

WAC 458-30-330 Open space plan and public benefit rating system
—Authorization and procedure to establish—Adoption—Notice to owner—
Valuation.

(1) **Introduction.** RCW 84.34.055 enables a county legislative authority to establish an open space plan, public benefit rating system, and valuation schedule for land classified as open space. This section explains the factors that must be considered when such a plan and rating system are established, includes a nonexclusive list of recognized sources used in determining open space priorities, and outlines the actions required after and effects of the approval of an open space plan and public benefit rating system.

(2) **General authorization.** The county legislative authority may direct the county planning commission to set open space priorities and to adopt, following a public hearing, an open space plan and a public benefit rating system (rating system) for the county. As used in this section, "planning commission" means the county office, commission, or department that is responsible for making planning decisions at the county level. The open space plan must include, but is not limited to, the following:

- (a) Criteria to determine the eligibility of land;
- (b) A process to establish a rating system; and
- (c) An assessed valuation schedule developed by the assessor.

This schedule is a percentage reduction of true and fair value based on the rating system.

(3) **A public hearing is required.** At least one public hearing must be held before an open space plan, a public benefit rating system, or an assessed valuation schedule may be approved by the county legislative authority.

(4) **What criteria are used to determine eligibility?** Within the rating system the county legislative authority must include the criteria and elements contained in RCW 84.34.020 (1)(a). This authority, which approves or denies applications for the classification and reclassification of land as open space, must consider the criteria when it makes its determination.

(a) The rating system must provide a method to rank or rate classified open space land.

(b) The legislative authority must give priority consideration to lands used for buffers planted with or primarily containing native vegetation no later than July 1, 2006, unless buffers of this nature already receive priority consideration in an existing open space plan, rating system, and assessed valuation schedule.

(c) "Priority consideration" as used in this section, may include, but is not limited to, establishing classification eligibility, maintenance criteria, or a rating system for buffers with native vegetation.

(5) **How is an open space plan and rating system developed?** The county planning commission must take all reasonable steps to determine open space priorities or use recognized sources for this purpose, or both.

(a) Recognized sources of open space priorities include, but are not limited to:

- (i) The natural heritage database;
- (ii) The state office of historic preservation;
- (iii) The recreation and conservation office inventory of dry accretion beach and shoreline features;
- (iv) The state, national, county, and/or state registers of historic places;

(v) The shoreline master program; or

(vi) Studies conducted by the parks and recreation commission and by the departments of fisheries, natural resources, and wildlife.

(b) Particular features and sites may be verified by an outside expert in the field and approved by the appropriate state or local agency. This verification is to be sent to the county legislative authority for final approval for inclusion in the open space plan.

(6) How is an owner of classified open space land notified about the adoption of an open space plan, rating system, and valuation schedule? Can an owner choose not to participate and request removal from the current use program? Once the county legislative authority adopts an open space plan, rating system, and assessed valuation schedule, the planning commission or other designated agent of the legislative authority must assign a recommended number of priority rating points to all land classified as open space using the adopted rating system. The planning commission or agent will forward this recommendation to the county legislative authority for approval. After the number of priority rating points are assigned and approved, this information will be sent to the assessor. The assessor will determine the new assessed value of the classified open space land based on the number of priority rating points assigned and the adopted assessed valuation schedule. Thereafter, the assessor must notify all owners of such land of the new assessed value of their land in the manner provided in RCW 84.40.045.

(a) Within thirty days of receipt of this notice of the new assessed value, the owner may request that the parcel(s) of land be removed from the open space classification without payment of additional tax, interest, or penalty.

(b) If previously classified open space land does not qualify for classification under the newly adopted open space plan and rating system, the assessor is not to remove the land from the open space classification. This land will retain its status as classified open space land. The assessor will determine the value of this land using the new priority rating system and valuation schedule.

(7) How does a rating system affect assessed value of classified open space land? The assessed value of properties classified as open space is determined by a formula using a priority rating system typically consisting of "points." A county generally establishes a list of priority resources based on the definition of open space in RCW 84.34.020(1); these are also known as "open space priorities." Each priority resource is assigned a specific point or number of points. The more priority points the land is entitled to, the larger the reduction in true and fair value.

(a) A parcel of classified open space land may contain a number of priority resources. In such cases, the open space plan and rating system may allow the parcel to receive multiple priority points based on the number of priority resources. This would entitle the parcel to a larger reduction in assessed value.

(b) The priority rating system takes into consideration established priority resources, public access, and/or conservation or historic easements.

(c) **Example.** Let's assume a wetland was designated as a priority resource in the adopted open space plan. A wetland entitles the land to receive three priority points. Each point may represent a ten percent reduction in assessed value (one point equals a ten percent reduction, two points equals a twenty percent reduction, and so on). A

parcel with a priority rating of three points would be entitled to a thirty percent reduction in assessed value.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 84.33.140, 84.34.055, 84.34.108, 84.34.141, and 84.08.070. WSR 07-21-097, § 458-30-330, filed 10/18/07, effective 11/18/07. Statutory Authority: RCW 84.34.141. WSR 06-18-011, § 458-30-330, filed 8/24/06, effective 9/24/06. Statutory Authority: RCW 84.08.110, 84.08.070, 84.34.141 and 84.34.360. WSR 95-21-002, § 458-30-330, filed 10/4/95, effective 11/4/95. Statutory Authority: RCW 84.08.010(2), 84.34.141 and chapter 84.34 RCW. WSR 88-23-062 (Order PT 88-12), § 458-30-330, filed 11/15/88.]