

# INCORPORATION 101

Shaping your community's future through local governance

## What is incorporation?

Incorporation is the legal process a community can follow to form a local city government. Pierce County planning policies encourage unincorporated areas within Pierce County's Urban Growth Area (UGA) to incorporate or be annexed by neighboring cities.

## What is an "unincorporated community"?

Unincorporated communities are governed by their county government rather than a city government. Services like roads, schools, parks, and utilities are typically provided by the county, adjacent cities, and private providers.

## What is a "city"?

In Washington, there are only two legal categories for places: urban and rural. Urban is a designation that refers to higher than rural levels of:

- Housing type variety
- Types and service levels for sewer systems, water, and public transportation
- Population density and population growth
- A "city" is an incorporated urban area led by a locally elected government.

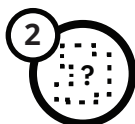
## What are the responsibilities of a city government?

Incorporation allows local residents to elect city officials who understand their community's unique needs and priorities. City governments are responsible for providing services like road maintenance, parks & recreation, public safety, and planning for economic development.

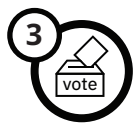
## The Incorporation Process:



1 Collect signatures



2 Verify signatures and propose city limits



3 Vote on Incorporation



4 Start electing a mayor or city council

## How is incorporation relevant to South Hill?

South Hill is categorized as a Potential Incorporation Area (PIA) by the Pierce County UGA due to its urban classification by the Washington Growth Management Act (GMA). With South Hill's PIA designation, this issue will continue to come up and the community will need to consider when and if incorporation is the right choice.

County governments only provide rural levels of service. With 64,708 residents in 2020, South Hill is the second largest community in Pierce County and the largest unincorporated community in Washington State. As a rapidly growing area, South Hill's need for reliable urban services continues to rise, such as:

- Transportation and road improvements
- Sidewalk infrastructure
- Public parks
- Public safety

## How would incorporation affect me and my community?

Incorporation can give local residents more influence over policies and initiatives that impact their daily lives. The effects are determined by the new city government such as defining a community vision, identifying key issues to address, deciding what services are managed by the city, and fostering a stronger sense of community.

## How would incorporation affect my taxes?

City governments fund services by collecting taxes and seeking federal and state grants. Tax rates after incorporation would be set by the new city government. Pierce County has commissioned a financial analysis to advise on possible tax rates, and the findings are expected in mid-2026.



## About this Project

Pierce County Planning & Public Works is partnering with the University of Washington's Master of Urban Planning program to organize community outreach events in April and May 2026. These events aim to help the County better understand the current issues facing South Hill residents and businesses and to discuss incorporation as an option for the community. **Join us for a Community Open House on 5/13/26 from 3:00pm to 6:30pm in the South Hill Pierce County Library (15420 Meridian E, Puyallup, WA 98375).**

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