Skagit County Housing Suitability Study

Phase 1 Analysis Results

DRAFT January 17, 2023

Introduction

Skagit County owns approximately 3,000 acres of land spread across 282 sites. This project assesses these sites' suitability for affordable multifamily housing and identifies potentially viable options that could benefit from a more detailed evaluation. The suitability assessment is accomplished through three levels of analysis: Level 1 – Screening; Level 2 – Scoring; and Level 3 - Qualitative Evaluation.

The Level 3 evaluation, which included discussions with most of the local jurisdictions, sorted sites into Priority A and Priority B rankings. Among the County's landholdings, Priority A sites are the most physically suitable sites for housing identified by this analysis. These sites are:

- **County Property No.243** in Concrete (county administration and recreational uses)
- **Cleveland Park & Senior Citizen Center** in Mount Vernon
- **Parker Building Site in Mount Vernon** (community court)
- **Skagit County Fairgrounds** in Mount Vernon
- **Burlington Yard** in Burlington (major public works yard)
- **County Property No.58** in Mount Vernon (parking lot)

More detailed Level 3 results and considerations start on page 3.

Level 1 Analysis - Screening

Sites were first screened for seven Level 1 criteria using GIS and visual analysis. This eliminated sites where use, location, characteristics, or encumbrances indicate they are unsuitable for affordable multifamily housing development. This analysis removed 204 of 282 sites.

Criteria	Considerations	Results
FEMA	Remove properties with a use name of "FEMA Buyout Parcel."	40 sites removed
Water and tidelands	Remove properties with a use name of "Water" or "Tidelands" after visually confirming the location is unsuitable for development.	All 5 "Water" sites and 10 "Tidelands" sites removed. 15 sites removed in total.
Right-of-way	Remove properties with a use name of "Abd Railroad ROW", "ROW", and "Vacated ROW" after visually confirming the property size, shape, and/or use is unsuitable for development.	Of two "Vacated ROW" sites, one was removed. Of 27 "ROW" sites, 21 were removed. Of 26 "Abd Railroad ROW" sites, 18 were removed. 40 sites removed in total.
City and UGA proximity	Remove properties more than 1 mile from city and urban grown area (UGA) boundaries and more than 1 mile off a highway.	30 sites removed.
Floodways	Remove sites mostly or fully within a floodway.	14 sites removed.
Undevelopable sites	Remove all sites categorized with a "use name" as something other than right-of-way, but where	54 sites removed.

Criteria	Considerations	Results
	visual analysis and historical notes confirm the site is right-of-way, a drainage facility, steeply sloped, inaccessible, located on a river shoreline or island, or is in a similar undevelopable situation.	Some trail rights-of-way retained for further evaluation where they are large or polygonal in shape.
Use restriction	Remove all sites where staff have confirmed there are legal restrictions (e.g. covenant, deed, dedication, estate) that prevent residential development from ever being an option. Also remove any sites the County does not own.	10 sites removed. In most cases, this is a restriction requiring a parcel only be used for recreational purposes. Three sites the County does not own were removed.

Level 2 Analysis – Scoring

The remaining 79 sites were then scored relative to the six Level 2 criteria, according to the point system and weighting described below. Sites were scored using GIS and visual analysis, discussion with the project team, and input from county staff.

Criteria	Points	Weight	Attribute
City proximity	3	3	In a city
	2		In an unincorporated UGA
	1		Within 1 mile of a city or UGA or 1 mile off a highway
Transit access	4	1	Within ¼ mile of a bus stop
	3		Within ½ mile of a bus stop
	2		Within ¾ mile of a bus stop
	1		Within 1 mile of a bus stop
	0		More than 1 mile from a bus stop
Wetlands	2	1	No mapped wetlands
	1		May be within a within a wetland buffer (200 feet from mapped wetlands)
	0		Contains a mapped wetland
Flood Zones	2	1	Not within flood zone A or a floodway
	1		Within flood zone A
	0		Partially within a floodway
County facilities	2	2	Site appears vacant or unused
	1		Site has a county facility that may be feasible to relocate (based on size, age, type of use, etc.) or possibly has significant vacant area
	0		Site has a county facility that may be infeasible to relocate (e.g. an active park or criminal justice facility)
Size	4	2	2 acres or larger
	3		1-2 acres
	2		0.5 to 1 acres
	1		0.25 to 0.5 acres
	0		Less than 0.25 acres

Scoring Summary

The maximum possible score is 27 and the highest any site scored was 26. The distribution of scores is show in the table below. Scores were relatively evenly distributed, showing the County sites have a wide range of characteristics.

Score	26	25	24	23	22	21	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11
Number of Sites	3	0	8	3	9	7	7	5	8	3	5	7	6	1	2	4

Level 3 Analysis - Qualitative Evaluation

Starting with the highest scoring sites, MAKERS and County staff further considered suitability characteristics. Discussions were had with planning officials in the jurisdictions of Mount Vernon, Anacortes, Sedro-Woolley, and Concrete. These discuss informed the following results.

Six **Priority A** sites are identified. These sites are mostly unencumbered and good candidates to further evaluate for near-term housing development.

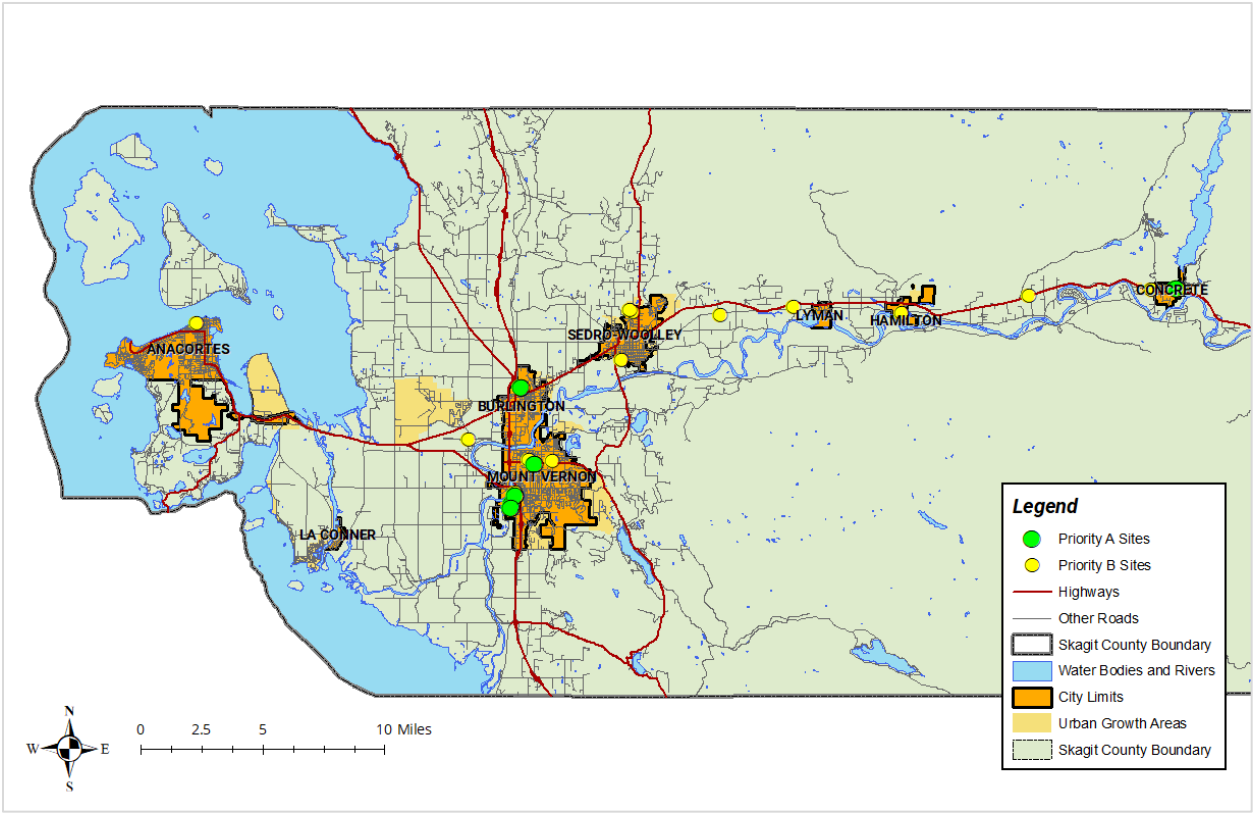
Seventeen additional sites were identified as **Priority B.** These sites have some promising attributes but are in less favorable locations for housing or have complex conditions that may require multiple years to resolve. This includes Skagit County civic campus in Mount Vernon which is undergoing a separate master planning and redevelopment process, but where surplus land may be available when that process is complete.

Priority A and B sites can also be viewed on the interactive online map: https://arcg.is/OLTy9

Priority A Sites - Summary

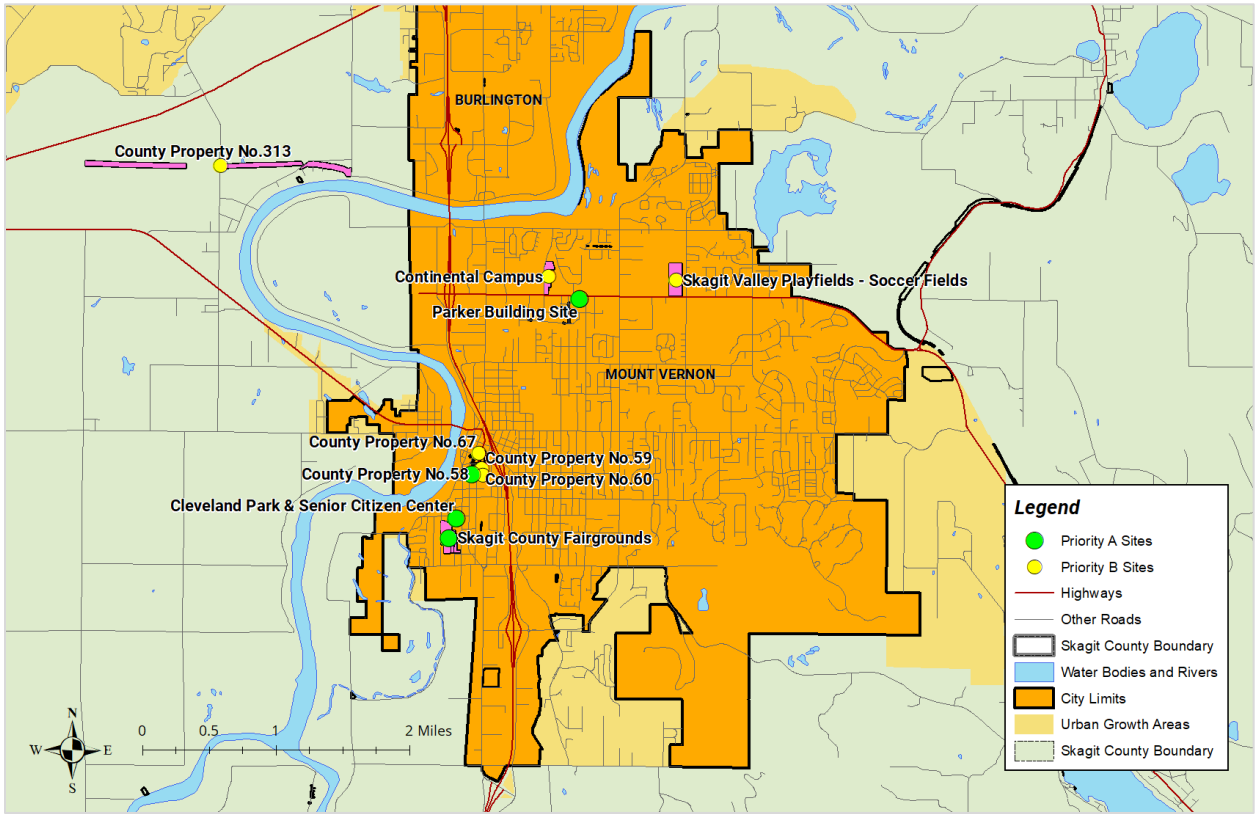
The table below summarizes Priority A site scores, locations, and notes. UID is the County's internal identifier number for each site. See the next page for a Countywide map. Each site is described in more detail on the following pages. Prior to the project kickoff, County staff had identified five sites that are already of interest for deeper review in Phase 2. These are shown in **bold**.

Score	UID	Site Name	Jurisdiction	Notes
26	243	County Property No.243	Concrete	County buildings in Concrete. Current buildings are staying long-term, some vacant areas could be developed.
24	57	**Cleveland Park & Senior Citizen Center**	Mount Vernon	Senior center and park in downtown Mount Vernon. Excellent location, potential for mixed housing/senior center redevelopment.
24	3	Parker Building Site	Mount Vernon	1-story office building in Mount Vernon, extension of Continental Campus (UID 2). May be redevelopable with adjacent private properties. Recently become home of community court.
24	4	**Skagit County Fairgrounds**	Mount Vernon	Fairgrounds in Mount Vernon. Will need to have relocation funding and new site before planning redevelopment.
22	5	**Burlington Yard**	Burlington	Public works yard and has some viable vacant area on the north side of parcel. One facility tenant looking to relocate in 5 years.
20	58	**County Property No.58**	Mount Vernon	Underutilized parking per staff.


ANACORTES
BURLINGTON
MOUNT VERNON
LA CONNER
SEDRO-WOOLLEY
LYMAN
HAMILTON
CONCRETE
N
W
E
S
0
2.5
5
10 Miles
Legend
Priority A Sites
Priority B Sites
Highways
Other Roads
Skagit County Boundary
Water Bodies and Rivers
City Limits
Urban Growth Areas
Skagit County Boundary

Priority A Sites – Mount Vernon

Mount Vernon is the county seat. It has most of the Priority A sites and some Priority B sites. A context map is shown below; the cluster of sites in the southwest between the highway and the river is the downtown civic campus.



Property #57 – Cleveland Park & Senior Citizen Center

This is a 1.5-acre site in southwestern Mount Vernon managed by the Parks Department. The site is in a flood zone. The site is within a quarter-mile of transit service.

Existing Conditions

The site contains a Senior Citizens Center and Cleveland Park which was established in 1975, both of which are managed by the Parks Department. To the west are private residential lots and to the south is a City-owned baseball field. The area is primarily residential with light commercial uses nearby.

The site is zoned Public; residential uses except for emergency homeless shelters are prohibited. Buildings up to four stories or 50-feet tall are permitted.

Opportunities and Considerations

City staff say this is a good location for adding housing because of the available infrastructure and some development activity and densification is already happening in the neighborhood. A Comprehensive Plan amendment would be needed prior to a rezone.

Preserving Cleveland Park would limit opportunities at this site. Redevelopment of just the east side of the property may be possible, co-locating the senior center on the ground level with housing above. Parking would be a challenge, with “tuck under” surface parking a possibility.

This site is on a large block north of the Skagit County Fairgrounds (property #4). These two sites could potentially be considered together for affordable housing opportunities and potentially facilitate a land-swap to preserve an equal or greater amount of park space. Two private residential lots on the west side of Property #57 could also be potentially acquired to create more flexible site options.



Property #4 – Skagit County Fairgrounds

This is a 15.5-acre site in southwestern Mount Vernon managed by the Parks Department. The site is in a flood zone. The site is within a quarter-mile of transit service.

Existing Conditions

This site hosts the Skagit County Fair which occurs every August for several days. During the rest of the year most of the individual facilities are available to the public for event rentals. The southern third of the site is used for parking and buildings include exhibit halls and a pavilion. The fairgrounds was relocated from Burlington around 1960.

The site is part of a superblock and it is mostly surrounded by single-family homes. The site is zoned Public; residential uses except for emergency homeless shelters are prohibited. Buildings up to four stories or 50-feet tall are permitted.

Opportunities and Considerations

City staff say this is a good location for adding housing because of the available infrastructure and some development activity and densification is already happening. A Comprehensive Plan amendment would be needed prior to a rezone. A subarea/master plan may be appropriate for the wider area. Among the Skagit County landholdings, the site's size and urban location make it perhaps the most promising opportunity for affordable housing at a large scale.

The fairgrounds are an important cultural asset for a variety of community members and businesses. The Parks Department would make redevelopment contingent upon securing funding and property to relocate the fairgrounds.



Property #58 – Parking Lot

This is a 0.3-acre site in central Mount Vernon managed by Facilities Management. The site may be in a flood zone. The site is within a quarter-mile of transit service.

Existing Conditions

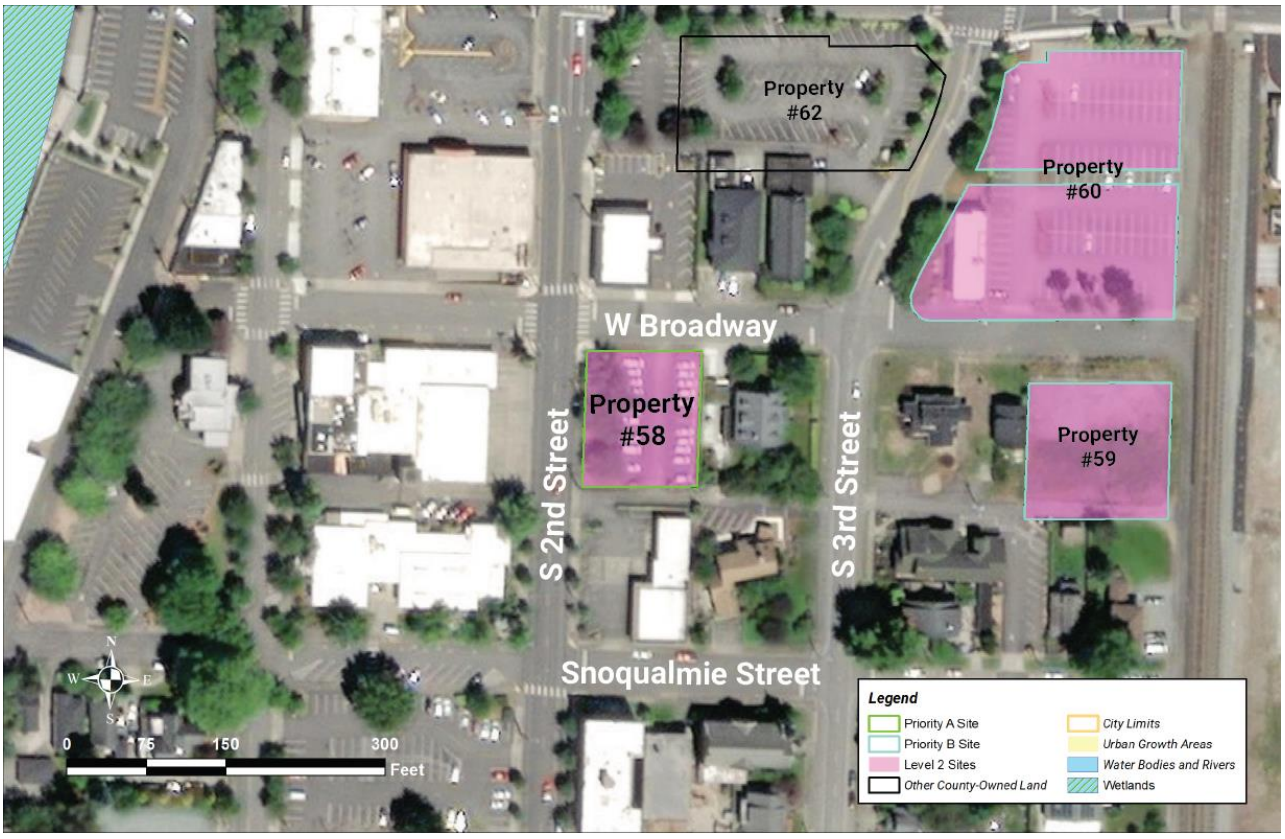
This is a County vehicle parking lot that is part of the Skagit County Campus. Staff report the parking is underutilized. The site is a quarter-block.

The site is zoned Public; residential uses except for emergency homeless shelters are prohibited. Buildings up to four stories or 50-feet tall are permitted.

Opportunities and Considerations

A zoning change to allow multifamily use would likely be straightforward because the site is located within the Comprehensive Plan designed South Kincaid Subarea, which allows multifamily and mixed-use development in other zones. Potential development would be constrained by its relatively small size, though parking could be located on the ground floor with housing above. Some parking could potentially be shared with neighboring properties.

There is a one-story school district office south of the site that could potentially be redeveloped in partnership with the school district to create more housing capacity in a mixed-use/co-located facility. This may require a full or partial alley vacation. Acquisition of properties to the east are unlikely, with the main challenge being a historically listed structure.



Property #3 – Parker Building

This is a 1.1-acre site in north Mount Vernon managed by Facilities Management. The site is outside of the mapped flood zone. The site is within a quarter-mile of transit service.

Existing Conditions

The site contains a one-story office building and parking. It functions as an extension of the Continental Campus (Property #2) and was purchased by Skagit County to achieve the goal of eliminating leased office space. It recently became home of the community court program.

The site is zoned C-2 General Commercial; residential uses are prohibited except for emergency homeless shelters. There is no building height limit. The property is also part of the College Way Village Association Business Park (originally the Parker Business Center) and is subject to restrictive covenants, details of which are unknown

Opportunities and Considerations

The location is moderately favorable for additional housing, with single-family and multifamily uses existing in the vicinity and a variety of commercial and institutional uses providing services in walking distance. There are bus stops directly adjacent on East College Way. The small size and potentially low improvement values of some surrounding properties (including several which may have surplus parking, per City staff) provide acquisition opportunities to expand the site.

Community court is mostly an office-based use, and so may have options for temporary relocation during redevelopment. A zoning change (perhaps to C-3 which allows multifamily uses) would have several steps to navigate entitlements, including a likely Comprehensive Plan map and/or text amendment. The City may have concern with a loss of commercial capacity.



Priority A Sites - Burlington

Property #5 – Burlington Yard

This is a 22.8-acre site in north Burlington managed by Public Works. The site is within a flood zone. The site is within a quarter-mile of transit service.

Existing Conditions

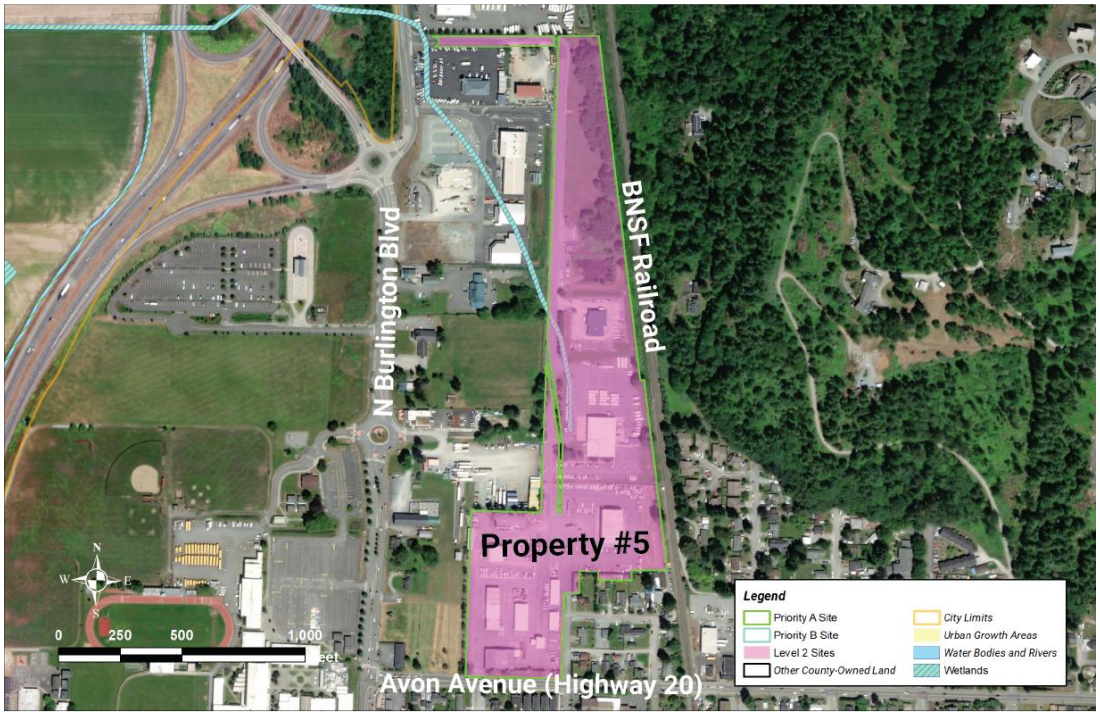
This is the headquarters for Skagit County Public Works and Parks maintenance and operations. It also includes a Skagit Transit bus depot. Single-family residential use borders the site on the south.

The site has two zones. C-2 Heavy Commercial borders the residential area in the south and M-1 Industrial represents the rest of the site. The C-2 zone conditionally allows multifamily where the street frontage is residential and the site is better suited for housing than commercial development. The M-1 zone does not allow any residential use. In both zones the building height limit is 45-60 feet, or greater with increased setbacks.

Opportunities and Considerations

County staff identified this as a long-term site of interest because at least one facility tenant is looking to relocate within five years. In the interim, the vacant northern four-acre tip may be a viable site for redevelopment, if buffers and design details can mitigate adjacency to a freight railroad and light industrial uses.

If partially or totally vacated by County operations, this site's housing capacity is considerable. There is vacant land on the west which could also potentially be acquired to leverage this site. A full or partial rezone would be needed, and likely a Comprehensive Plan change from the Heavy Commercial & Industrial designation.



Priority A Sites - Concrete

Property #243 – Concrete Campus

This is a 5.15-acre site in central Concrete managed by Facilities Management. The site is outside of the mapped flood zone. The site is within a quarter-mile of transit service.

Existing Conditions

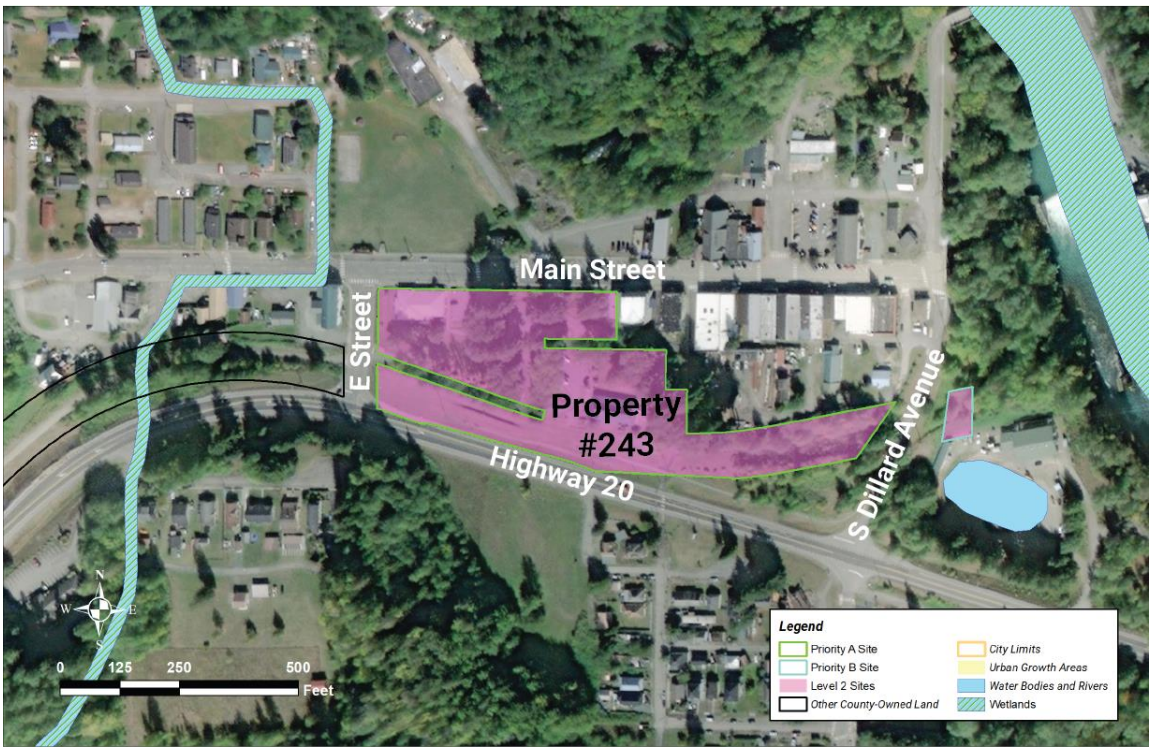
The site contains the Ted Anderson East Skagit County Community Resource Center, Concrete Senior Center, and Concrete Community Center. The Cascade Trail runs east-west through the southern portion of the site and the site also includes trailhead parking. The site is sloped, with a 34 feet elevation increase from Highway 20 to Main Street.

The site is zoned Town Center; multifamily dwellings are permitted in multi-story buildings with the ground floor having at least 50% non-residential use. The maximum building height is 35 feet and two stories.

Opportunities and Considerations

County staff report that the existing uses are likely to remain in place but identify the open spaces as potential redevelopment opportunities. Under a 1973 deed, the site must have public uses or it will revert back to Town of Concrete. Housing could be added to the open spaces, or some of the public uses could be redeveloped/co-located with mixed-use buildings, to satisfy legal requirements.

The housing capacity on this site is limited. The southeast corner appears to be excess right-of-way that could expand opportunities in that area. There are significant tree stands on the property that may be valuable features to retain.



Priority B Sites

These sites have some promising attributes but are either in less favorable locations for housing or have complex conditions that may require multiple years to resolve.

Score	UID	Site Name	Jurisdiction	Notes
26	312	County Property No.312	Hamilton	Vacant lot in Hamilton, possible tax foreclosure. Could be viable for mobile homes, but otherwise not a favorable location and may be a flood risk. Zoning: Unknown
26	212	County Property No.212	Skagit County	Forested site just outside Sedro-Wooley city limits, may be steeply sloped. See adjacent UID 213. Zoning: RRv Rural Reserve
24	156	Centennial Trail - Sedro-Wooley High School	Sedro-Wooley	Trail with a large polygonal area in Sedro-Woolley. Potential for private land acquisition to east and west. Moved from Priority A to B after City staff discussion, in which zoning, environmental, and political issues were identified as the key barriers. City staff say the site was previously a mill and there is known underground contamination in the area, some cleanup happening on site to the east. There is some opposition to trail development in the county. Zoning change would require demonstrating the need for more residential land, perhaps include analysis in the 2025 comprehensive plan update. Zoning: Public

Score	UID	Site Name	Jurisdiction	Notes
24	2	Continental Campus	Mount Vernon	Office campus in Mount Vernon. Current buildings and parking are staying long-term. A 2-acre forested area on the north end could be developed, but it likely contains a regulated wetland that requires further investigation. Moved from Priority A to B after City staff discussion, in which the likely presence of wetlands was identified as a key barrier. Zoning: C-2 General Commercial
24	60	**County Property No.60**	Mount Vernon	Large parking lot in downtown Mount Vernon, site of Public Defender building. May be available in about 10 years once County redevelops criminal justice facilities nearby with a central parking garage. City staff say this could be a viable site for private development. Zoning: Public
24	314	County Property No.314	Hamilton	Vacant lot in Hamilton, similar opportunities and flood risk as UID 312. Zoning: Unknown
23	82	Skagit Valley Playfields - Soccer Fields	Mount Vernon	Mount Vernon, mostly reserved for future sport fields and has other life estate restrictions. Per staff, there is 45-50k square feet of L-shaped unencumbered buildable area on the College Way frontage, which the Sheriff's Department has some interest in. Zoning: Public
22	204	County Property No.204	Anacortes	Parking lot near Guemes Ferry in downtown Anacortes, used by island residents who park a vehicle on both sides. Residential area and favorable near-downtown location. Zoning is limited and ferry parking would be challenging to remove or relocate. Moved from Priority A to B after City staff discussion, in which zoning and political considerations were identified as the key barrier. City staff suggested that perhaps a low-density demonstration project (cottages or tiny homes) might be viable. Zoning: Old Town
22	249	Cascade Trail	Concrete & Skagit County	Wide trail corridor in Concrete, mostly outside town limits. Maybe be feasible for townhomes if trail can be realigned, parcel is 155' wide. Zoning: None
22	59	County Property No.59	Mount Vernon	Empty lot in downtown Mount Vernon sometimes used for overflow parking. May be available in about 10 years once County redevelops criminal justice facilities nearby with a central parking garage. Zoning: C1-C Downtown Public
21	207	County Property No.207	Skagit County	Relatively large. Forested and appears to have a stream running through it. Fairly rural and far from highway. Zoning: Ag-NRL Agricultural Natural Resource Lands

Score	UID	Site Name	Jurisdiction	Notes
21	238	Cascade Trail - Concrete	Concrete	Small property across the street from UID 243. Zoning: Public Lands
21	320	County Property No.320	Skagit County	Vacant, possible stream Zoning: RRv Rural Reserve
20	213	County Property No.213	Skagit County	Old gravel pit near Sedro-Wooley. County staff are unclear on the current uses by Public Works. Moved from Priority A to B after City staff discussion, in which annexation and lack of sewer service were identified as the key challenges. Annexation has been previously proposed but County was uninterested, and it is unclear if this would meet annexation criteria. Zoning: Rural Reserve
20	67	County Property No.67	Mount Vernon	Parking. May be part of civic campus redevelopment efforts. City staff say it would be a good site for housing, and it could be part of a full-block redevelopment that installs upgraded sewer and stormwater infrastructure which is needed. Zoning: Public
20	226	Cascade Trail	Skagit County	Possible log yard or trail corridor. Zoning: RRv Rural Reserve
20	313	County Property No.313	Skagit County	Farmland in right-of-way shape. Large area just west of Mount Vernon. Zoning: Multiple; agricultural and residential

High Score Sites Removed

These sites were high scoring (20 or above) in the Level 2 analysis but were determined to be ineligible or impractical for housing development due to constraints like topography, rural location, special flood risk, or current use.

Score	UID	Site Name	Notes
24	332	Stabilization Campus	New (2022) mental health facility in Sedro-Woolley, some vacant area, nursing home adjacent
23	223	County Property No.223	Forested, small property in Concrete. On a hillside, not large enough to be worthwhile.
23	310	Community Justice Center	Jail in south Mount Vernon. It is a new facility and located in an industrial area.
23	256	County Property No.256	Forested, old gravel pit between Concrete and Hamilton. It appears steeply sloped or inaccessible.
22	70	Hoag Memorial Park - Big Rock	Active park outside Mount Vernon, use and topography are unsuitable.
22	112	County Property No.112	Skagit County Crisis Center in Burlington, difficult to relocate, auto-oriented commercial area. Private party approached County to buy it recently. Long-term space needed for this type of use.
22	187	County Property No.187	Forested old gravel pit east of Hamilton. Unfavorable location for affordable housing.
22	66	County Property No.66	County building. Site is being actively redeveloped by County as part of criminal justice campus.
22	1	Law And Justice Campus	County building. Site is being actively redeveloped by County as part of criminal justice campus.
21	210	County Property No.210	Gravel pit. Unclear life, and very rural. Remove from consideration.
21	218	Cascade Trail Birdsview Gravel Pit	Trail with a large polygonal area. However, fairly rural, forested, and polygonal area appears steeply sloped.
21	43	County Property No.43	Forested and park of town park.
21	183	County Property No.183	Vacant, on river.
20	247	County Property No.247	Vacant land, likely undevelopable due to overhead power lines.
20	248	County Property No.248	Forested, very small parcel in Concrete.

Low Score Sites

These sites scored 19 or less in the Level 2 analysis and were not studied further.

Score	UID	Site Name	Notes
19	24	County Property No.24	Forested, gravel pit
19	234	Cascade Trail	Trail with some surplus area
19	326	Prevedell Road Access	Large parcel, landslide risk
19	327	Cascade Trail - Parking	Forested
19	245	Butler Pit	Active gravel pit, potentially large surplus area
18	11	County Property No.11	Forested
18	49	County Property No.49	Polygonal shape
18	65	County Property No.65	Parking
18	208	Guemes Ferry Facility	Ferry facility
18	221	Cascade Trail	Trail with some surplus area

Score	UID	Site Name	Notes
18	68	Juvenile Probation	Part of larger building site
18	283	County Property No.283	Gravel pit with potentially surplus area
18	252	Cascade Trail	Trail with potentially surplus area
17	253	County Property No.253	Forested
17	263	County Property No.263	Forested
17	83	County Property No.83	Forested
16	46	County Property No.46	Forested
16	72	Centennial Trail	Trail with potentially surplus area
16	330	County Property No. 330	Vacant
16	270	County Property No.270	Vacant, adjacent to schoolyard
16	231	County Property No.231	Small public works shop
15	105	Clear Lake Beach	Active park
15	134	County Property No.134	Forested
15	139	County Property No.139	Forested
15	205	County Property No.205	Forested, former dump
15	96	County Property No.96	Vacant, nearby gravel pit
15	123	County Property No.123	Solid waste facility
15	76	County Property No.76	Forested
14	146	Sauk Transfer Station	Forested, small area used as transfer station
14	190	County Property No.190	Forested
14	321	County Property No.321	Forested
14	25	Conway Park - Ballfield	Active park
14	290	County Property No.290	Forested, former dump
14	273	Pomona Grange Park	Active park
13	9	Centennial Trail - Lake Mcmurray	Polygonal shape
12	26	Conway Boat Launch	Vacant
12	287	Donovan Park	Active park
11	246	County Property No.246	Ferry parking
11	50	Sauk Park Campground	Active park with potentially surplus area
11	133	Howard Miller Steelhead Park Campground	Active park with potentially surplus area
11	74	County Property No.74	Forested