development and reduce the impact buildings would have on views from the street.

The rural character visible from adjacent residences can be preserved by providing a vegetation buffer in areas where a buffer isn't currently proposed. As mentioned above, a vegetated buffer would be more effective if it includes native conifers.

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.