

**Comprehensive Plan Amendment: 2025-2026 Docket Item #CPA-24
Black Lake Quarry (Littlerock) Land Use and Rezoning Amendment**

Date: August 6, 2025
Public Hearing Date: August 6, 2025

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Proponent/Applicant: Black Lake Quarry LLC, Mike Parsons

Action Requested: Amend the future land use and associated zoning from Rural 1/20 (R1/20) residential to Rural Resource Industrial (RRI)

Location: 4741 88th Ave SW
Assessor's Parcel Numbers: 12718310000, 1371344000, 13724110000, 13724140000
Acres: 270± acres
Current Land Use and Zoning: Rural one Dwelling per 20 Acres (R 1/20)

Map Changes Text Changes Both Affects Comprehensive Plans/documents
 Affected Jurisdictions

REQUEST OF PLANNING COMMISSION AND PROPOSED REVIEW TIMELINE

The Black Lake Quarry (Littlerock) Land Use and Rezoning Amendment, County docket item CPA-24, is priority 8 of 10 on the 2025-2026 Official Thurston County Comprehensive Plan Docket. Staff requests Thurston County Planning Commission hold work sessions and a public hearing and produce a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners.

Proposed Timeline:

- **April 28th, 2025** – Public Open House
- **June/July 2025** – Planning Commission Work Sessions
- **August 6th, 2025** – Planning Commission Public Hearing
- **August 2025** – SEPA Environmental Review Completed
- **August 2025** – Board of County Commissioners Work Session
- **October 2025** – BoCC Public Hearing & Decision

BACKGROUND

Application

The Black Lake Quarry (Littlerock) Rezone is a request from a property owner to rezone approximately 270 acres at 4741 88th Ave SW from Rural 1/20 (R 1/20) to Rural Resource Industrial (RRI). The current zone allows for mostly residential and resource uses (such as agriculture, mining, and forestry.) The proposed new zone primarily allows industrial uses that support rural resources, with some provisions for other industrial uses. This site does not meet the locational and performance criteria in TCC 20.29.020 that would allow for additional assembly, fabrication, manufacturing, storage, warehousing, and distribution uses.

Property Details & Surrounding Neighborhoods

The site is currently a functioning gravel surface mine operated by Black Lake Resources. Surrounding uses include open space, residential, and agriculture.

- The parcels to the west are a part of the Black River Refuge, and are owned and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Black River finds its course through the refuge, and is an important tributary for the Chehalis River.
- The parcels to the northeast are developed as single-family residential, and one parcel to the east hosts an agriculture use.
- The remaining parcels to the southeast and south are undeveloped.

Under the requested zoning district (RRI) various resource-related industrial uses would be allowed, and the site may be developed at a higher intensity than its current state. The requested zoning may impact surrounding neighborhoods through increased noise, traffic, and environmental impact, and may provide additional commercial activity. These factors would be considered during the environmental review period of any future land use applications related to new uses, and would also be reviewed if the current use was altered or expanded beyond its currently approved scope.



Figure 1. Aerial photo of 4741 88th Ave SW, parcels 12718310000, 1371344000, 13724110000, 13724140000

Property History

According to the Thurston County Assessor's records, parcel 12718310000 has functioned as a gravel pit since at least the late 1980s. According to GeoData photograph archives, this use has expanded across the parcels on the site since 1996. GeoData also shows two mines designated on the site; Littlerock Pit/Quality Rock and Fairview Pit/Quality Rock. Deed histories also include a timber deed from 2002. The owner of the site submitted a 5-year Mine Review permit in 2024 which is still under review. Other permitting and resolved code enforcement history pertains to structures related to the mining use.

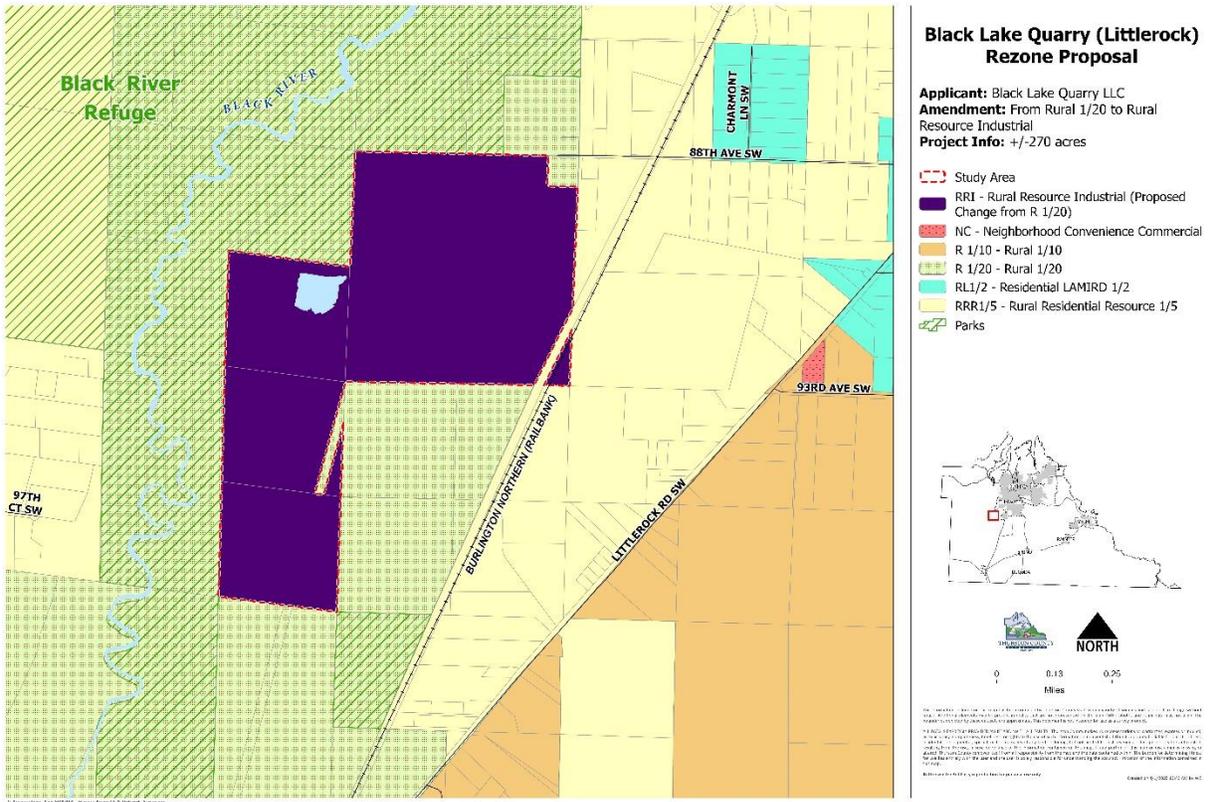


Figure 2. Subject site with requested zoning (in purple) and surrounding zoning.

DEPARTMENT ANALYSIS

The following analysis includes discussion of the regulatory issues that will affect this proposal, including access, utilities, environmental considerations, and zoning. It also discusses relevant portions of the Comprehensive Plan. The result of this analysis is in the form of two decision options, which are presented at the end of the following section.

Access

According to the most recently approved 5-year mine review permit, trucks may access the site from a driveway connected to Littlerock Road, which enters the site at the southern boundary of the southernmost parcel. While 88th Ave SW does extend to the northeast corner of the site, the current use is not approved to use this road for truck access, including material transport and large deliveries. Use of 88th Ave is to be avoided to the maximum extent feasible, according to the current permit. If the site is redeveloped, use-specific access needs would be addressed at the time of development application.

Utilities

The site is not part of a Thurston County water or sewer ULID. According to a Hearing Examiner's decision from April of 2018, the site is served by an on-site septic system and utilizes groundwater under Water Right G2-30523.

Environmental Characteristics

The site includes the following environmental areas as mapped in GeoData: steep slopes, frequently flooded areas, high groundwater hazard areas, shoreline areas, hydric soils, prairie soils, mazama pocket gopher soils and areas, Oregon spotted frog areas, wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas, knotweed containment sites, noxious weed sites, and critical aquifer recharge areas. The presence of these features, and any bearing on potential uses of the site, would be evaluated during the land use application process for any submitted proposals.

Groundwater was a topic of interest at the Planning Commission work sessions. A majority of the site is classified as either category 1 or category 2 ("extreme" and "high" aquifer sensitivity, respectively) Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas (CARAs). Notably, the presence of category 1 CARAs would limit or prohibit some of the uses allowed under the requested zone including asphalt, cement, and concrete plants; chemical manufacturing and processing; commercial or industrial uses that use or generate more than two hundred twenty pounds of hazardous waste or materials per month; and wood product preserving and treating.

Groundwater monitoring reports are regularly prepared because the site is an active gravel mine. As requested by the Planning Commission, the most recently received groundwater monitoring report is included as an attachment to this report. The results of the report are summarized as follows:

"Groundwater elevations were assessed by measuring the depth to water in seven of the groundwater monitoring wells. A map showing groundwater elevation contours is shown in Figure 2. Based on our measurements, the average gradient is 0.009 feet per foot with groundwater flow to the northwest towards the Black River. This flow direction is generally consistent with previous monitoring events. Hydrographs of the monitoring wells are shown in Figure 3.

Groundwater samples were collected from the monitoring wells for laboratory analysis. Groundwater samples were collected in accordance with standard protocol and were transported to Libby Environmental in Olympia, Washington for the analysis of Petroleum Hydrocarbons by NWTPH-GXv and Dx; VOC using EPA Method 8260C; Metals (total and

dissolved) by EPA 200.7, and 6010D; and General Chemistry using a variety of EPA methodologies.

Concentrations of compounds detected in groundwater samples from the site are summarized in Figure 4 and in Tables 1 through 3. Laboratory reports from Libby Environmental Laboratory are contained in Attachment A. Total Iron and/or Manganese were detected in four of the groundwater samples at concentrations greater than the respective Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) secondary maximum contaminant levels (SMCL). Dissolved Manganese was also detected in two groundwater samples at concentrations greater than the SMCL. Concentrations of all remaining target analytes remain at concentrations less than their respective cleanup levels or maximum contaminant levels."

The site is directly adjacent to the Black River and the Black River Unit of the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge. This is owned and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). According to the USFWS:

"The Black River Unit consists of a large, complex mosaic of wetland, riparian , and upland habitats surrounding the low-lying river. These diverse habitats include river and tributary channels, locally rare and unique bog, shrub swamp, riparian forest, emergent marsh, seasonally flooded non-native grassland, dry non-native grassland, and mixed forest. Drainage from the nearby Black Hills creates Stony, Dempsey, and Waddell Creek tributaries, as well as many seeps and springs. This low-gradient, meandering river of tannin-stained, slow-moving, nearly silt-free water flows southwesterly with a floodplain that is subject to frequent surface flooding during winter and spring.

Within the boundary of the Unit, there is spawning and rearing habitat and migration corridors for steelhead, cutthroat trout, and coho and Chinook salmon. 150 species of migratory birds, including waterfowl and neotropical songbirds, are found here. The Olympic mudminnow, a state-endemic and state species of concern, survives in the Unit. The federally threatened and state endangered Oregon spotted frog survives here thanks to the complex system of wetlands and connections to the river. Some of the largest Oregon spotted frog population in Washington State are found here."

THURSTON COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Decisions regarding the designation of land uses must meet the locational criteria and decision-making guidelines found in Chapter 2, Section IV of the Comprehensive Plan.

The requested zone, Rural Resource Industrial, must meet the following locational criteria (found on page 2-18 of the Comprehensive Plan):

Land Capability and Environmental Characteristics. Land should be capable of supporting industrial development with minimal environmental constraints. Particularly important is the ability to support uses without significant adverse effects on surface or ground water. Land should generally be level and free of critical areas.

- The subject site does contain several mapped critical areas, and is upland of the “natural” Shoreline designation along the Black River. This Shoreline designation extends onto the subject site. See the environmental characteristics section above for more information.

Natural Resources: The area should be located so that development will not detrimentally impact agriculture, forestry, aquaculture or other natural resource uses. The area to be designated industrial should itself have minimal potential for natural resource management/utilization.

- Most of the land area within the site is designated as mineral lands. The site is not adjacent to any land designated as long-term agriculture or forestry, and does not contain areas designated for agriculture or forestry.

Public Services:

Utilities: Utility services should be at levels appropriate to serve the rural area and the intensity of proposed industrial activity. Industrial development will be limited to uses not requiring public sewer and where the land can support the industrial uses with on-site septic systems and water without adversely affecting surface or groundwater.

Transportation: Rural industrial areas should rely either on rail service or be within close proximity of a freeway interchange or state highway. Such areas shall have direct access to arterial or collector roads and shall not result in significant adverse traffic impacts on surrounding rural areas and uses.

- The site is outside any urban service areas for water or sewer, and is served by well water and an onsite septic system. The site is accessed by a long private driveway that connects to Littlerock Rd, a County arterial road. The site is currently not approved to use 88th Ave SW, a small local access road used primarily by residences. The site is not adjacent to an interstate, and the rail line that passes through the site is abandoned according to WSDOT.

Existing Land Uses. Uses within this designation shall be compatible with rural character, which includes both functional and visual components. The functional component describes land put to uses that are dependent on a rural setting. For example, sawmills should be close to forest lands. An industry that has no orientation to rural or resource based activities is not dependent upon a rural location. If rural lands and/or rural uses

on those lands will be interfered with by the traffic, light, noise, etc. from a proposed industrial use, then that use is incompatible with rural character.

The visual component describes the visual attributes of the traditional rural landscape. If the visual character of the rural landscape is unduly disrupted or altered by a proposed use, then that use is incompatible with rural character. Site design, landscaping, design and construction of internal and access roads and building scale should reinforce the set boundaries and rural nature of the industrial area to further discourage future industrial expansion beyond the industrial boundary.

- No specific use or redevelopment of the site is being proposed at this time. Any change in the established use on the site would be required to meet the above criteria, and any other applicable criteria in the Thurston County Code. While the site currently operates as a mineral extraction facility, it is not adjacent to any other designated resource lands.

The existing land use designation, Rural One Dwelling Unit per 20 Acres, must meet the following locational criteria (found on page 2-15 of the Comprehensive Plan):

Land Capability and Environmental Characteristics: This designation is appropriate for lands that are within the Black River Corridor, along the Nisqually Bluff or severely constrained by environmentally sensitive or hazardous areas.

- The site is adjacent to the Black River, and contains critical areas, although it is not heavily constrained.

Natural Resources: The area may contain forests, mineral deposits, critical areas and soils suitable for agriculture.

- The site contains designated mineral lands which are currently being mined, and critical areas.

Public Services: Allowed uses do not require provision of urban services or utilities. However, the area may be located along arterials, within areas containing pre-existing small-lot development, and/or relatively close to existing centers of employment and/or personal services.

- The site is outside any urban service areas for water or sewer, and is accessed by a long private driveway that connects to Littlerock Rd, a County arterial road.

Existing Land Uses: The majority of the land is comprised of parcels twenty acres or larger in size, although some smaller parcels may be present. Residences, agriculture, forestry, mineral extraction, open space, or undeveloped land may be present.

- All the subject parcels are over 20 acres in size. The primary use on the site is mineral extraction, and surrounding uses include residential, agriculture, and open space.

Land use designations must also comply with the following general decision-making guidelines (found on page 2-10 of the Comprehensive Plan):

Citizen Preference Identified through Public Process: Desires of the citizenry for certain types of land uses over other types should be an important consideration in making land use decisions. Citizen preference is important, for example, when deciding to give weight to one factor over another, or in deciding among conflicting factors.

- The public has been invited to provide comments, and an open house was held on April 28th, 2025. Public comments received as of May 28th are attached to this report as an attachment. The project and open house have been noticed to the public via mail, email, the County website, and social media.

Impacts on Economy, Employment, Tax Base: A variety of factors associated with these impacts should be considered when making land use designation decisions. For example, a county-wide balance should be maintained between residential and industrial/commercial/agricultural/forestry areas in order to enhance and provide diversity to the county's tax base and employment opportunities.

- According to table 2-3 in the Comprehensive Plan, only 0.2% of county land is designated for rural commercial or industrial. The requested zoning change would provide additional space for rural industrial economic activity.

Easy to Identify Boundaries: The boundaries of land use designations should follow easily identified features on the land, such as utility corridors or observable terrain changes. When areas with severe limitations for development (e.g., soils, geology, flooding) do not coincide with such identifiable landmarks, the boundaries should be drawn with land capability in mind.

- The boundaries of the requested land use and zoning change follow parcel lines.

THURSTON COUNTY CODE

The following summaries highlight the differences in types of development that may be authorized on the subject parcels under the current and proposed zoning designations.

Intent of Land Use Designations and Allowed Uses

Current Zone: Rural One Dwelling Unit per Twenty Acres (R 1/20): The purposes of the R 1/20 district are to protect public health and safety by minimizing development and avoiding incompatible uses in environmentally sensitive and hazardous areas such as the Black River Corridor, the Nisqually Bluff, and parcels completely covered by critical areas; provide greater opportunities for protecting critical areas and creating open space corridors; provide for low density residential uses, agriculture, forestry, conservation and associated uses appropriate for a rural area that do not require urban services; and provide for mining through a special use process

Allowed Primary Uses:

- Single-family dwellings (limited to one primary residential structure per lot)
- Agriculture
- Forest practices and forest management activities
- Outdoor recreation

Accessory Uses (Must be with an allowed primary use):

- Home-based businesses
- Accessory uses that support timber harvesting like storage, weigh stations, crew quarters, and sawmills
- Composting of plants or manure that are produced on-site
- Greenhouses for agriculture
- Accessory uses for agriculture and forestry for the storage of explosives, fuels and chemicals, which must comply with special regulations

Special Uses:

There are many uses allowed in R 1/20 through a Special Use Permit. These generally include

- Schools and other public facilities, including daycare
- Recreation-related uses
- Churches and community centers
- Mining

Requested Zone; Rural Resource Industrial (RRI): The purpose and intent of the rural resource industrial district is to provide areas where industrial activities and uses that are dependent upon agriculture, forest practices and minerals may be located. The district also allows such uses that involve the processing, fabrication, wholesaling and storage of products associated with natural resource uses. The standards in this chapter are intended to protect the rural area from adverse industrial impacts. All industrial uses must be functionally and visually compatible with the character of the rural area.

Controls to provide freedom from nuisance-creating features such as noise, dirt, odor, vibration, air and water pollution, are established together with adequate traffic circulation, buffers and landscaping requirements, to establish compatibility with surrounding rural development and offer protection from industrial blight and impacts.

Service and Retail:

- Service uses like restaurants, bars, and service stations
- Service, repair, storage and sales for cars, trucks, and machinery

Agriculture Related Uses:

- Sales (including wholesale) and storage for feed, fertilizer, and other farm equipment
- Farm management services
- Veterinary clinics and hospitals

Forestry Related Uses:

- Mills for producing wood products
- Manufacturing of wood products
- Prefabricated wood buildings and components

Mineral Related Uses:

- Stone, marble and granite monument works
- Manufacturing brick, tile or terra cotta
- Manufacturing clay products
- Manufacturing concrete products

Other Uses:

- Living quarters or unit for caretaker or watchman working on the property
- Administrative, educational and similar activities, with a permitted use
- Public facilities and utilities (Landfills require a Special Use Permit)

- Research labs and commercial testing labs for resource uses
- Unclassified uses and railroad rights-of-way

Uses allowed on sites that meet all of the criteria in subsection TCC 20.29.020 (5)(a), which include proximity to freeways, adequate road and rail access, and the ability to function without urban services. *(Note: The subject site does not meet these criteria.)*

- Sheet metal product manufacturing
- Other manufacturing like assembling electronics, precision instruments, cable lines, or boats
- Storage buildings, warehouses, wholesaling and distribution facilities
- Storage for building materials, contractors' equipment, house moving, delivery vehicles and used equipment in operable condition.

SEPA

An environmental determination for the proposed amendment is required pursuant to WAC 197-11-704 and will be completed prior to the Board of County Commissioners public hearing.

Any future project level applications may require SEPA and environmental review unless they are a categorical exemption as listed under WAC 197-11-800(1)(c) and TCC 17.09.055.

STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS

Thurston County noticed the April 28th Open House and the August 6th Public Hearing to the owners and residents of nearby parcels. Notice of the project was also sent to the general planning email list. Notices and information have also been provided on County websites, calendars, and social media. No paper comment forms were completed at the open house, but conversations with attendees highlighted concerns about the site's compatibility with neighboring residential and open space uses. Residents of the area discussed local wildlife using the area, including black bears which regularly cross 88th Ave SW. There was also a concern about the current mine using 88th Ave SW as an access point, which is not an approved access for the site. Additionally, participants were concerned about the presence of critical areas nearby, including habitat areas for important fish, birds, and other wildlife. As of July 30th, 2025, 13 written comments have been received through the online comment portal, and these comments are provided in Attachment B. Staff will provide any additional comments received before 12:00 PM on August 6th to the Planning Commission.

OPTIONS

Option 1: Amend the land use and associated zoning of the applicant's parcels (12718310000, 1371344000, 13724110000, 13724140000) from R 1/20 to RRI.

Considerations:

- Amends the Future Land Use Map (L-1), Chapter 2, and the Official Zoning Map for Thurston County, WA.
- Rezones approximately 270 acres to RRI.
- Meets the request of the applicant.
- Increases area available for industrial uses in Thurston County.
- Would allow for continued, possibly intensified, commercial activity on the site once the current mining use is no longer economically viable.
- Change in use may affect surrounding residential areas, or generate concern among residents.

Option 2: No Change. Maintain the current future land use and zoning.

Considerations:

- Makes no changes to the Comprehensive Plan or Official Zoning Map for Thurston County, WA.
- Land use and zoning remains the same.
- Does not meet the request of the applicant.
- Preserves option for low-intensity rural uses on the site.
- Keeps low density zoning consistent with surrounding uses on all sides of subject property.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Application Materials & Applicant-submitted SEPA Checklist

Attachment B: Map Packet

Attachment C: Public Comments

Attachment D: Groundwater Monitoring Report