

Visual Analysis Technical Report

City Heights Planned Mixed-Use Development

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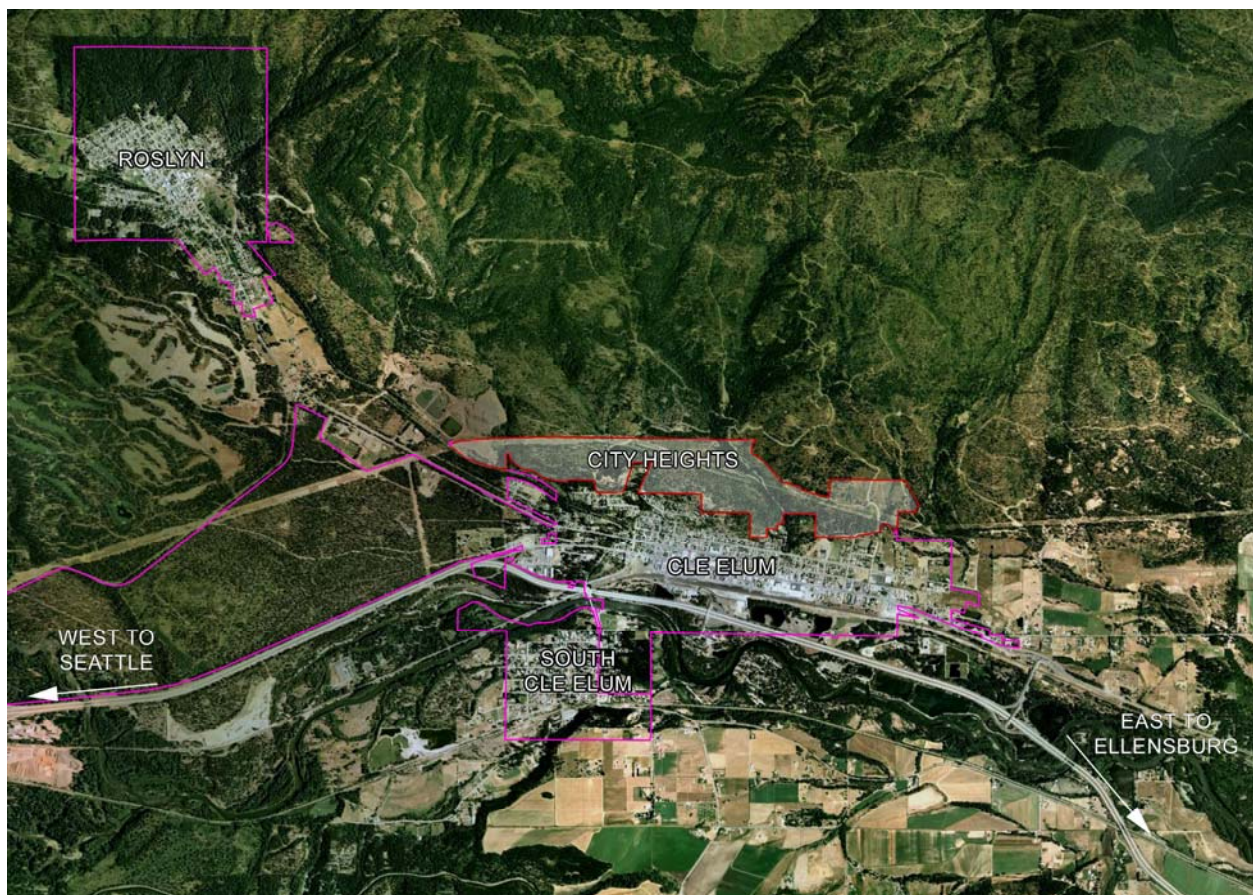
A. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

1. Proposed Project Location

The proposed City Heights project is approximately 358 acres in size and located within the City of Cle Elum north Urban Growth Area. The City Heights property stretches east to west with average site dimensions measuring 12,500 x 1,500 linear feet. The site sits above the City of Cle Elum by an average of 100 to 300 vertical feet due to the rising terrain of the Cle Elum Ridge to the north.

City Heights is located 3 miles to the east of the City of Roslyn, and 25 miles to the northwest of the City of Ellensburg (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Vicinity Map



Source: GCH Planning & Landscape Architecture

2. Existing Conditions

The City Heights property is currently undeveloped and is characterized by a series of ravines, ridges and rolling topography. The site contains four running streams within the north / south ravines that find their way into the Yakima River south of the Interstate 90 corridor. Steep topography (25% - 60% slopes) throughout the site limits the potential development area to +/- 170 acres. The Cle Elum Municipal Code prohibits excavation, grading, or filling on slopes greater than 40%.

The site sits on a ridge at the top of a relatively steeply rising slope and then generally flattens or gently slopes up and down from the ridgeline. North of the site, the Cle Elum Ridge area again begins a steadily upward terrain change. The steepness of the rise from town to the site, the relative flatness of much of the site and the forested nature of the slope and front edge currently leaves the western three-fourths of the site unseen from much of the town. Only the eastern one-quarter of the site is currently visible from town.

There are several types of vegetative habitats on the property: mature conifer forests with a mix of native evergreen and deciduous understory (+/- 215 acres), native grassland and shrub meadows, which include the powerline easements described below (+/- 125 acres), one primary wetland and surrounding wetland meadow (+/- 5 acres), and patchy native and invasive shrubs on stored coal tailings (+/- 20 acres).

Two high-voltage powerline easements run east to west for the length of the site: one used by Puget Sound Energy (PSE), and one used by the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA). The combined width of these easements is approximately 285 feet (+/- 68 acres). These easements currently contain a series of trails which allow for tower maintenance and service, as well as informal recreational opportunities.

Existing roads run through the City Heights property, including Summit View Drive, Montgomery Avenue, and Columbia Avenue, to serve neighboring properties to the north. (These City Streets presently terminate at the City limits and become private roads through the property.) Adjacent land uses include: 1) Rural residential properties to the north; 2) existing City of Cle Elum residential, commercial, and industrial properties to the south; 3) the City of Cle Elum "Bullfrog" Sub Area to the southwest; and 4) former City of Roslyn sewage lagoons and stormwater detention ponds to the west (see Figure 2).

The entire City Heights property was at one time a coal mining operation with coal mines ranging from 100 to 500 feet deep. Most of the mine corridors have since collapsed and settled over time. The western-most 20 acres of the site contain a large amount of coal tailing piles that are evidence to the historical use of the property.

Interstate 90 runs east-west just south of downtown Cle Elum. Two ramp locations provide quick access to the site from either direction. See Figure 2 below for an aerial photograph of the City Heights site.

Figure 2. Aerial Photograph



Source: GCH Planning & Landscape Architecture

3. Existing Views from the Site

Viewing opportunities or viewsheds, are all surface areas visible from an observer’s viewpoint, taking into account the screening effects of intermediate vegetation and structures. Viewing opportunities from the majority of the City Heights property are limited by topography and vegetation. As shown in Figure 3 below, the majority of the ‘front edge’ on top of the bluff has filtered views to the valley and City below through these large coniferous tree stands on the steeper slopes.

The types of existing views from the site can be characterized as follows: 1) Open or unfiltered distant views (views not blocked by any substantial environmental feature); 2) filtered valley views (views partially blocked by a specific feature); 3) interior views (views looking into ravines or back into topography). These are illustrated in Figures 4 through 6, following.

Figure 3. Viewsheds from the Site



Source: GCH Planning & Landscape Architecture



Source: GCH Planning & Landscape Architecture

Figure 4. Open or Unfiltered Distant Views

Minimally filtered views to the south clearly show the distant South Cle Elum Ridge across the valley. These views are not blocked by any significant topographical feature, built structure, or substantial vegetation.



Source: GCH Planning & Landscape Architecture

Figure 5. Filtered Valley Views

Partially blocked views to the south. Some topographical features, built structures, or substantial vegetation screen portions of the distant views.



Source: GCH Planning & Landscape Architecture

Figure 6. Interior Views

These viewpoints do not have a significant view south to the distant views across the valley. These locations have views east and west looking into the interior ravines and meadows.

B. BUILD ALTERNATIVES

Development of any one of the first three conceptual land use alternatives would change the physical characteristics of the City Heights property, as the overall character of the existing site conditions would be significantly altered. The grading within proposed development parcels would make the topography more uniform in elevation. While much of the existing coniferous tree stands within the interior of the site would be removed to construct buildings, roadways, and site amenities, the forested edge along the southern boundary that provides a visual buffer from the town below is anticipated to be retained in many areas. In those areas, the forested buffer width would range from approximately 25 to 80 feet. Some aspects of the land use alternatives are consistent throughout: the ratio of development area to open space, development zone locations, low and/or moderate density housing would be constructed along the 'front edge' of the development zone.

There are several proposed access routes to and from the property. These vary by alternative. In Alternative 1, the four access routes are, from west to east: Access from SR 903 via a new road, Summit View Drive, Montgomery Avenue and Columbia Street. Other potential access routes include an access connection to Alliance Road that runs from the northern edge of the western third of the site, and an access from Sixth Street in the central portion of the site. These options are evaluated with conceptual land use Alternatives 2 and 3A.

1. Alternative 1 – Conceptual Land Use Plan

The preferred conceptual land use plan (Alternative 1) for the City Heights property shows a mix of residential densities ranging from 5 to 9 dwelling units per acre. This alternative would be developed under City land use regulations and development standards to be specified in a Development Agreement between the applicant and the City. A total of 985 dwelling units are shown (Figure 7). Approximately 20,000 square feet of total commercial building space would be provided in two commercial areas. A significant amount of the developed homes would be in the plateau area of the site and therefore will not be visible from the Cle Elum city limits. Higher density housing would be grouped around a commercial center and located in low visibility areas away from property's southern edge to minimize visual impacts. A mix of low density and medium density housing is located along the front (i.e., south) edge of the property. Primarily keeping the low density detached housing along the southern edge of the property would be most compatible with the existing residential neighborhood on the valley floor.

2. Alternative 2 – Conceptual Land Use Plan

The Alternative 2 conceptual land use plan for the City Heights property (Figure 8) would result in a reduced number of dwelling units (875) by lowering the density range to 4 to 9 units per acre. The reduced residential density could have a lower visual impact. Alternative 2 replaces all medium density housing along the southern edge of the property with lower density, detached homes to further minimize visual impacts from town. Approximately 40,000 square feet of commercial building space would be provided in two commercial areas. Vehicular access to the City Heights property would be provided from Alliance Road that runs from the northern edge of the western third of the site, and an access from Sixth Street in the central portion of the site. Montgomery Avenue would not be improved to provide access to City Heights with Alternative 2. This route would only be used by emergency vehicles to access the site. A significant amount of the developed homes would be in the plateau area of the site, and therefore would

not be visible from the Cle Elum city limits. Higher density housing would be grouped around a commercial center and located in a low visibility area away from the property's southern edge. Lower density housing along the front edge would, again, be most compatible with the adjacent existing residential neighborhood.

3. Alternative 3A – Conceptual Land Use Plan

The Alternative 3A conceptual land use plan for the City Heights property would maintain the same approximate number of dwelling units as Alternative 2 (875), and the general parcel layout. As with Alternative 2, Montgomery Avenue would not be improved to provide vehicular access to the City Heights property. This route would only provide emergency vehicle access to the site. This alternative would be developed within Kittitas County under single ownership as a Planned Unit Development (PUD).

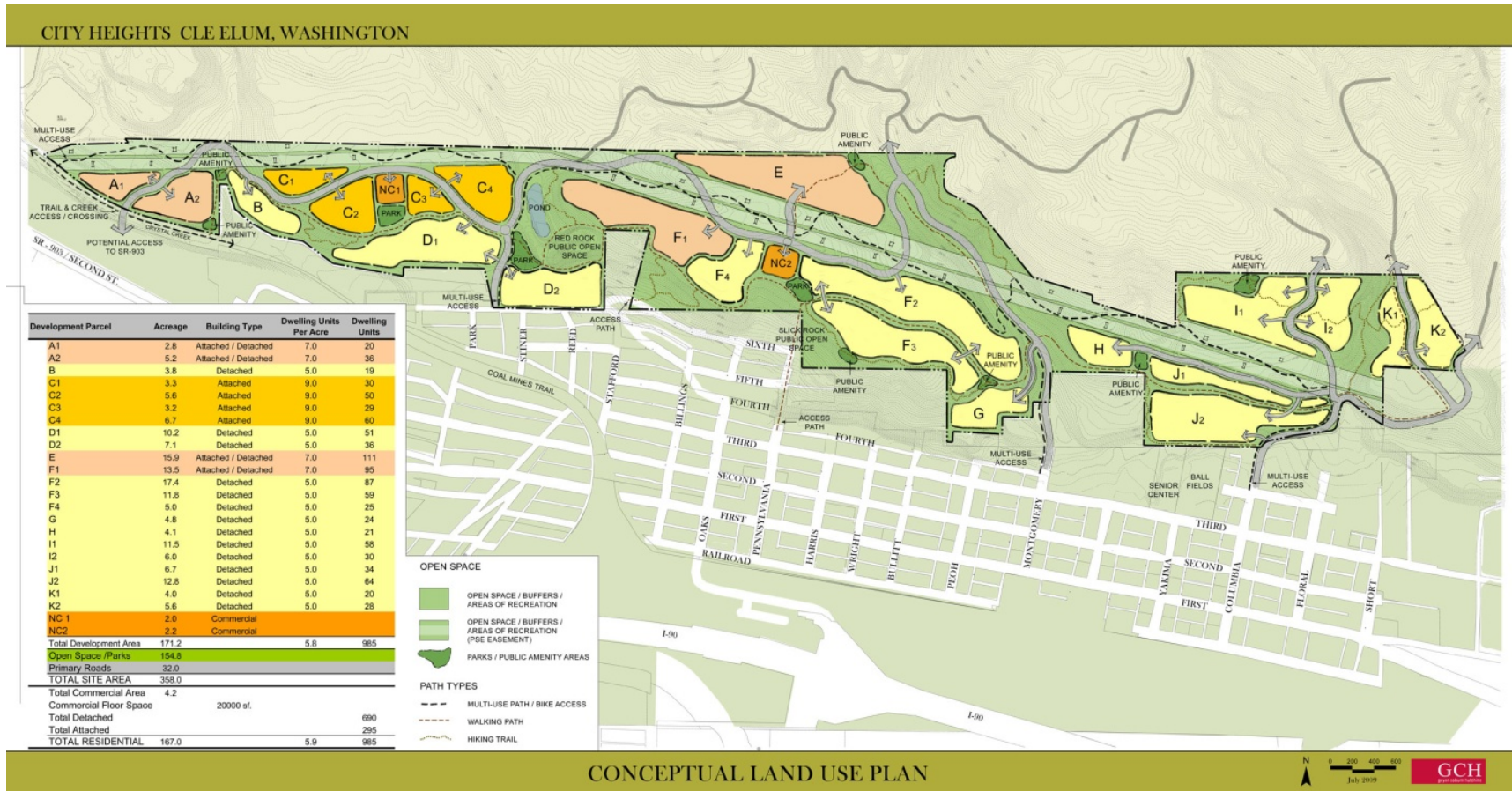
4. Alternative 3B – Conceptual Land Use Plan

The Alternative 3B conceptual land use plan for the City Heights property would consist of seventeen parcels developed under multiple ownerships within Kittitas County. The total estimated number of dwelling units would be 500 single-family detached homes. The potential for visual impacts during construction could be high due to discontinuous development patterns over longer periods of time, and likely a non-cohesive development style. It is unlikely that the forested buffer to be retained along the south boundary of the site with Alternative 1, 2, or 3A would be retained by private property owners in Alternative 3B.

5. Alternative 4: No Action

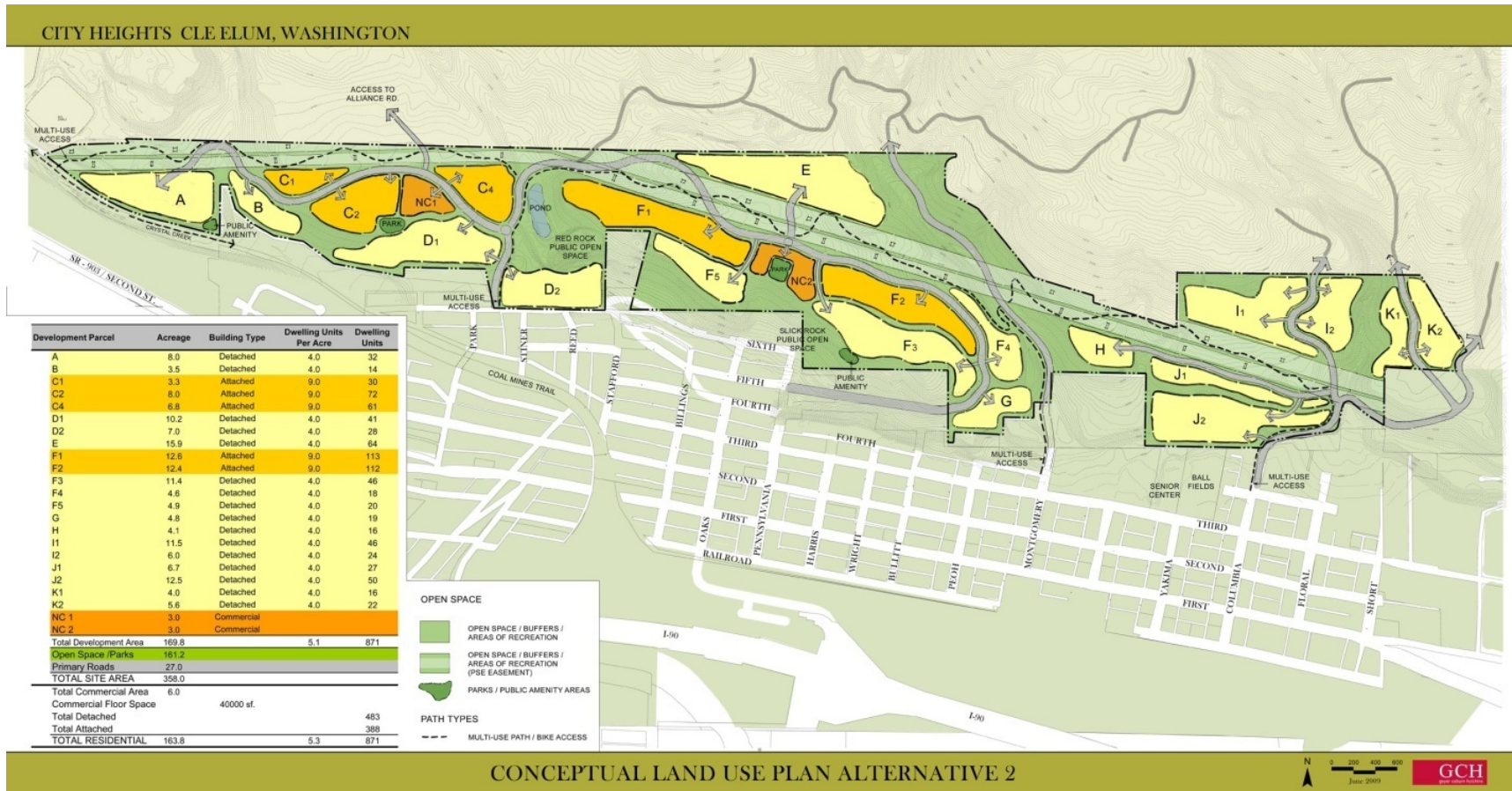
Under Alternative 4, there would be no development on the City Heights property at this time; it would be left as-is in its present condition. The *Archaeological Review* (Reiss-Landreau Research 2009), and the *Phase I Environmental Site Assessment* (Aspect Consulting 2009) prepared for the City Heights property describe and illustrate uncontrolled solid waste disposal areas on the property that include household refuse, abandoned vehicles, appliances, and tires that have accumulated since approximately the 1970s. These have been removed from the site by the current owner (Northland Resources, LLC). Locked gates at access points to the property should deter unauthorized dumping as an on-going problem.

Figure 7. Alternative 1 – Conceptual Land Use Plan



Source: GCH Planning & Landscape Architecture

Figure 8. Alternative 2 – Conceptual Land Use Plan



Source: GCH Planning & Landscape Architecture

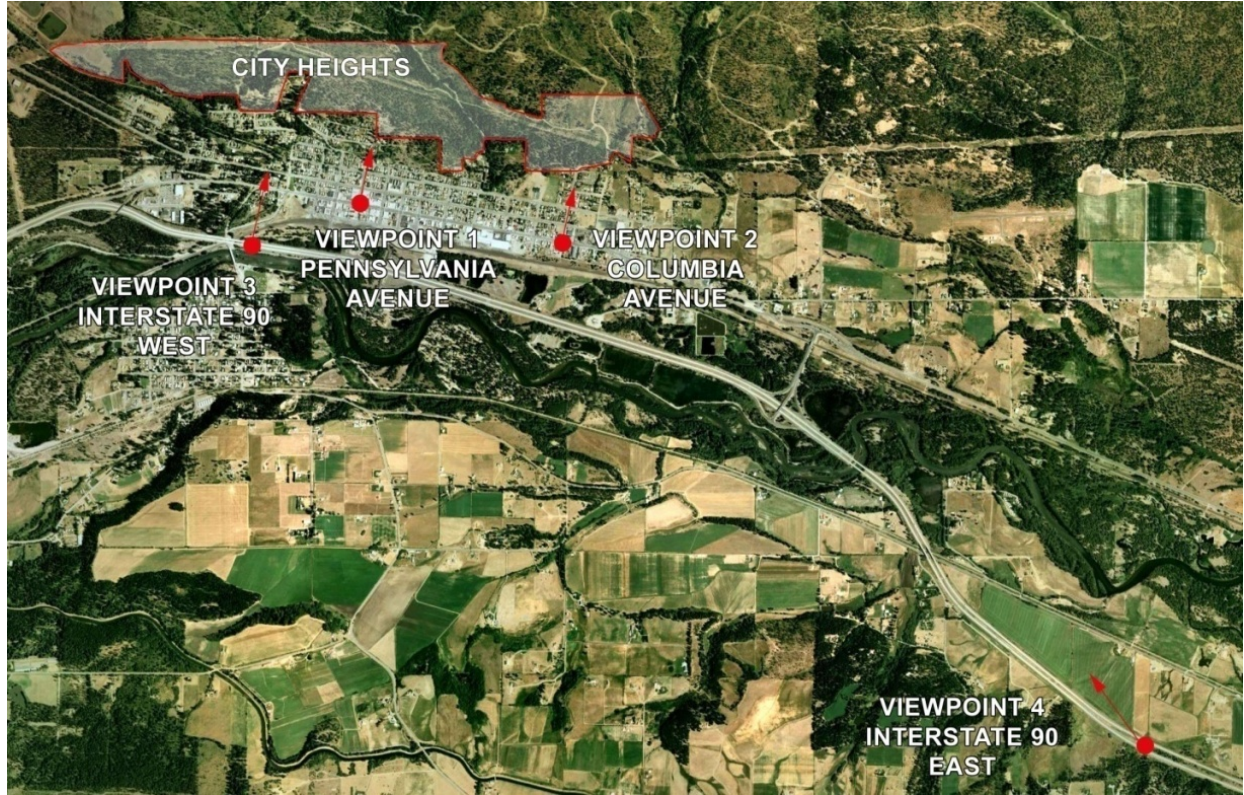
C. POTENTIAL VIEW IMPACTS

Existing coniferous tree stands would be protected in open space zones during City Heights construction to maintain community character and minimize negative construction impacts for the City of Cle Elum.

It is a goal of the City Heights development to integrate with existing development within the City of Cle Elum. This will result in some homes being visible from the town below. Significant vegetation and grading alterations would be made within proposed development zones to provide for safe building sites. With any of the build alternatives, the majority of housing built near the front (i.e., south) edge and behind the buffer of trees would be of low and/or moderate density design. Visual impacts during construction would be similar to those in the developed condition, with the exception that structures, where visible, would be seen in an unfinished status (such as partially-framed or unroofed). The proposal includes retaining a forested buffer along much of the southern edge approximately 25 to 80 feet in width where it exists today between the front row of proposed homes and the existing City boundary to serve as a buffer to minimize the visual impact of construction, as well as to minimize the noise and light impacts from the developed condition of the property. New tree and shrub plantings within the development parcels will, at maturity, augment open space vegetation to be retained to further screen the City Heights development.

The majority of proposed interior construction would have little visual impact on existing City of Cle Elum residents and businesses due to a combination of topographical changes, intervening structures, and stands of coniferous trees. Aesthetic impacts on adjacent properties would be most distinctly experienced by rural residential properties to the north, and Peoh Point residents across the valley. Figure 9 below identifies four study viewpoint locations used for the visual analysis looking towards the City Heights site.

Figure 9. Visual Impact Study Points



Source: GCH Planning & Landscape Architecture

1. Viewpoint 1 from Pennsylvania Avenue

Pennsylvania Avenue is a good example of the typical amount of potential visual impact due to construction along the front row (i.e, south boundary) of the City Heights development. Looking up to the City Heights site from town, a linear residential arrangement would be visible along the top of the bluff, filtered with stands of coniferous trees and built structures in the foreground (Figure 10). This particular street aligns itself with the ‘Slick Rock’ feature within the City Heights property that would be reserved as a public open space amenity, and would provide even further buffering for the development above.

Figure 10. Built View of the City Heights Site from Pennsylvania Avenue and First Street



Note: Covenants, Codes and Restrictions (CC&Rs) for the project, and standards to be enforced through the Development Agreement with the City, will require that building exteriors be earth tone colors along the southern edge of the City Heights property. The lighter colored houses shown in this schematic image of the developed condition of the site are purposely shown to contrast with the background so that the location of the structures can be identified.

Source: GCH Planning & Landscape Architecture

2. Viewpoint 2 from Columbia Avenue

The eastern portion of the City Heights site has the potential to be the most visible from the City of Cle Elum downtown core due to a topographically consistent slope between town and the back of the property. The topography of this portion of the site provides buildable slopes at lower elevations that may have greater visual impact to existing residences along Third and Fourth Streets. Looking up to the eastern portion of the City Heights site from First Street, multiple linear residential arrangements would be visible along the consistent slope, filtered with stands of coniferous trees, existing homes within the city, and foreground plant material (Figure 11). Proposed homes in this area would not exceed the 35-foot height limit of the City of Cle Elum Municipal Code.

Figure 11. Built View of the City Heights Site from Columbia Avenue and First Street



Note: Covenants, Codes and Restrictions (CC&Rs) for the project, and standards to be enforced through the Development Agreement with the City, will require that building exteriors be earth tone colors along the southern edge of the City Heights property. The lighter colored houses shown in this schematic image of the developed condition of the site are purposely shown to contrast with the background so that the location of the structures can be identified.

Source: GCH Planning & Landscape Architecture

3. Viewpoint 3 from Interstate 90 West, Eastbound from the South Cle Elum Way Area

The Interstate 90 corridor has multiple windowed opportunities to view the City of Cle Elum, as well as the City Heights property. Portions of the City Heights property are screened from view by a combination of rolling topography, large stands of coniferous trees, and existing built structures. The City Heights property would have potentially greater visual development impacts from the I-90 corridor where no immediate foreground obstructions occur due to the climbing elevation of the site. Figure 12 depicts the developed condition of the City Heights property where existing coniferous tree stands in open space areas to be retained work in combination with the mature community landscape to be planted to screen the homes on top of the bluff.

Figure 12. Built View from Interstate 90 West, Eastbound From the South Cle Elum Way Area



Note: Covenants, Codes and Restrictions (CC&Rs) for the project, and standards to be enforced through the Development Agreement with the City, will require that building exteriors be earth tone colors along the southern edge of the City Heights property. The lighter colored houses shown in this schematic image of the developed condition of the site are purposely shown to contrast with the background so that the location of the structures can be identified.

Source: GCH Planning & Landscape Architecture

4. Viewpoint 4 from Interstate 90 East, Westbound from the Elk Heights Area

Traveling westbound on I-90, there are multiple viewing locations of the City Heights property. Figure 13 below shows the proposed development zones during the construction phase of the project. This view is approximately 3.5 miles east, from which travelers on I-90 and the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway, as well as local home owners in this area, would have a more comprehensive view of site clearing and grading before any introduced plant material (i.e., landscaping) could mature. Further west, travelers on I-90 and the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway would observe less of the City Heights site due to existing screening by a combination of rolling topography, large stands of coniferous trees, and existing built structures (see Viewpoint 3, Figure 12).

Figure 13. Built View from Interstate 90 East, Westbound From the Elk Heights Area



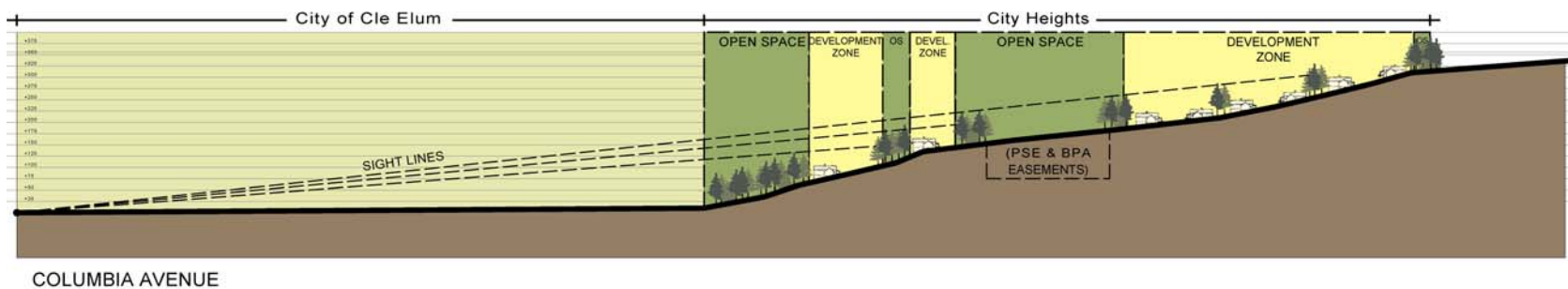
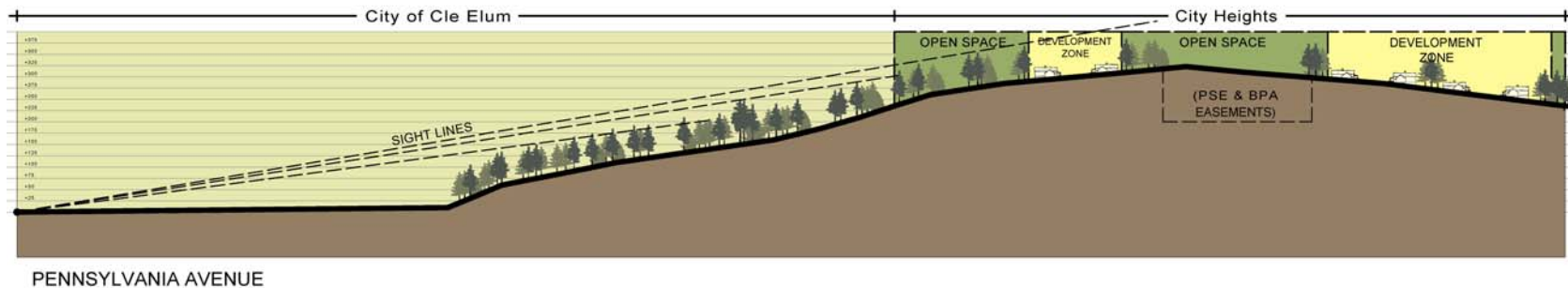
Note: Covenants, Codes and Restrictions (CC&Rs) for the project, and standards to be enforced through the Development Agreement with the City, will require that building exteriors be earth tone colors along the southern edge of the City Heights property. The lighter colored houses shown in this schematic image of the developed condition of the site are purposely shown to contrast with the background so that the location of the structures can be identified.

Source: GCH Planning & Landscape Architecture

5. Sectional Analysis for Pennsylvania Avenue and Columbia Avenue

Figure 14 depicts two typical section cuts through the City of Cle Elum and City Heights properties along Pennsylvania Avenue and Columbia Avenue. Sight lines are shown from First Street towards the City Heights property. In most cases, direct sight lines to proposed homes within the City Heights property would be partially or fully blocked by a combination of rolling topography and coniferous tree stands.

Figure 14. Sample Sections from Downtown Core to the City Heights Property



Source: GCH Planning & Landscape Architecture

D. DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER

It is important to understand the meaning of aesthetics and how it relates to developed-condition impacts within the proposed City Heights development. From the standpoint of how one experiences his/her surroundings, the value of aesthetics is described as an important interaction between a person and a particular landscape feature. Potential developed-condition impacts to the aesthetics of the City Heights property will likely vary, depending on how City Heights residents, adjacent property owners, visitors and/or passers-by experience different aesthetic elements of the community.

The alternative site plans shown are conceptual at the time of this writing. These plans schematically depict possible locations and features of various elements of the City Heights community such as residential development parcels, residential densities, commercial areas, streets and access points, open space, parks, and public amenity areas.

Figure 15 depicts a conceptual aerial view of the developed condition of the west end of the City Heights community, with the existing pond in the foreground. Multiple housing types, commercial centers, open space, trails, parks and public amenities, would be found throughout with development under Alternative 1, 2 or 3A.

Figure 15. Conceptual Aerial Perspective of the Developed Condition of the Site



Source: GCH Planning & Landscape Architecture

Figure 16 depicts a conceptual detached dwelling unit community. This view shows a typical open space trail connection through the single-family home neighborhood that could be implemented as a component of Alternative 1, 2, or 3A.

Figure 16. Conceptual Detached Dwelling Unit Neighborhood



Source: GCH Planning & Landscape Architecture

Figure 17 depicts a conceptual attached dwelling unit streetscape that could be implemented as a component of Alternative 1, 2, or 3A.

Figure 17. Conceptual Attached Dwelling Unit Neighborhood



Source: GCH Planning & Landscape Architecture

Figure 18 depicts a conceptual cottage neighborhood and direct pedestrian trail access that could be implemented as a component of Alternative 1, 2, or 3A.

Figure 18. Conceptual Cluster Cottage Neighborhood



Source: GCH Planning & Landscape Architecture

Figure 19 depicts a conceptual commercial center, public plaza and direct park access that could be implemented as a component of Alternative 1, 2, or 3A.

Figure 19. Conceptual Neighborhood Commercial Center



Source: GCH Planning & Landscape Architecture

E. SIGNIFICANT UNAVOIDABLE ADVERSE IMPACTS

With the exception of a forested buffer to be retained along the south boundary of the site, development of the City Heights Planned Mixed-Use Development under conceptual land use Alternatives 1, 2, or 3A would substantially remove existing vegetation cover from the site and alter existing topography to more level grades during construction. In place of the coniferous tree stands, shrubs and meadows within the proposed development parcels, an urban residential neighborhood would be created, permanently altering the existing character of the site. The aesthetic impact of this change would likely be interpreted differently by different observers; i.e., it may be pleasing to some and objectionable to others. The City Heights site is within the City of Cle Elum north Urban Growth Area, and thus is anticipated to develop as a residential community whether at this time or in the foreseeable future.

F. REFERENCES

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