7 ~~7.~~ Utilities Element

This chapter is a required element of a comprehensive plan developed to meet the provisions of the GMA. In overview, this chapter presents the general location and capacity of all existing and proposed utilities for the city of Sumas and the surrounding UGA.

The GMA defines electricity, natural gas, and telecommunications as "utilities," and this chapter contains a discussion of each, as well as a discussion of cable television. Water, sanitary sewer, and storm sewer systems are defined as "public facilities" and are addressed in the Capital Facilities Element (Chapter 4). Sumas is unusual in that it owns and operates its own electric utility. The discussion of this utility is therefore more extensive than that of the privately owned utilities. The financial analysis contained in Chapter 4 includes a detailed discussion of the city electrical utility's financial condition. The final section of the chapter presents goals and policies pertaining to private utilities.

7.1 Natural Gas

7.1.1 Existing conditions

Natural gas is provided by the Cascade Natural Gas Corporation (Cascade). Cascade serves its Whatcom county customers from a Northwest Pipeline Corporation transmission line that originates in Canada, crosses into the U.S. just east of Sumas, and runs south to the Columbia River. A second major line, the ARCO lateral, runs west from the Northwest Pipeline Corporation line across the county to the ARCO refinery, passing just to the south of town.

East of the city, a two-inch service pipeline branches off the Northwest Pipeline Corporation line and runs along Jones Road into Sumas. To the south, another two-inch branch line originating from the ARCO lateral enters the city on Hill Road. Smaller service lines extend from these trunk lines.

The number of customers receiving natural gas fluctuates slightly every month, due to economics, development and weather. In the month of ~~March~~February, ~~2016~~2025, Cascade served ~~459~~ 527 customers in Sumas (~~390~~ 453 residential, ~~66~~ 69 commercial and ~~3~~ 5 industrial).

7.1.2 Future conditions

Future expansion is based on economic feasibility. Cascade Natural Gas's growth includes new residences, commercial uses, and industrial uses, as well as existing buildings converting to natural gas from other forms of power. Factors influencing growth include the relative costs of gas and electricity, regional power planning priorities, and trends in growth and economic development. Because of ~~Sumas's~~Sumas' proximity to the Northwest Pipeline Corporation line, there are no physical limits to future natural gas capacity. When Cascade is contacted by a

- A 123 megawatt gas-fired co-generation facility owned by PSE is located on the south side of W. Front Street, near the west city limits. The power generated at the facility supplies the regional power grid.
- Puget Power owns major facilities located in Sumas and is the provider of electrical service to the unincorporated area surrounding town. PSE's Sumas substation is located adjacent to the co-generation facility, and two of PSE's 115 kV transmission lines pass through town along Front Street: the Sumas - Bellingham line, and the Sumas - Lynden line.

  PSE has a public service obligation to furnish electrical service where and when demanded. Its service levels are regulated by the WUTC.

7.2.2 Future conditions

Based on growth in the industrial and residential areas, the City contracted with PSE in 2007 to upgrade Circuit 16 on the Hovel Road, to a larger conductor, and combining this with Circuit 12, enabling the City to increase its load capacity from 5 megawatts to 10 megawatts. In 2009, the City built a new overhead distribution line to feed IKO Pacific, which is the largest power consumer in Sumas, thereby allowing for more growth on our underground distribution system in the industrial area. As of 2025, the City is preparing to upgrade the electrical services along Bob Mitchell Avenue from a 200-amp capacity to a 600-amp capacity.. This would allow potential customers with large electrical needs to come to Sumas without having to worry about upgrading the system just for them.

The city has updated its service area agreement with PSE, which is before the WUTC. Sumas is currently working on an agreement to purchase PSE facilities that have been annexed into the city and into the city's service area. This would increase the city's customer base by 12 customers.

Sumas constructed a new three (3) phase underground distribution line along Hovel Road to serve the new ball field and the UGA and UGA Reserve areas to the southeast of the city. The City also built a new three phase underground distribution line south along the new SR 9 highway to serve the UGA south of the city.

The City has an inter-local agreement with the Whatcom County Public Utilities District and the City of Blaine to share BPA conservation funds, equipment and personnel.

Private facilities. PSE plans to construct another 115 kV transmission connecting their Sumas substation to Nugent's Corner. The exact route of the line is not yet known, but it will probably follow SR 9, the B-N railroad tracks, or WSDOT's undeveloped right-of-way (originally intended as the new alignment for SR9). The proposed 115 kV line will be used to serve a future substation to be located near Nooksack and Everson, known as the Denson substation.

7.3 Telecommunications

prospective customer, a feasibility analysis is ~~conducted~~conducted, and Cascade determines the improvements that would be needed to serve that customer or development and how such costs would be allocated. For major developments, the prospective customer may be required to pay the costs of system improvements necessary to serve the development.

7.2 Electricity

Sumas is unusual in that it owns and operates an electric utility that provides service within city limits. The following information about the electric system was provided by the public works director.

7.2.1 Existing conditions

Source and transmission. Sumas purchases power from the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), a federally owned electric utility, under a contract that expires at the end of September 2028. BPA generates most of its power at hydroelectric facilities located on the Columbia River. Power from those facilities reaches Sumas through transmission lines operated by BPA and by Puget Sound Energy (PSE). Power is transmitted from the Columbia River to BPA's Custer substation through high-voltage lines owned by BPA. Power is transmitted from Custer to PSE's Schuett's Corner substation (2 miles south of Sumas) through high-voltage lines owned by PSE. At Schuett's Corner, the voltage is stepped down to 13 thousand volts (kV) and transmitted to Sumas along two routes. One route is along Garrison Road and Halverstick Road, and the other is along Telegraph Road, Hovel Road, and E. Front Street. Both routes arrive at ~~Sumas's~~Sumas' South substation, which is located on W. Front Street near the railroad lines. Power is metered at this substation before distribution within the city.

Distribution system. The city's distribution system is divided into two basic service areas, Circuit 12 and Circuit 16. As mentioned above, Circuit 12 comes from the southwest along Garrison Road and West Front Street, and Circuit 16 comes from the southeast along Hovel Road and East Front Street, meeting at the intersection of Johnson and West Front Streets. These are metered before going to the distribution service area. The Circuit 12 service area includes all of the area west of the BNSF railroad mainline, making up the Industrial Load, and Circuit 16 serves all of the area east of the BNSF railroad, making up the Commercial and Residential Load.

Conservation program. Sumas has three (3) programs to support conservation. The first one is a City program that offers rebates for a number of ENERGY STAR appliances including clothes washers, dishwashers, refrigerators and water heaters. The second program is the BPA Energy Efficient Incentive, which includes a custom project and a lighting project, plus various other programs. The third program is net metering, which allows Sumas residents and businesses to install renewable systems such as solar and/or wind and receive payment for power delivered to the electrical grid.

Private facilities. Significant privately-owned electric facilities are located in and around Sumas:

7.3.1 Existing conditions

Telecommunication service is provided by Ziply Fiber, PogoZone, and Comcast. Frontier Communications continues to be available for landlines only. The main switching office for Sumas is located downtown at 233 Garfield Street. All calls from the city and the surrounding area are transmitted through this main office. Network services include, but are not limited to, POTS, Digital subscriber line (DSL) and Ethernet.

~~Television service is provided by the City of Sumas, and 61 channels are currently provided~~

7.3.2 Future conditions

~~No telecommunications service constraints currently exist in and near Sumas. Future expansion for telecommunications feeder systems is based on development expansion and community needs where economically feasible. Frontier currently uses fiber optic lines to connect main switching offices and to provide digital subscriber line H S I up to and including high bandwidth data networks. Building / Area WIFI are also available.~~ As more and more households continue to switch over to cellular devices only, the need to expand the local POTS network lessens. DSL and Ethernet may need to be expanded with new development but that will happen as needed and funded by the developers.

7.4 Goals and Policies

Goal 7.1. ——Provide access to private utilities to the residents of Sumas.

Policy 7.1.1: ——Whenever possible, the city should provide the private utilities with timely notice of the city's street and utility projects so that the utilities are able to coordinate construction and reduce overall infrastructure costs.

Policy ~~.~~ 7.1.2: ——The city should encourage private utilities to expand service within Sumas to keep pace with development.

Policy ~~.~~ 7.1.3: ——The city should notify private utilities regarding major developments, such as subdivisions, to support coordination on extension of utility services.