



Health Impact Assessment: **Municipal Incorporation of South Hill**

ENVH/URBAN 536
Spring 2026



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Land Acknowledgement

The University of Washington acknowledges the Coast Salish peoples of this land, the land which touches the shared waters of all tribes and bands within the Duwamish, Muckleshoot, Puyallup, Suquamish, and Tulalip nations.



(Christopher Tritt, 2019)



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Positionality Statement

16 Graduate Students

- 10 Public Health
- 4 Urban Planning
- 1 Landscape Architecture
- 1 Engineering

Not all report contributors of the report are familiar with South Hill and central Pierce County. The findings and recommendations of this report are informed by educational and personal experiences, online research, informational meetings with representatives from Pierce County Planning and Public Works (PPW), and, for some, limited firsthand accounts of visiting South Hill.

Introduction to HIA



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What is an HIA?

A Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is:

"A combination of procedures, methods and tools that systematically judges the potential, and sometimes unintended, effects of a policy, plan, program or project on the health of a population and the distribution of those effects within the population. HIA identifies appropriate actions to manage those effects."

(Quigley, 2006)

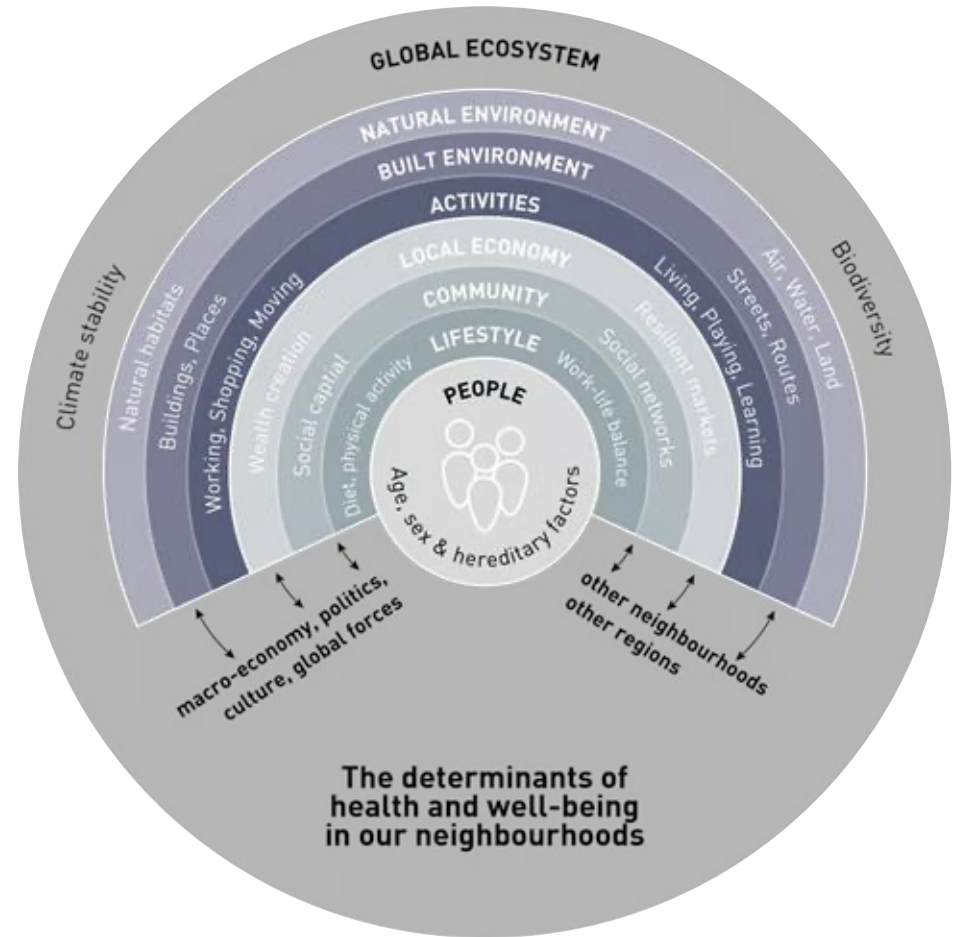
Why HIA?

Programs, policies, and projects impact health.

HIAs tell us how!

HIAs facilitate decision-making by:

- Identifying harms and benefits
- Considering vulnerable populations
- Increasing transparency
- Supporting community engagement
- Issuing recommendations



1

Screening

Determine feasibility + potential to impact health

2

Scoping

Identify priority issues

3

Assessment

Assess health impacts

4

Recommendations

Suggest options or alternatives

5

Reporting

Communicate results

6

Monitoring &
Evaluation

Evaluate impact

(Human Impact Partners, 2011)



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Project Background



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Why South Hill?

Largest unincorporated
community in Washington

Rapid growth

Rural to suburban
transformation

Resource strain

Evaluate health implications

Provide recommendations

Health-oriented lens on
incorporation



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Screening & Scoping

Topic derived from collaboration between :

- Pierce County Planning and Public Works (PPW)
- Livable City Year (LCY)
- Course instructors

SPH and CBE met with PPW and reviewed literature to generate initial scoping topic list

Scoping topics were organized into three assessment areas



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Regional Representation, Governance, & Service Provision



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1. Resource Allocation & Representation
2. Growth
3. Sewer & Wastewater Systems
4. Hospital & Healthcare Access
5. Emergency Services



Resource Allocation & Representation

Regional Representation, Governance, & Service
Provision

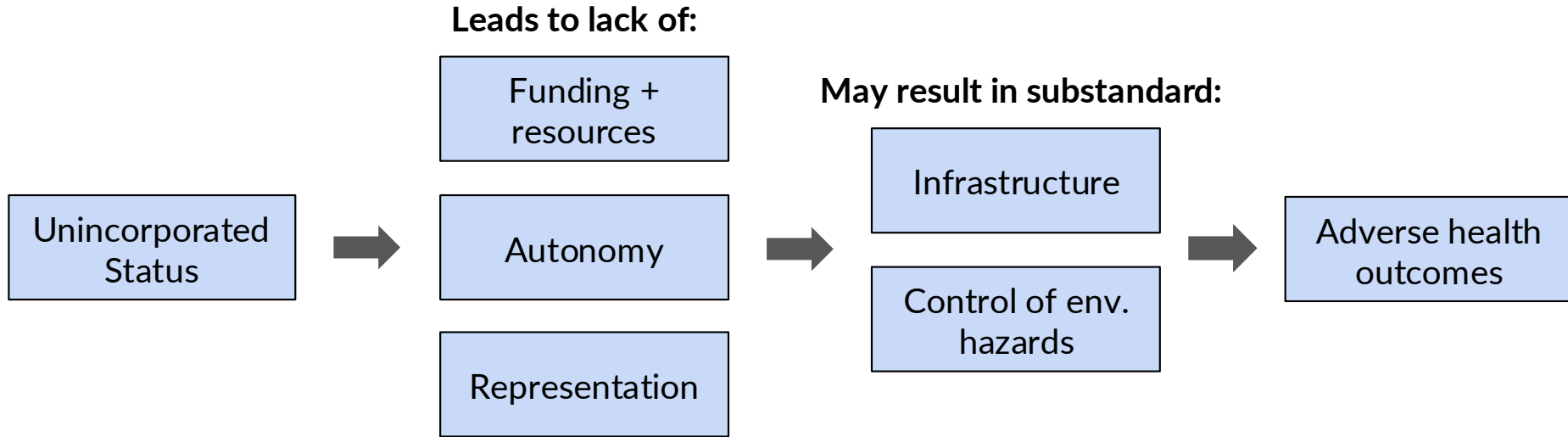


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Resource Allocation & Representation Framework



Resource Allocation & Representation Conditions

South Hill residents:

- Are underrepresented in regional planning bodies
- Lack policymaking authority
- Receive services through PC or its contractors
- Do not control revenue
- Are ineligible for grants

Under incorporation:

A voice in regional transportation planning, growth management, and service contracts, plus additional funding opportunities

Resource Allocation & Representation Recommendations

An incorporated City of South Hill should consider:

Pursuing state and federal grants related to housing, transportation, and economic development

Leveraging PSRC representation to influence regional transportation planning and growth management

Growth



Regional Representation, Governance, & Service
Provision



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Growth Conditions

Sprawl

Increases exposure to pollution and traffic injuries. Decreases physical activity and access to quality food

Displacement

Severs social ties, increases risk of mental crises, chronic diseases, and weight gain

Compact Development

Increases walking access to nearby amenities

Affordable Housing

Improves mental health, self-esteem, and chronic disease outcomes

Growth Conditions

- 70% population growth 2000-2019
- 4% vacancy rate
- 42% property value increase
- 46% cost-burdened/severely cost-burdened renters

Under incorporation:

Increased agility to meet changing housing needs

Growth Recommendations

An incorporated City of South Hill should consider:

Additional upzoning for high-density residential use and mixed-use development

Establishing continuous monitoring of displacement risk factors

Identifying and pursuing state/federal grants to support housing assistance programs (e.g., Housing and Urban Development, Washington Department of Commerce)

Sewer & Wastewater Systems

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Provision



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Sewer & Wastewater Systems Conditions

- Population growth exceeds system capacity
 - Pathogen exposure and nitrate contamination
- Mixed sewer (county) and septic (private) systems

Under incorporation:

Option to maintain county operations or transition to city PUD over time

Sewer & Wastewater Systems Recommendations

Regardless of incorporation, utility district should consider:

Prioritizing infrastructure expansion in high-risk areas

Implementing improved septic system monitoring and maintenance requirements, combined with increased outreach about state and county septic maintenance assistance grants

Hospital & Healthcare Access

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Hospital & Healthcare Access Conditions

- Closest hospital is Multicare Good Samaritan
 - Limited service local clinics and ER
- Distance & traffic delay treatment and impact outcomes
 - More ER use

Under incorporation:

City could pursue hospital development (CON) to meet future demand

Hospital & Healthcare Access Recommendations

An incorporated City of South Hill should consider:

Developing a publicly accessible centralized healthcare access information system to track service availability, in collaboration with Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department

Emergency Services



(Tacoma Weekly,
2024)

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Emergency Services Conditions

- Average EMS response time is **11.1 minutes**
- 2 Fire Stations
- 1 Sheriff's Office

Under incorporation:

City could pursue contract policing like other Pierce County cities and negotiate higher level of service with Central Pierce Fire & Rescue

Emergency Services Recommendations

An incorporated City of South Hill should consider:

Developing growth projections and desired level of service when updating contracts with Pierce County Sheriff's Department and Central Pierce Fire & Rescue

Transportation

1. Urban Design
2. Transit
3. Mobility

Urban Design

Transportation

Urban Design Conditions

- Streetscape design under control of PPW & WSDOT
- High crash rate on E Meridian (S.R. 161)
- Few prospects of street improvements

Under incorporation:

Unlock new capacities for USDOT, FTA, FHWA, WSDOT funding

Urban Design Recommendations

An incorporated City of South Hill Transportation Department should consider:

Adopting a Complete Streets & Urban Design Standards Plan

Activating design review for Meridian's commercial development

Transit



(Ingri d Fosberg, 2026)

Transportation



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Transit Conditions

- Pierce Transit is a Transit Benefit Area for Pierce County
 - Minimum tax rate
 - No board seat for South Hill
- Consistent cuts killed service expansion plans
- No coordination for first/last mile connections

Under incorporation:

Could have a board seat

Lobby to increase tax rate

Expand bus and Runner (On-Demand) service

Transit Recommendations

An incorporated City of South Hill Transportation Department should consider:

Pursuing a Pierce Transit Board seat, expanding bus service, and increasing the Runner service area

Establishing a transit fare affordability program through levy funding, employer partnerships, or PT's reduced fare programs

Mobility

Transportation

Mobility Conditions

- **58%** of residents commute **over 30** minutes
- **136** miles of county roads
- **77** miles of sidewalks
- **0** miles of bike lanes

Under incorporation:

Dedicated funding

Regional planning opportunities

Funding mechanisms to diversify mode share

Transportation



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Mobility Recommendations

An incorporated City of South Hill Transportation Department should consider:

Establishing a Transportation Benefit District

Adopting a CTR ordinance for qualifying employers

Evaluating a shared micromobility program

Community Infrastructure & Public Space



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1. Community Center
2. Towne Centers
3. Pedestrian & Non-Motorized
Transportation Connectivity
4. Youth Activities, Recreation, &
Employment

Community Centers



(Andy Pham, 2026)

Community Infrastructure & Public Space



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Community Center Conditions

- Community-centered programming improves:
 - Social support
 - Mental health
 - Healthier lifestyle behaviors
- Part of Meridian Habitat Park
- New facility in the works

Under incorporation:

Localized control

Dedicated funding

Faster implementation

Potentially higher taxes for residents

Community Infrastructure & Public Space



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Community Center Recommendations

An incorporated City of South Hill should consider coordinating with Pierce County Parks & Recreation to:

Incorporate physical and mental wellness spaces

Improve accessibility and inclusivity in the new design

Towne Centers



Community Infrastructure & Public Space



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Towne Centers Conditions

- Longston & Sunrise Village
- Higher-density mixed-use nodes and corridors
- Can increase:
 - Walkability
 - Accessibility
 - Social cohesion
 - Community & cultural identity

Under incorporation:

Localized control for planning & zoning

Faster implementation of amenities & infrastructure

Potentially higher taxes for residents

Community Infrastructure & Public Space



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Towne Center Recommendations

An incorporated City of South Hill Planning Department should consider:

Leveraging vacant and underutilized parcels to develop multifunctional towne centers

Reimagining Thun Field as a phased, mixed-use civic redevelopment site

Pedestrian & Non-Motorized Activity

Community Infrastructure & Public Space

Pedestrian & Non-Motorized Activity Conditions

- Traffic and roadway safety concerns along Meridian
- Limited pedestrian/NMT infrastructure
- Better NMT can improve:
 - Accessibility to amenities
 - Traffic/pedestrian safety

Under incorporation:

Dedicated funding

Faster implementation of infrastructure

Pedestrian & Non-Motorized Activity Recommendations

An incorporated City of South Hill Transportation Department should consider:

Creating safer pedestrian/NMT infrastructure along Meridian

Improving safe crossing and community connectivity along Meridian

Adding public art and wayfinding signage along major routes

Youth Activities, Recreation, & Employment



Community Infrastructure & Public Space



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Youth Activities, Recreation, & Employment Conditions

- Recreation infrastructure centers on outdoor facilities
- Most amenities are weather-dependent
- Lacking a dedicated indoor community center with programming
- Compounded by car dependence, limited public transit
- Growing need to serve multiracial, military, and lower-income families

Under incorporation:

Local control of recreation programming, funding, and coordination with Puyallup School District & Bethel School District

Bridge between Pierce Transit and school districts

Municipal grants for youth programming

Youth Activities, Recreation, & Employment Recommendations

An incorporated City of South Hill should consider coordinating with Puyallup School District & Bethel School District to:

Prioritize structured after-school programs

Create youth employment pipelines at the community center through partnerships with schools and Pierce College

Integrate mental health supports into programming

Ensure equitable access

Limitations



Limitations

Novelty in data

No community engagement

Student positionality

Feasibility & financial analysis outside HIA scope

Health impacts change with incorporation process



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Next Steps



(Christopher Tritt, 2023)



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Next Steps

Receive feedback from Pierce County PPW

Make revisions to our draft report

Share final report with **Pierce County PPW & UW LCY**



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What do



What do

Recommendations Summary

Representation & Governance

- **City** Aggressively pursue state and federal grants
- **City** Leverage regional representation

Transportation

- **City** Adopt a Complete Streets framework
- **City** Pursue Pierce Transit board seat
- **City** Establish a Transportation Benefit District

Community Infrastructure

- **Pierce County** Add community center wellness spaces and programming
- **City** Invest in Longston and Sunrise Village Towne Centers
- **City** Improve pedestrian/NMT infrastructure



Team

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