
South Hill Now and in the Future

Final Report and Recommendations

Livable City Year | UW Master of Urban Planning | URBAN 507 Studio

Prepared June 5, 2026

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Acknowledgements.....	4
3. South Hill Alternatives.....	5
3.1. Purpose of Alternatives.....	5
3.2. Matrix of Alternatives.....	6
3.3. No Action Alternative.....	11
3.4. Incorporation Alternative.....	13
4. Going Forward.....	15
4.1. Criteria for Future Decisions.....	15
4.2. Recommended Next Steps.....	15
Appendix A: Focus Group 1 Summary.....	17
Appendix B: Focus Group 2 Summary.....	19
Appendix C: Community Open House Summary.....	21
Appendix D: Supplemental Outreach Summaries.....	30

1 Introduction

The University of Washington's Livable City Year (UWLCY) program has partnered with Pierce County Planning & Public Works to create and facilitate a community engagement plan focusing on the future of South Hill, a census-designated place located in Pierce County, Washington. Pierce County asked UWLCY to engage a student team positioned as neutral fact-finders to help facilitate community discussions and promote an informed dialogue about potential alternatives relating to South Hill's future governance. This engagement process comes as the County prepares to update South Hill's Community Plan and Vision Statement.

South Hill is located directly south of Puyallup and southeast of Tacoma. In 2024, the estimated population in South Hill was more than 78,000 residents, making it the largest unincorporated area in the state of Washington. Per the American Community Survey, between 2019 and 2024, the population grew by 13.1% and total housing units increased by 14.5%. The area continues to grow at a rate of 2.4% annually, which is higher than any other area of Pierce County and higher than the county's overall growth rate.

A group of fifteen graduate students in the University of Washington's Master of Urban Planning program worked alongside Pierce County staff and University of Washington faculty members to craft and facilitate a community engagement strategy for South Hill. This process began in January 2026 and continued through June 2026.

During Phase One of the project, the UW Team compiled an [Initial Conditions Report](#) with detailed findings on current population demographics, built and natural environment conditions, and utility provisions. It also proposed initial community engagement strategies to communicate with South Hill residents about findings on incorporation as a potential future path.

In April 2026, the UW Team shifted to Phase Two of the project, which focused on creating and implementing a community engagement plan. Team members planned and implemented multiple engagement strategies, including focus groups, canvassing, and interviews. The goal of this outreach was to assist the community in determining what direction is best for South Hill by providing factual information and listening to community perspectives.

This report outlines the key findings from the community engagement efforts undertaken in April and May 2026, which comprised focus groups, a community open house, and supplemental outreach (results summarized in Appendices A, B, C and D). Key issues identified in this engagement process are used in this report to outline South Hill's future under two potential alternatives: a "no action" alternative, in which South Hill would remain an unincorporated area under the jurisdiction of Pierce County, and an "incorporation" alternative, in which South Hill would incorporate and form a city government. These are

not necessarily the only two possibilities for South Hill's future, but they represent two distinct, realistic paths that the community could choose to follow.

After outlining the potential outcomes of these two alternatives on the South Hill community, a series of key open questions are proposed as areas of further inquiry in future engagement processes. These open questions are informed by community input and focus on topics that South Hill residents have identified as crucial in informing their ability to make a decision on their community's future. Recommended next steps are also provided to guide future planning efforts in South Hill. These are tailored toward planners and other community-engaged bodies that may seek to conduct community outreach in South Hill. This report also includes appendices with detailed summaries of the student-led community engagement events and strategies undertaken in this project.

2 Acknowledgements

The students involved in this project would like to acknowledge the support of the Pierce County Planning & Public Works Department, the University of Washington's Livable City Year Program, and the College of Built Environment's Department of Urban Design and Planning. The work prepared by BERK Consulting for Pierce County has also contributed to the information presented in this report.

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3 South Hill Alternatives

3.1 Purpose of Alternatives

Through two focus groups and a community open house (see Appendices A, B, and C), community members and representatives from service providers and Pierce County agencies provided input on the challenges and opportunities that South Hill faces. A key takeaway from these engagement sessions was that South Hill residents do not currently have a cohesive vision for the community's future. Most issues raised during these events focused on current services and needs rather than the growth and future of the community. South Hill's residents will need to work together to identify a vision for what they want their community to be like in the future. Once there is a stronger idea of what the community wants, a decision must be made about how best to accomplish that vision. Through the UW Team's engagement with community members, service providers, and County employees (see Appendices A, B, and C), the potential of two alternatives were explored: a future for South Hill under continued county management versus a future for South Hill under the leadership of an incorporated city government.

These alternatives are described below and build on several assumptions about South Hill's future. These assumptions were identified in the Initial Conditions Report for Phase One of this project and public engagement.

1. **Population growth:** Based on recent population statistics, it is reasonable to expect continued population growth. Per the American Community Survey (2019-2024), the population grew by 13.1% and total housing units increased by 14.5%. The local population has continued to grow at a rate of 2.4% and will likely continue to grow under either alternative.
2. **Traffic:** Past and present transportation metrics from Pierce County indicate that traffic will continue to increase in the area. Considering local and regional population growth and limits of current transportation facilities, this will likely remain a relevant and pressing issue for the area.
3. **Services:** As the number of residents increases, the demand for public services will likely increase as well. Although future demand levels depend on the specific wants and needs of the community, it is reasonable to expect increased demand on public services like roads, parks, public safety, stormwater management, and facilities and infrastructure maintenance.
4. **Boundaries:** The two alternatives are informed by information collected and interpreted within the current boundary of South Hill as outlined in the 2023 Community Plan. It is important to note that these boundaries may not represent public perceptions of South Hill's extent and will not necessarily be the official city limits should South Hill choose to pursue incorporation.

3.2 Matrix of Alternatives

Alternative governance structures offer different sets of tools that could be utilized. Below is a comprehensive matrix of tools and opportunities available to the South Hill community under a future “no action” county alternative versus an incorporation alternative.

	No Action Alternative: Maintaining Pierce County Jurisdiction	Incorporation Alternative: Incorporation as an Independent Municipal Body
Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> County residents would continue to be represented by elected County Councilmembers whose districts include areas of South Hill. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City would have its own planning and zoning authority, which would set land use policy. Residents could have more direct representation for decisions related to land use and patterns of development.
<p>BOTH: Home Owners Associations (HOA) have their own facilities and regulations and would continue to advocate for their residents.</p>		
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> County would be required to meet expectations under the Growth Management Act (GMA) to accommodate growth in South Hill. County would allocate population growth estimates to South Hill that the area must plan for and accommodate. County would set density for development through zoning. County would review land use decisions such as subdivisions, planned unit developments, and conditional units, and building permits would follow the county building code. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City would be required to meet expectations under the Growth Management Act (GMA) to accommodate growth. County would allocate population growth estimates and South Hill city government could determine where and how growth would be accommodated. Residents could advocate for zoning code amendments and design review to align housing and development with the community vision.

South Hill Now and in the Future: Final Report and Recommendations

<p>Capital Facilities + Utilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pierce County would plan for the provision of utilities. ● County would determine funding and timelines for capital improvement projects. ● County would typically only improve inadequate facilities once they failed or no longer met mandated standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● City could expand utilities to suit the needs of the population and further expansion. ● Residents could have more local control of where and how to expand utilities. ● City could direct funding to be focused on local capital projects. ● City would be able to prioritize and focus applications for state and federal grant funding. ● Current private water utilities may not be able to maintain water quality standards with increasing density.
<p>Transportation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● County would resolve transportation projects based on priority across the whole county. ● Meridian Ave E would remain a state road maintained by Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) with no significant plans for improvements. Pierce County has limited influence on this road. ● County would work with Pierce Transit, supporting long-term transit expansion plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● City would have the ability to work with WSDOT to prepare a Corridor Plan for Meridian Ave E. ● City could expand public transit system. ● City could create a traffic plan to help alleviate traffic congestion. ● City could improve road management and maintenance, expand north-south capacity, and improve pathways for public safety vehicles. ● Increased Level of Service for roads would come with additional cost.

South Hill Now and in the Future: Final Report and Recommendations

BOTH: Pierce Transit has long-term potential for developing Bus Rapid Transportation along Meridian Ave E.

Pierce Transit has potential for increasing frequencies on the Route 402 bus to every thirty minutes.

Pierce Transit is funded through a county-wide sales tax for public transit.

Climate Change & Resiliency

- Unified coordination for regional climate change initiatives.
- County resources may be stretched thin and prioritize other areas.
- County could have access to broader federal/state grants.
- South Hill residents bear lower burden of costs for hazard mitigation plans.
- County would focus on county-wide concerns, providing slower response for South Hill specific climate risks and natural disasters.
- County scale of planning has limited capacity for localized opportunities for climate-focused land-use and zoning reforms.
- City could develop locally-focused hazard mitigation and climate strategies for South Hill.
- City tax revenue could be used for ecological restoration projects.
- City environmental programs/projects could be redundant and siloed from regional efforts.
- City could better strategize for local issues like stormwater drainage, urban heat island effect, and carbon emissions.
- City representation in regional and national climate issues.

South Hill Now and in the Future: Final Report and Recommendations

<p>Economic Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● County would not provide substantial efforts to address the jobs/housing balance in South Hill. ● County tax revenue from South Hill not used exclusively for South Hill. ● County has no potential for a city business & occupation tax. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● City could create a targeted economic development plan. ● City could have autonomy over its economic policy. ● City could create local jobs. ● City could implement business & occupation tax. ● City may have challenges with collecting sufficient taxes to support municipal services.
<p>Parks & Recreation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● County would maintain and operate parks and recreational facilities. ● County would have to compete with private developers to acquire property for public parks. ● County park levy and park impact fees would continue to fund a significant portion of county-wide park development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● City could take over management of County parks in South Hill or continue to benefit from regional resources. ● City could create a parks and recreation plan to create greater connectivity and fill gaps in green space. ● City could invest in more public parks in South Hill. ● City could invest impact fees on new developments locally in South Hill.
<p>Schools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● School districts experience capacity constraints as South Hill population continues to grow. ● Schools governed by school districts, rather than at the county or city level. 	

South Hill Now and in the Future: Final Report and Recommendations

<p>Taxation and Fiscal Policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Hill residents continue to pay county tax rates which support county-wide projects and governance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City could decide desired service levels: increasing service level will cost more; same service level will likely have comparable cost to current taxes. • City could choose to implement fees such as impact fees for investing in local amenities and services. • City could prioritize and focus applications for state and federal grant funding.
<p>Public Safety</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pierce County would be responsible for public safety policies, staffing, and budgets. • Population growth and increasing density would challenge Pierce County's ability to meet public safety needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City would have three options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status quo – Sheriff continues to provide service at adopted levels • Augmented – City contracts (and pays for) additional services (i.e. more public safety officers) • Independent – City forms its own police department • Expanded sheriff/police service could enhance traffic control to improve safety along Meridian Ave E.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central Pierce Fire and Rescue continues to provide existing levels of service for fire safety services. 		

3.3 No Action Alternative

In a No Action Alternative, where South Hill remains under Pierce County governance, there are key points that will need to be considered. Continuing growth and population increases of about 2.4% year-over-year will result in a higher usage and strain on public utilities like water services and an increase of traffic and road use. South Hill will continue to be served at a level of service that is set by the County, which may or may not meet the needs of a growing urban population in the future. Improvements to public services in South Hill will be addressed by Pierce County as capacity allows and in alignment with other projects and priorities in the region.

Land Use: County governance continues to give developers and HOAs significant power in advocacy and control of land use in South Hill, being the main resource of other-than-county projects like sidewalks, parks, and housing developments. The residents of South Hill will continue to have limited, advisory-only input through the South Hill Advisory Commission. The County will continue to plan for South Hill and review all applications for development.

Housing: Growth is happening regardless of the government structure in South Hill, and Pierce County currently sets the population growth targets. Housing will follow the land use code that Pierce County sets, which is set toward a potential increase in middle housing development, resulting in increased density with little input from residents.

Capital Facilities + Utilities: As South Hill continues to grow, level of service demands, maintenance, and need for funding of capital facilities and utilities will likely also grow. Currently, tax revenue does not stay entirely local and is funneled to Pierce County to provide prioritized capital facility projects throughout the county. Since Pierce County has to consider the facilities of an entire region, improvement projects are not always prioritized in South Hill and are on longer timelines. This means that in a no action future, inadequate facilities in South Hill will continue to be the responsibility of the county and will only be fixed once they fail or no longer meet mandated standards. Furthermore, during the engagement process (described in Appendices A, B, and C) residents shared concerns about shortages in public safety resources and slow response times. In a no action future, South Hill would continue to look to Pierce County for decisions on public safety policies, staffing, and budgets.

Transportation: As time goes on, transportation demands and traffic will continue to increase both in and around South Hill. As issues arise, they will be noted and addressed by Pierce County based on the priority among all transportation issues across the county. Bus service will likely remain the same level, as it is also funded by Pierce County. The County would continue to develop priority projects, such as Safe Routes to Schools, with a completion of two to three projects a year. Improvements to some South Hill roads, such as 122nd Ave E, are a county priority, but improvements to Meridian Ave E are determined by the state, with limited influence from the County. Improvements to the connectivity of pedestrian and bike infrastructure are uncertain.

Climate Change & Resiliency: Pierce County is responsible for developing and implementing responses to climate change effects within and around South Hill. Currently, Pierce County's climate strategy is guided by Sustainability 2030, the county's plan for reducing carbon emissions to below 2015 levels by 2030. Climate action plans would remain the same due to additional climate initiatives incurring additional funds. During the engagement process (Appendices A and B), it was shared that South Hill residents experience lower fiscal burdens for any climate initiatives taking place in the area, though there is some concern for South Hill's emergency preparedness.

Economic Development: South Hill has a significant commuter population that works outside the area, with many of the jobs in the area being in the retail sector. Additionally, Pierce County does not produce local economic development plans. Under county governance, businesses are not required to apply for a city endorsement. Tax revenue generated in the area does not necessarily stay local, but is used across the County.

Parks & Recreation: During Focus Group 1 (described in Appendix A), County Parks staff shared that South Hill is the most underserved in parks and recreational facilities in terms of parks per acre of land. Funding for park development will continue to be largely supplied by the Pierce County park levy fund in a no action scenario. Pierce County has some plans for expanding park facilities in South Hill, but currently lacks significant resources for this purpose, so increases in green space are mostly reliant on private developers developing private park facilities.

3.4 Incorporation Alternative

The process of incorporation offers both opportunities and responsibilities. As part of forming a South Hill city government, a transition plan would need to be created to transfer responsibilities and services from Pierce County to South Hill. A planning process would be conducted to establish a community vision and goals. Using that information, the city would prepare its own Comprehensive Plan and implement regulations which could establish level of service standards for public services, potentially increasing standards for areas of concern identified by residents, such as public safety, parks, and transportation.

The community engagement process (see Appendices A, B, C, and D) revealed that local residents likely wouldn't want to form a city government without confidence in potential improvements and benefits to the community. This indicates that a vote to incorporate may signal residents' desire for a higher level of service for urban governmental services. Increasing service levels may come with an increased tax rate to fund the services.

The following are focus areas a new city government may consider throughout the incorporation process.

Land Use and Housing: Incorporation would enable South Hill to form its own Planning and Building Department, which would have authority over land use and zoning policy and development permitting, responsibilities that are currently managed by Pierce County.

South Hill Now and in the Future: Final Report and Recommendations

South Hill would be required to meet expectations under the Growth Management Act (GMA) to accommodate growth, which includes negotiating with Pierce County regarding the amount of population growth that the area would plan for.

Capital Facilities & Utilities: During the engagement process (described in Appendices A, B, C, and D), respondents shared that South Hill currently has an adequate level of service in many of its capital facilities and utilities, although challenges are anticipated as South Hill continues to grow. A city government could give South Hill more ability to provide the capital facilities necessary to meet the increased needs that this growth will cause. Incorporation offers a greater capacity for expanding or constructing new facilities when needed. Furthermore, given that many businesses and residents could benefit from new sewer mains, the community would have increased input in deciding when, where, and how utilities extend. The increased capacity and level of service would be funded by capital funds staying local to the city, rather than being allocated to the county.

Transportation: Incorporation offers several possibilities for South Hill to address traffic, a concern raised in the engagement process (see Appendices A, B, C, and D). Incorporation presents several opportunities for South Hill, including better regional representation, such as being able to petition for a seat on the Pierce Transit Board of Commissioners. This could allow increased opportunity to advocate for more public transportation routes and more frequent bus service. To address vehicular traffic more directly, the city of South Hill could develop a Corridor Plan for Meridian Ave E, a state highway controlled by WSDOT, in cooperation with WSDOT. The city could also create a citywide traffic plan to address larger fundamental north-south travel challenges. Transportation projects and their anticipated benefits would likely require infrastructure improvements, which could come at significant time and cost to the community.

Climate Change & Resiliency: Many of the mitigation strategies in the existing Pierce County Hazard Mitigation Plan would apply to an incorporated South Hill. The city would prepare a hazard mitigation plan focused on South Hill's specific needs in addressing potential threats associated with extreme weather, natural disasters, and climate change.

Economic Development: A new city government would prepare an Economic Development Element as part of their Comprehensive Plan. Per the South Hill Community Plan: "Economic development is more likely to occur when a specific area or areas are targeted for financing, capital improvements, civic projects, or redevelopment". If South Hill were to be its own municipality, the targeting of specific areas for economic development would be led by the city government with local resident input. Additionally, the city would have greater autonomy over its economic policy, could implement a business & occupation tax, and could be responsive to the needs of South Hill residents.

Parks and Recreation: Incorporation would allow South Hill to expand access to public green space. The city could prepare a local parks and recreation plan and use impact fees from developers and taxes to fund the purchase, construction, and maintenance of new city park facilities. The status of existing county parks would need to be negotiated with

South Hill Now and in the Future: Final Report and Recommendations

Pierce County as the County could retain responsibility for regional park facilities in South Hill or could transfer them to city governance.

Schools: Currently, 46% of students in the Puyallup School District reside in South Hill. Schools are facing issues of over-enrollment as a result of South Hill's increasing population. This is resulting in schools with many portable classrooms, more traffic, and a need for safer routes to school. Incorporation could address some of these problems, but not all. Because schools are governed locally by school boards, rather than by cities or counties, incorporation would not have immediate impacts on the current situation.

Public Safety: The city of South Hill would have three options for public safety services. First, the city could maintain the status quo with the Pierce County Sheriff continuing to provide service at adopted levels. Second, the city could amend the current system and pay the Pierce County Sheriff for additional services focused on South Hill. Finally, the city could choose to create its own police force. Emergency services along Meridian Ave E could be enhanced through greater control of how police staffing is allocated. With either option, the city could choose to increase the level of service, which could result in improved response times. For fire safety services, the city could continue to be served by Central Pierce Fire and Rescue at existing levels of service.

4 Going Forward

4.1 Criteria for Future Decisions

Throughout the research process and community outreach, several questions and themes emerged as common areas of relevance for the community. These questions addressed the overarching concerns or interests of community members related to the future of South Hill. In many cases, these questions and themes indicate where there may be gaps in community dialogue or resources. Other themes seem to reflect community priorities, concerns, and hopes for future visions of South Hill.

The following is a list of key open questions for the South Hill community to explore. These were informed by engagement with community members and leaders. These questions could lead to robust dialogue among residents and help them make an informed decision about the future of their community. Considering these questions can help guide South Hill's decision-making process to center community-identified values and goals.

Open Questions to Consider:

- What are the community vision and goals for South Hill?
- What kind of governmental structure fits this community's vision and goals?
- Which alternative will support the community characteristics and lifestyles that South Hill residents value?
- Which alternative will provide the services, facilities, and resources that the South Hill community wants?
- How would a future municipal government differ from the current government structure?
- What are the economic and financial outcomes of each alternative, and are these alternatives worth the resources, services, and opportunities the community will receive in return?

4.2 Recommended Next Steps

As South Hill continues to discuss the topic of incorporation, it is important that the community is involved in this process. The UW Team recommends the following steps to better understand South Hill's current identity and what South Hill hopes to become.

- **Define a vision for South Hill:** To help the South Hill community make a unified decision about their future, engagement efforts should focus on activities which produce a shared understanding of community values and vision for their future.
- **Define a geographic identity:** During the engagement process (described in Appendixes A, B, C, and D) some residents of the South Hill area expressed surprise or concern over the boundaries identified in the South Hill Community Plan. Efforts

South Hill Now and in the Future: Final Report and Recommendations

should be made to engage a large number of residents in community mapping exercises to identify generally accepted boundaries before potential city borders are proposed.

- **Develop case studies of cities like South Hill:** Seeing examples of how other similarly sized communities have changed and grown after incorporation, even if they are not in Washington, would help in explaining what incorporation could do for South Hill. The community could particularly benefit from seeing examples of areas that have addressed major traffic issues and have improved a busy commercial route like Meridian Ave E.
- **Ensure that engagement accurately represents South Hill's demographics:** There remain many untapped communities for future engagement efforts, including youth, families and parents, newer residents, and those with who have barriers to access and have historically been underrepresented in engagement processes – those with disabilities, workers with limited weekday availability, non-English speakers, and other similar groups.
- **Engage youth voices in visioning the future of South Hill:** Youth make up a quarter of South Hill's population and efforts should be made to get their input in this process. Through initial efforts at engagement, the UW Team learned that engaging with schools or classrooms directly can pose a challenge and would require longer-term negotiation and planning with the school districts. However, some initial contact has been made with The Puyallup School District's PTA Council, which may lead to a path forward to connect with parents and children who can share their insights.

Appendix A: Focus Group 1 Summary

PRESENTERS: Drew Closner, Nathan Cutter, Falisha Hola, Danielle Keranen, Kelly Tobar

ATTENDEES: Rob Allen, Alon Bassok, Sam Consiglio, Sara Grice, Steven Hartwig, Emma Hill, Champagne Lewis, Tiffany Odell, Justin Patterson, Robert Perez, Rick Sepler, Kevin Stender

DATE: Wednesday, April 22nd, 2026, 3:30 pm - 5:00 pm

LOCATION: Pantages Conference Room, Pierce County Annex

SUMMARY

Pierce County has asked the University of Washington Livable City Year to help facilitate community discussions and promote an informed dialogue about what incorporation means for South Hill. This project comprises 15 first-year Master of Urban Planning students who are an independent, neutral, fact-finding group. We aim to assist the community in deciding what direction is best for them through a series of community engagement events.

On Wednesday, April 15, 2026, a group of University of Washington students met with Pierce County employees from a variety of departments (Utilities, Economic Development, Parks, Human Services, Development Services, Public Works - Roads) to discuss two alternatives: an incorporated South Hill versus a South Hill that remains unincorporated and under the current County governance. We hosted a 2-hour roundtable discussion and engaged with 9 employees.

This report summarizes our findings and key takeaways from this conversation. The UW Team would like to thank Pierce County for hosting this meeting and for offering their time and participation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- South Hill will continue to grow in population. Pierce County expects to continue developing at urban densities.
- Pierce County, as a regional government, has to consider the County as a whole, not just South Hill's needs. There are limitations on what can be provided to South Hill residents. Under current conditions, there is no guarantee that development and services will go beyond the adopted County Levels of Service (LOS).
- South Hill residents should expect to see the continuation of issues associated with growth. These include increased traffic congestion along arterial and collector streets. Demands on public services and utilities will also continue to grow and will be responded to incrementally by applying the County's LOS standards, which are generally designed to accommodate rural development.

South Hill Now and in the Future: Final Report and Recommendations

- Should the community choose to incorporate, South Hill may have the opportunity to:
 - Have more autonomy over the provision of services. This includes directed projects to address existing challenges. Additionally, as an incorporated City, South Hill would have additional funding opportunities, such as grants and bonds.
 - Have more targeted community visioning and cohesion through local governance that could help to promote community identity and unite the community. Incorporation would also increase resident representation in decision-making for their community.
- Should residents choose incorporation, a detailed transition plan will need to be prepared to ensure continuity of services and to provide time for thoughtful community consideration of priorities.
- It is likely that the current water and sewer utilities would continue to provide service post-incorporation. This is due to the cost savings of using existing regional services rather than duplicating services in-house.

Appendix B: Focus Group 2 Summary

PRESENTERS: Jaylen Antoine, Christina Aristides, Chet Lukanic, Luke Preston, Brigitta Rehn, Ryan Schrader

ATTENDEES: Brian Devereaux, Ted Hardiman, Steve Harting, Ashley Jones, Logan Kovash, Sandi Roberts, Sheriff Keith Swank, Mejin Turner, Nicole Wanner

DATE: Wednesday, April 29, 2026, 3:00 pm - 5:00 pm

LOCATION: South Hill Pierce County Library

SUMMARY:

Pierce County Planning & Public Works has asked the University of Washington Livable City Year to help facilitate community discussions and promote an informed dialogue about the choices available to South Hill for the future governance of their community. This project comprises 15 first-year Master of Urban Planning students who are an independent, neutral, fact-finding group. The UW Team aims to assist the community in deciding what direction is best for them through a series of community engagement events.

On Wednesday, April 29, 2026, UW team members met with representatives of organizations and agencies serving South Hill or Pierce County (Central Pierce Fire and Rescue, Fruitland Mutual Water Service, Pierce County Library System, Pierce County Planning & Public Works, Pierce County Sheriff, Pierce County Utilities (sewer), Fruitland Water District, Pierce Transit, and Puyallup School District) to discuss two alternatives: an incorporated South Hill versus a South Hill that remains unincorporated and under the current County governance. The UW Team hosted a 2-hour roundtable discussion and engaged with nine individuals.

This report summarizes our findings and key takeaways from this conversation. The UW Team wishes to thank Pierce County for hosting this meeting and all the attendee agencies for offering their time and participation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- The effects of growth on South Hill was a key theme discussed by multiple departments and agencies. There were concerns about how increasing density might impact public services such as fire safety, school capacity, police staffing, traffic, and public safety.
- Traffic is a primary concern in the community as it can inhibit the provision of public safety services, poses a hazard to pedestrians and bikers, and detracts from daily wellbeing.
- Clarification was provided on Pierce Transit Board membership. Every four years, a "P-Tech" (Public Transportation Improvement Conference) meeting is held, where

South Hill Now and in the Future: Final Report and Recommendations

elected officials from the service area review and vote on how to allocate board seats among the participating cities and the county. Cities have the ability to opt out of the public transit benefit area (PTBA) (tax).

- Libraries provide a number of services for unhoused individuals. Increased public safety services are desired to support in urgent situations when immediate healthcare is needed for unhoused individuals.
- Water and sewer are already at adopted levels of service; their long-range planning considers issues that may emerge up to 100 years in the future. Utilities have the ability to collect revenue and give it back to the municipality. Building housing more densely does not necessarily decrease per capita utility costs. Utilities are concerned about density, not growth. Although service is provided to many areas, the current lines may be undersized for higher density.
- The most important consideration of incorporation for residents generally is the balance of costs to benefits.
- Municipalities and agencies in Pierce County can issue bonds to improve services administered by the county, such as making renovations to an existing library or constructing a new library to be run by the county. Additionally, certain agencies may ask the voters for levy lid lifts and/or to support capital bonds.
- Incorporation would allow South Hill residents to elect leaders that represent their specific interests, rather than the interests of Pierce County as a whole.
- If South Hill were to incorporate, key policies and partnerships would need to be established for the provision of public services.
- The boundaries of South Hill as defined by the U.S. Census and the South Hill Community Plan may not reflect the general understanding of boundaries perceived by South Hill residents.

Appendix C: Community Open House Summary

DATE: Wednesday, May 13, 2026, 3:30 pm - 6:30 pm

LOCATION: South Hill Pierce County Library

SUMMARY:

The University of Washington's Master of Urban Planning program is partnering with Pierce County Planning and Public Works to facilitate community outreach and help South Hill residents learn about the incorporation process of a city. At this Community Open House on May 13th, residents had the opportunity to share concerns, contribute to community visioning, and begin considering if incorporation is a good fit for their community. Residents were able to learn more about the project and engage with the graduate students through a variety of activities, which will help the team understand the concerns and hopes of South Hill residents.

C.1 Check-In Table

41 attendees checked into the event by providing their name and email address if they wanted further information regarding the project. Handouts included an "Incorporation 101" document and "Frequently Asked Questions Service and Tax Implications" from BERK Consulting. A QR code was available to access the project website <https://uwsouthhill.org/>. During check-in, attendees were encouraged to put a pin in a map of South Hill showing where they lived (see Figure 1C: Results of Check-In Map Pin Activity). Most participants placed a pin inside the South Hill boundary, and two participants placed pins outside of the South Hill boundary.

WHERE ARE YOU IN SOUTH HILL?

Place a pin where you live on the map

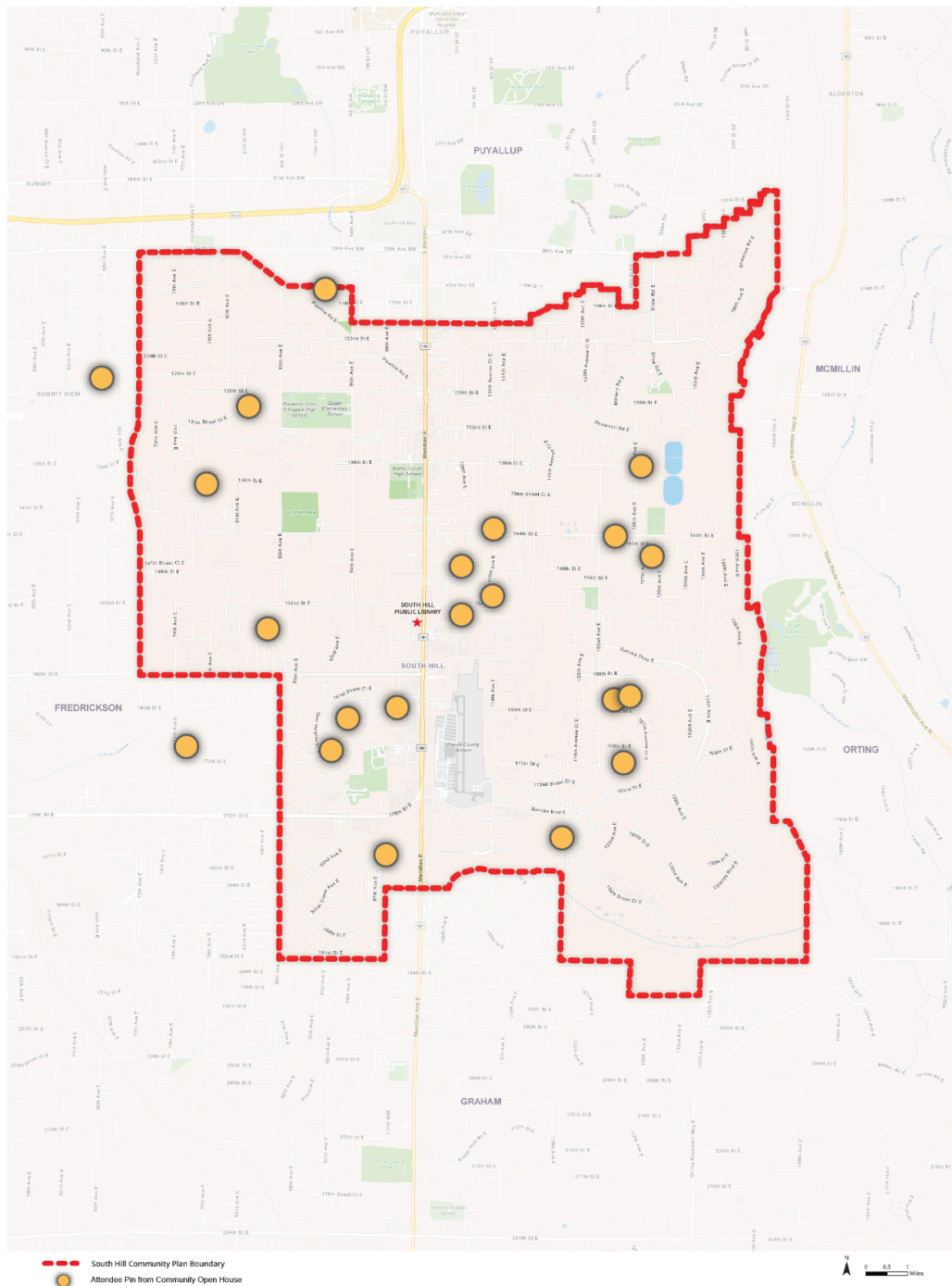


Figure 1C: Results of Check-In Map Pin activity.

C.2 “Identity” Table

Attendees were invited to share their favorite place in South Hill and where they find community in South Hill. The goal of this exercise was to identify highly regarded places and centers of community in South Hill. A digital wordmap was generated on-site for community members to contribute to with a paper version provided for members without internet access (See Figure 2C: Image of Identity activity).

11 people responded to “What is your favorite place in South Hill and why?” by submitting a response via a QR code on PollEv.com, writing on sticky notes and placing the note on a sheet of paper hanging on the wall.

- “I don’t have one been here 20+ years.” (sticky note + QR response)
- South Hill Library x2 (one respondent said their reasoning was because of their background as a high school English teacher)
- Sunrise Village x3 (one respondent said because of the shopping)
- The Dump
- Habitat Park
- Nathan Chapman Trail
- Motion Church South Hill Church
- Grocery Outlet

7 people responded to “Where do you find community in South Hill?” by writing on sticky notes and placing the note on a sheet of paper hanging on the wall.

- South Hill Library
- Library
- Sunrise Village, shopping
- Habitat Park
- The subdivision
- Don’t have – been here 20+ years maybe my neighborhood
- Motion Church South Hill

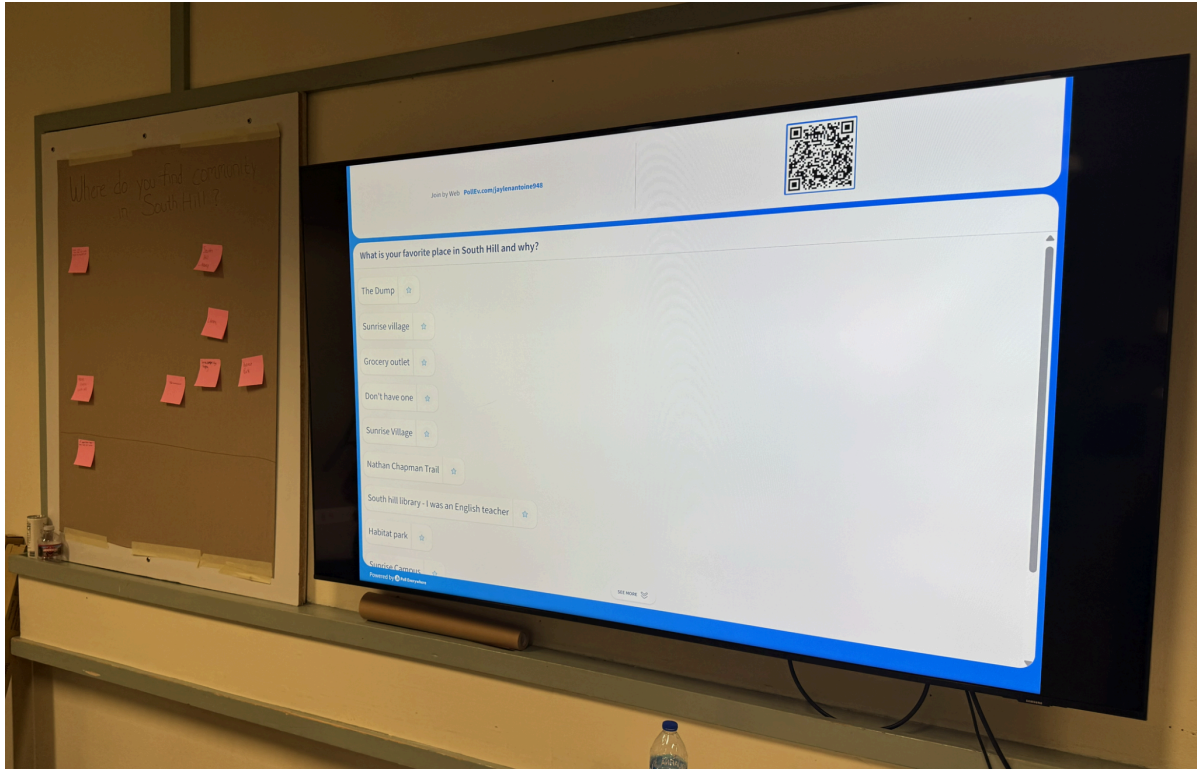


Figure 2C: Image of Identity activity.

C.3 “Concerns” Table

Attendees were asked *What issues are most important for you in South Hill?* Participants were given three stickers and asked to put stickers next to the categories that concerned them the most. Sticker colors didn’t matter and the stickers could be placed in a category multiple times but participants could not exceed their three sticker limit (See Figure 3C: Graph of voting results from Concerns activity and Figure 4C: Image of results from Concerns activity). If there was a major concern which participants had that didn’t fit into any of the listed categories, they were invited to share it on a sticky note.

Category Descriptions:

1. **Traffic:** Driving to and from where you need to go quickly and easily
2. **Use of Taxes:** Local tax money being used to improve the South Hill community
3. **Public Safety:** Good response times in an emergency
4. **Neighborhood Character:** Maintaining a unique identity for South Hill
5. **Population Growth:** Having enough space and resources for new residents
6. **Road Safety:** Well maintained roads that are safe for cars, pedestrians, and bicyclists
7. **Climate Change:** Being prepared for the impacts of climate hazards
8. **Public Transportation:** Ways to get around for those who can't or don't drive

30 people voted on their biggest concerns for South Hill right now. Traffic and Use of Taxes received the most votes.

Votes are shown in the chart below:

Votes on Concerns for South Hill

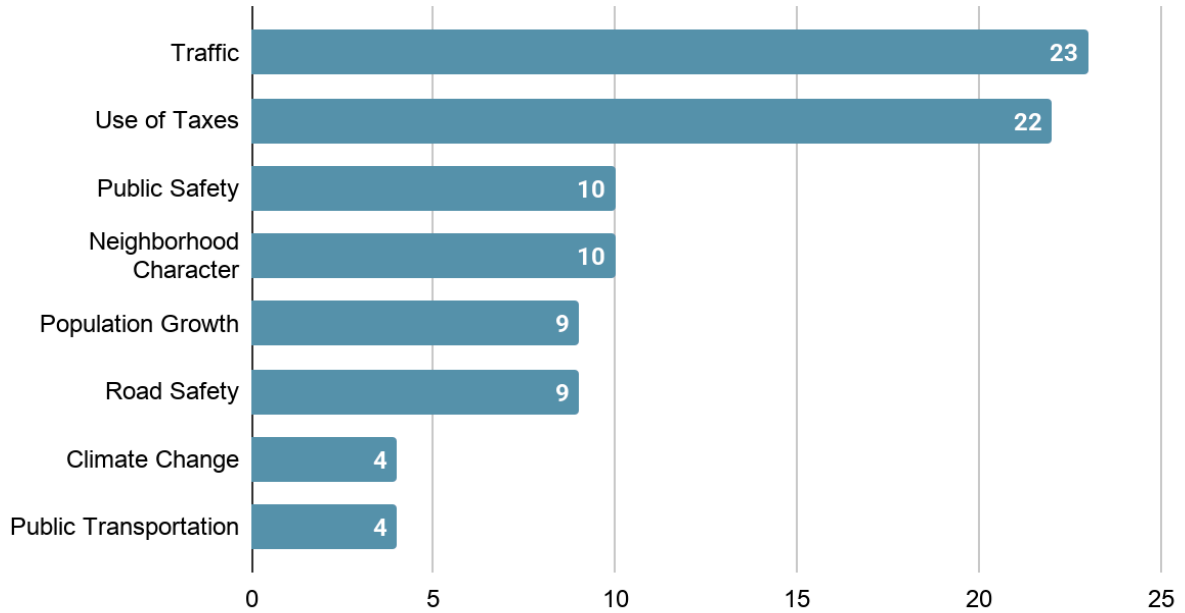


Figure 3C: Graph of voting results from Concerns activity.

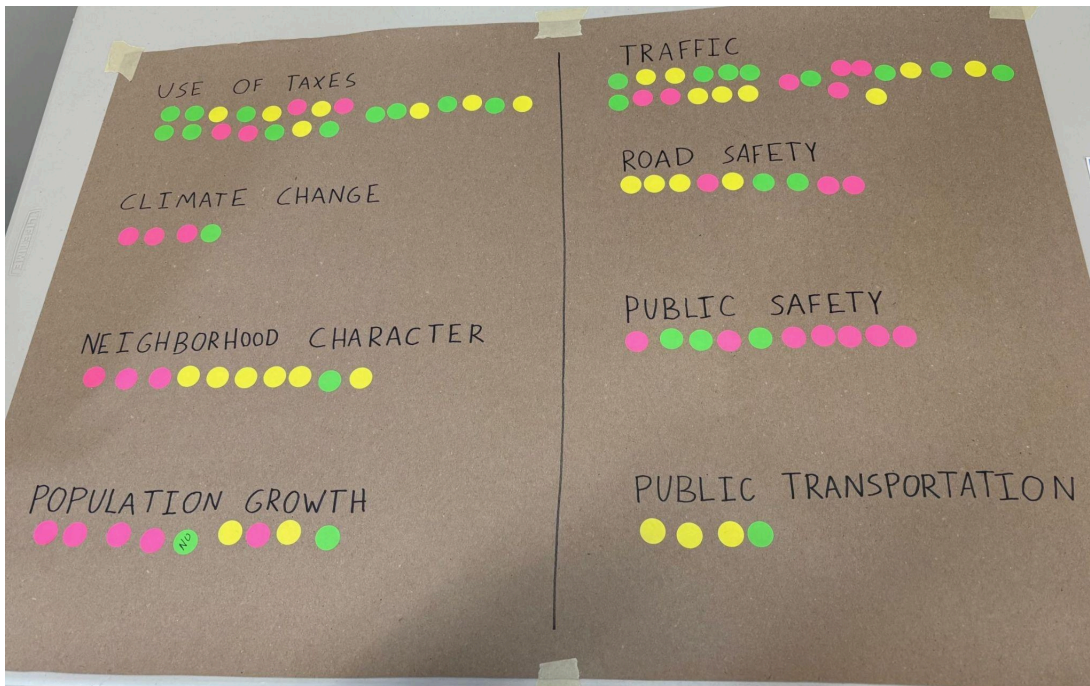


Figure 4C: Image of results from Concerns activity.

11 people shared additional concerns on sticky notes:

- AeroSpace Galactic Constellation, Resources of open computational system
- Costs
- Increasing homeless population
- Cost to build a government from ground up + who pays for it
 - Ditto
- Maintaining a safe & family friendly city: no porn shops, no more pot shops
- With 85% residential, there's nowhere to build new industry - We are out of balance. How do we plan for community needs?
- More funding allocated to sheriffs for hiring
- Schools - Impact feed paid by developers is inadequate to support student growth
- Code enforcement
- Code enforcement - County currently neglects

C.4 "Opportunities" Table

Attendees were asked "What gift would you like to give to South Hill? If you could make one thing happen tomorrow within your community, what would it be?" Participants were asked to consider these questions and share their opinion on a sticky-note, which was then posted on a board (See Figure 5C: Image of results from Opportunities activity). The goal of this activity was to get a sense of attendee's vision for the future of their community, as well as to get a sense of their priorities for their desires within South Hill. There were a total of 20 notes added to the board by participants, some of which included more than one comment. All attendee responses, reported back in participants' own words, are noted below:

Responses noted on the "Opportunities Board" written on Post-it notes:

- Making a Left Turn from Pioneer Ave to 112th. Its making me crazy
- Traffic & Parks
- Improved Traffic
 - Agree
- Better Road Connections East/West
- Commuter updates @Thun airfield and on Meridian
- More Police
- More Police
 - Agree
- More Police Response
- Parks
 - Agree
- Keep the Trees!
- Sidewalks and More parks and Weed control

South Hill Now and in the Future: Final Report and Recommendations

- Less Government
- Maybe merge with Frederickson
- Better land use and more housing opportunities
- Better Communication between Puyallup and South Hill on Traffic and Roads
- Tomorrow – I would put a moratorium on housing developments. Before an additional housing development is approved, all infrastructure would be in place, and adequate funding and construction for schools
 - Agree
- Less chain retail
- Trader joes and whole foods :)
- Better Connections for pedestrians and cyclists
- Public Art and Murals
- Reduce lights – light pollution
- Turn Back Time

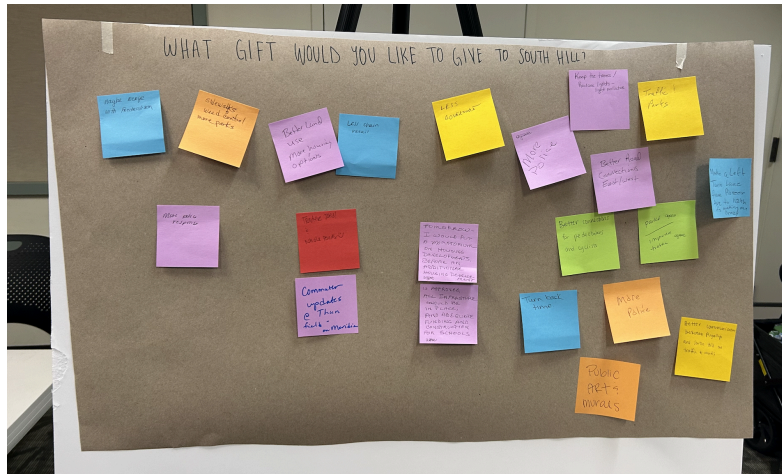


Figure 5C: Image of results from Opportunities activity.

C.5 “Two Futures” Table

Attendees were given information about the two potential futures for South Hill: governance under the current county, or what it could look like under a municipal government. Attendees were given flyers, such as “Incorporation 101,” in both English and Spanish, along with a poster describing the differences in responsibilities and actions between county and municipal governments. Participants had the opportunity to ask any questions they had about what this future could or should look like.

C.6 “Youth Activity” Table

Youth attendees were invited to creatively express their vision of South Hill through a collaging and drawing activity.

- Markers, magazine cutouts, and glue sticks were provided at the table
 - 2 children visited the table
 - Drawings were taken home by the 2 children

C.7 “Exit” Table

Attendees were asked to complete an “exit survey” for the collection of information on the following questions: While a digital option was provided if participants needed or wanted it, all chose to complete the paper survey. The questions are stated verbatim below.

- 1) Based on the materials presented today, do you feel like you know enough about incorporation?
 - a) If yes: what information was the most helpful
 - b) If no: what other information would you like to see?
- 2) You have been presented with two possible futures today. Which one would you most like to see for South Hill, and why?

Supplemental questions were asked through conversation when the opportunity presented itself. Language was not necessarily consistent in how they were asked between different participants.
- 3) How did you feel about the design of this open house? Was it conducive to your learning about South Hill? What was missing?
- 4) How did you hear about this event?

Twenty responses were submitted to our exit survey, although not all surveys were fully complete. All responses were recorded verbatim and were interpreted through some minor coding for brief quantitative analysis. The only changes made to responses were to correct any spelling errors.

Question 1: In response to the question on whether people feel they know enough about incorporation, eighteen responses were submitted, Eight responses had “yes” circled, eight responses had “no” circled, and two responses wrote in their own mixed sentiments: “yes in concept, no in realistic solutions to problems” and “not really.” There were some further notes provided for this question for one “no” respondent, who added on the phrase “always more.”

Question 1A: Additional comments for information that people found the most valuable were as follows (13 total responses):

1. “Presentation Boards, talking with staff.”
2. “Cash flow, follow money control on planning process”

South Hill Now and in the Future: Final Report and Recommendations

3. "Mostly- I have already been following this issue."
4. "Citizen input."
5. "Learning the Incorporation 101."
6. "Map of impact area."
7. "Incorporation is too late, too mature and too residential now."
8. "Public Services, People, Place."
9. "Difference between County + City Taxing and governing."
10. "City Lines"
11. "Boundaries"
12. "The charts showing the potential growth."
13. "The fact that 'people' are talking about this."

Question 1B: Additional comments for further information people would like to know were as follows (10 total responses):

1. "IRB Research Methods."
2. "Cost per month / Benefits per month."
3. "Septic/sewer location of infrastructure."
4. "Specific vision of what the future would specifically accomplish."
5. "How taxes get spent."
6. "Info on tax increase - salaries of city officials."
7. "Examples from other incorp."
8. "Financial costs- currently being worked on."
9. "A new border proposal that includes 126th to Canyon Rd."
10. "Specifics about how "city" control over current roads would differ from current situation - who would be in charge of arterials?"

Question 2: (15 total responses) Respondents shared a variety of reasons for being in favor of or against incorporation. We interpreted language that explicitly stated "city" or "incorporate" as being in favor of an incorporation pathway. We interpreted language including "no incorporation" or "stay unincorporated" as being in favor of our no-action pathway. We further received two surveys in which respondents reported that they were "on the fence" or expressed interest in a "city, but not now." We coded these responses as "mixed." The final count for this question, among fifteen respondents, was seven people being in favor of incorporation, five people being against incorporation, and two people expressing mixed feelings. One response was partially illegible, and so we did not code it, but simply listed it below. The index of all responses is below:

1. **(Incorporate)** "Having South Hill become a city"
2. **(Incorporate)** "Incorporation for Citizen Input / Leadership"
3. **(Incorporate)** "Incorporated"
4. **(Incorporate)** "City"
5. **(Incorporate)** "City"
6. **(Incorporate)** "City"
7. **(Incorporate)** "Incorporation"

South Hill Now and in the Future: Final Report and Recommendations

8. **(Status Quo)** "From what was presented today, I don't see sufficient benefits to justify creation of a new city government. A clearer vision rather than the abstract info received today could possibly cause me to reconsider."
9. **(Status Quo)** "No Incorporation"
10. **(Status Quo)** "Without more info on tax increase, South Hill should stay unincorporated"
11. **(Status Quo)** "Stay unincorporated. Can't afford the higher taxes, stricter permits, and land use restrictions, especially for livestock, pets, and garden let alone sustainable property infrastructure restrictions. Community feedback and a lack of involvement of the majority of the population that DO NOT live in the housing developments where the homes value at 1-5 million. Also the lack of presence of the higher ups involved. Lack of downsides presented either suggesting that these factors are being ignored or there is a lack of awareness due to such a limited discussion with long time residents. Also was all of this calculated with the missing plans for construction of infrastructure that was first approved in the 80's that has been completed piece meal style since then. Only ask after we had gotten a call from the county asking if we had a copy ourselves."
12. **(Status Quo)** "NO"
13. **(Mixed)** "City, but not now. Tough economic times, we need to be in a better spot nationally"
14. **(Mixed)** "Still on the fence but getting more information to make an informed decision. Appreciate all the resources being applied and used- enthusiasm"
15. **(N/A)** "Incorporation including Red Hawk Development"

Question 3: We briefly spoke with people, when possible, asking how they heard about the open house event. It is worth noting that we did not ensure the language was consistent in how this question was asked, but we did record their responses using tally marks. Of the 16 people we asked this question, 9 specifically mentioned Facebook, 2 mentioned they had been informed by a neighbor, and 2 were members of the South Hill Advisory Commission. The remaining responses, each by one participant, were a flyer in the park, one stumbled upon the event by coincidence of being in the library at the same time, and one further person heard about it through their Homeowner's Association.

Question 4: When participants were asked about their thoughts on the Open House event format (as opposed to a more standard town hall / Q&A format), specific phrases they shared included that they, "expected a lecture instead," "Liked the come and go aspect," "Found the open house format easier / more accessible," and "Liked the structure; good that we came to South Hill rather than Tacoma." However, one participant voiced their displeasure by describing the event as "pageantry."

In extended conversations, participants in the exit survey also mentioned the following.

1. Two separate participants refused to take the exit survey, as they did not feel comfortable doing so since they lived outside the South Hill boundaries we showed.

South Hill Now and in the Future: Final Report and Recommendations

2. "5-6 pm or later works better for folks, more involvement after that time." This is due to many people prioritizing after-school activities for their kids or still on their commutes home prior to this time.
3. "There is an unsealed dump on 160th that has not been addressed."
4. "There is a class divide in the community, of long-term residents versus new residents."
5. Many people further mentioned that the team's tone regarding incorporation was too positive.

Appendix D: Supplemental Outreach Summaries

D.1. Businesses

Outcomes and Results

On Friday, May 1st, the UW Team distributed flyers and business cards to 29 businesses. Some were hung in windows or other publicly visible areas. Some were placed in temporary storage - awaiting management approval at those businesses. One or two were only able to be hung in private staff rooms.

During this distribution, our team also held further conversations with seven workers within South Hill. These workers brought up traffic as a main problem they face within South Hill (both as residents and as workers). There were conflicting feelings on safety in the area, with some feeling South Hill was very safe, while others said safety was one of their main concerns. Homelessness was also discussed in conflicting lenses: one worker (male, in the north) saying it wasn't really prevalent in South Hill (in comparison to Tacoma), whereas another (female, in the south) stated it contributed to a feeling of unsafety in the area.

A summary of actions taken within specific businesses is available in the following table. Entries ***in bold italics*** are businesses which are part of the Sunrise Village Shopping Center.

Business Name	What was distributed	Notes
Charm Thai Cuisine	Flyer hung up	Workers like working in South Hill- it's convenient because they live close
Original Pancake House	Flyer hung up	n/a (chain)
Volcano Coffee	Flyer hung up	Barista said she likes working here (has been there for 5 years)
Happy Bento	Flyer hung up	An employee stated they live outside of South Hill and commute to work. They like it so far and described it as better than Downtown (we inferred this as referring to Puyallup).
Floral Delight	Flyer hung up	Both owners live and work in south hill. They love it "besides the traffic"
Tamara Teriyaki	Flyer handed to them	n/a
Modi Teriyaki	Business cards handed out (no flyer)	n/a
Mis Tres Amigos	Flyer given	Workers said they feel unsafe (homeless population)- have lived in South Hill their

South Hill Now and in the Future: Final Report and Recommendations

		whole life
Melody Teriyaki	Took a flyer	Working is good
Bros Burgers	Took a flyer	No questions asked
Flip Off Arcade	Took a flyer	No questions asked
Hand and Stone	Business cards handed out (no flyer)	No questions asked
Little Gym	Business cards handed out (no flyer)	No questions asked
Cookie Cutters	Flyer Handed out	No questions asked
Blackbear Diner	Flyer Handed out	n/a (chain)
Qdoba	Flyer handed out	n/a (chain)
Waxing City	Business cards handed out (no flyer)	n/a chain
Mix Poke Bar	Flyer hung up	No questions asked
27 West	Business cards handed out (no flyer)	No questions asked
Jersey Mikes	Flyer hung up	n/a chain
Menchie's	Flyer hung up	n/a chain
Anthem Coffee	Flyer hung up	No questions asked
Pinot's Palette	Flyer hung up, business cards handed out	n/a
The Redd Dog	Flyer hung up	n/a
Red Barn market and Nursery	Flyer handed	Workers mentioned traffic as something that is lacking in community
Starbucks (over by Fat Zach's)	Flyer put up	n/a (chain)
Fat Zach's	Two flyers hung up	No questions asked
Joy Teriyaki	Business cards handed out	n/a
Rainier Growlers	Took a flyer	Said there's "less riffraff/ homelessness" than Tacoma (safer)

*A few businesses we entered were unable or unwilling to hang up flyers. These businesses were Fred Meyer, Happy Pho, and Pho KT.

D.2 Community Events

Outcomes and Results: Libraries

The UW Team spent 2 hours greeting and conversing with library patrons at South Hill Library on Saturday, May, 2, 2026 from 11:30am - 1:30pm. Despite the frequent traffic of passerbys, most people did not want to engage and chose to continue with their day. Two individuals talked with the team. The library staff hung a flyer for the Community Open House on the Community Events billboard.

Outcomes and Results: Parks

The UW Team spent 2 hours hanging up signage and conversing with patrons at the South Hill Community Park May 2nd, 2026 from 12:30pm-2:30pm. Signs were posted on public restrooms and the UW Team canvassed at the entrance of the Sergeant First Class Nathan R. Chapman Memorial Trail trailhead where cards and flyers advertising the South Hill Community Open House were distributed to 12 park visitors. Three individuals were asked questions about South Hill. One couple had been lifelong residents of the South Hill and Frederickson area. One of these individuals did not support incorporation because she did not want a rise in taxes, higher cost of living, and greater politicization of the community. She also expressed her dislike for the number of out-of-state individuals moving to the area. The third individual was more open to discussion of incorporation and enjoyed residing in South Hill because of its distance away from Seattle.

D.3. Religious and Community Leaders

The UW Team reached out via email to leaders in 12 organizations serving the South Hill area, including nonprofits, HOAs, and religious communities. Due to time constraints and limited responses, only one interview was able to be completed.

The UW Team interviewed Austin Adkinson, a pastor from Light of the Hill United Methodist Church, regarding their community and experiences within South Hill. Below are key takeaways from this interview:

- The current community consists of mostly isolated, separated individuals/families that live in their HOA.
- There is no sense of community in terms of identity and place. Identity is fragmented as there are partial connections to Seattle and Puyallup. Some have no connection to South Hill because they're military and are preparing to leave in 5 years. The boundary of South Hill is nebulous due to a lack of community events, South Hill being a bedroom community, and people not even being aware that South Hill is a separate community.
- Engagement is difficult due to the above.
- The community should accept reality concerning growth that has happened and will continue to happen. With this acceptance, the community could then address issues like traffic