



TO: Hyun Kim, Interim City Manager
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COPY: City Council and City Clerk
SUBJECT: Ordinance – Adoption of the South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District Code Update as Recommended by the Planning Commission – August 26, 2025
DATE: August 11, 2025

SUMMARY AND PURPOSE:

An ordinance amending Title 13 of the Municipal Code, relating to the South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District (STGPD), to implement the STGPD Code Update Work Plan, as adopted by [Substitute Resolution No. 40985](#), to strengthen groundwater protections, align with best available science, and ensure consistency with state and local regulations, as recommended by the Planning Commission on June 18, 2025.

BACKGROUND:

The STGPD was established in 1988 through Ordinance No. 24083 as an overlay zoning district in response to the area's vulnerability to groundwater contamination. The district was created to safeguard the South Tacoma aquifer system, a vital source of public drinking water. The original ordinance introduced a regulatory framework governing land use, stormwater infiltration, and the handling, storage, and disposal of hazardous substances. It also established technical standards, identified prohibited uses, and included enforcement provisions.

Currently, the City is proposing a targeted update to Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC) 13.06.070.D, which contains the primary regulatory provisions for the STGPD. In parallel, amendments are proposed for TMC 13.06.040.J, 13.06.060, 13.06.090.B, and 13.06.090.J to align development standards, such as landscaping, tree canopy, and lot coverage requirements, with the goals outlined in the updated STGPD Code Update Work Plan. These coordinated updates are intended to enhance groundwater protection, address regulatory gaps, and ensure consistency with current best available science and Washington State mandates.

Following a public hearing and deliberative process, the Planning Commission reviewed the proposed code amendments and formally recommended their adoption. The updated regulations are now before the City Council for consideration.

The scope of proposed updates includes:

- Prohibition of additional high impact land uses including underground storage tanks and metal recycling/auto wrecking facilities
- Improvements to enforcement and monitoring provisions
- Defining the timing and frequency of future code review and updates (also known as a Periodic Update)
- Evaluating the location of the STGPD code within the TMC and exploring options for potential relocation
- Enhancing integration between the STGPD Overlay Zone and the Critical Areas Preservation Ordinance (TMC 13.11)
- Reviewing infiltration policy and stormwater treatment best management practices (BMPs)
- Updating maps of the STGPD Overlay Zone
- Improving landscaping and tree canopy standards for industrial zones in STGPD, South Tacoma Manufacturing and Industrial Center (STMIC), and Tacoma Mall Regional Growth Center (RGC)



- Improving general program awareness
- Strengthening inter-departmental coordination related to permitting and land use amendments

This department's recommendation is to adopt the amendments to the STGPD as recommended by the Planning Commission on June 18, 2025. Pursuant to TMC 13.05.030.D, the Planning Commission is authorized to recommend amendments to the City's land use regulations in order to implement the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/ CUSTOMER RESEARCH:

Extensive engagement was conducted to ensure the proposed amendments to the STGPD code are informed by broad community input, technical expertise, and alignment with citywide goals. Outreach efforts focused on engaging residents, businesses, and partner agencies.

Between early 2024 and spring 2025, the City participated in a wide range of public events and forums to share information, gather feedback, and answer questions about the STGPD and its connection to public health, environmental protection, and land use policy. These events included:

- Spotlight on South Tacoma Series (January–March 2024): Neighborhood-focused outreach that elevated local concerns and surfaced early feedback on groundwater protection.
- Sustainability Expos (April 13, 2024 & April 26, 2025): Opportunities to connect with hundreds of community members around sustainability, water protection, and environmental health.
- Día de los Niños / Eastside Mini-Olympic Games (May 4, 2024)
- Nine One Tacoma Visioning Workshops (May–June 2024) and Four One Tacoma Workshops (February–March 2025): Citywide comprehensive planning events where groundwater protection and the STGPD code update were discussed alongside long-range planning goals.
- Ocean Fest (August 2024)
- South Tacoma Neighborhood Plan Steering Committee (August 22, 2024): Focused discussion on community priorities, including landscaping and tree canopy standards and land use compatibility.
- Tacoma Permit Advisory Group (September 18, 2024) and South Tacoma Business District Association (September 19, 2024): Targeted engagement with development, permitting and business stakeholders.
- Community Informational Meeting at STAR Center (May 15, 2025): A focused public meeting providing an overview of the STGPD code update, best available science, and ways to provide feedback on the draft code.
- The South Tacoma Neighborhood Council (STNC), as the original applicant for the code amendment, was regularly informed and engaged throughout the process. Their input helped shape the initial work plan and direction of the STGPD code update.

Two advisory groups were also convened to provide focused guidance:

- STGPD Health Impact Assessment (HIA) Advisory Group: Formed by the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, brought together nine representatives from the public, businesses, and the STNC to ensure the HIA reflected community health priorities. This group met five times between July 2024 and March 2025.
- Tacoma Water Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) Public Advisory Committee: Established to support the IRP update, this committee included representatives from local jurisdictions, the Washington State Department of Health, and a member of the STNC. This committee met five times between May 2024 and January 2025 to provide technical input on water supply and demand with consideration of future climate risks.



Feedback gathered through these engagement efforts played a significant role in shaping the draft STGPD code, particularly in identifying high impact uses and refining strategies to better protect South Tacoma's groundwater resources.

In addition, the Planning Commission conducted a public hearing on the draft STGPD code on May 21, 2025. During the public comment period leading up to the hearing, City staff hosted one in-person informational event to help community members learn about the draft code and prepare to provide comments.

In total, 12 people attended these events, and 20 public comments were submitted by community members, business owners and partner agencies. Comments were provided to the Planning Commission through the official meeting packet and summarized in a public debrief presentation on June 4, 2025, both of which are available on the Planning Commission's webpage:

- [June 4, 2025 Planning Commission Packet](#)

Prior to their final recommendation, the Planning Commission considered amendments to the public review draft based on public input and testimony.

In addition, the City Council conducted a public hearing on August 12, 2025, to accept public comments on the Planning Commission proposal.

2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Equity and Accessibility:

The proposed code update strengthens groundwater protections in the STGPD, an area historically impacted by industrial contamination. By prohibiting or limiting high impact land uses and adding standards for landscaping, tree canopy, and lot coverage, the amendments aim to minimize the risk of groundwater contamination and address environmental stressors, such as air pollution, noise, and odor, that disproportionately affect overburdened communities. The update also includes new language directing the City, in collaboration with the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, to implement innovative public outreach efforts that educate businesses and residents on aquifer protection and promote water conservation. Together, these provisions support more equitable access to environmental information, healthier neighborhoods, and greater inclusion in long-term resource protection.

Civic Engagement: *Equity Index Score: Moderate Opportunity*

Increase the percentage of residents who believe they are able to have a positive impact on the community and express trust in the public institutions in Tacoma.

Representation at public meetings will reflect the diversity of the Tacoma community

Livability: *Equity Index Score: Moderate Opportunity*

Improve health outcomes and reduce disparities, in alignment with the community health needs assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), for all Tacoma residents

Explain how your legislation will affect the selected indicator(s).

Civic Engagement: The STGPD code update reflects a strong commitment to inclusive community involvement, informed by extensive outreach to residents, businesses, and partner agencies. This inclusive approach helped build trust in public institutions and ensured that diverse community voices shaped the update process, enhancing community members' ability to participate meaningfully in local land use decisions.



Livability: The STGPD code update is also informed by Health Impact Assessment (HIA) conducted by the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, which identified key health priorities related to groundwater protection and environmental quality in STGPD. By addressing environmental stressors such as pollution, noise, and odor, the amendments support improved health outcomes and help reduce disparities in affected communities. These efforts align with the CHIP and contribute to creating healthier, safer neighborhoods for all Tacoma residents.

ALTERNATIVES:

Alternative(s)	Positive Impact(s)	Negative Impact(s)
1. Reject the proposal	Rejecting the proposal could maintain the current zoning flexibility for industrial property owners, which could encourage development or expansion of certain high impact uses.	Rejecting the proposal would limit efforts to strengthen protections for the South Tacoma aquifer, increasing the long-term risk of groundwater contamination. It would also prevent the code from aligning with state mandates and best available science, and keep outdated mapping in place, perpetuating uncertainty in the permitting process.
2. Modify the proposal	Modifying the proposal could provide flexibility to adjust provisions for specific industries or to modify the standards based on public input.	Modifying the proposal could risk weakening environmental protections if key provisions such as prohibitions on high impact land uses are altered. It could also delay implementation while changes are reanalyzed and potentially returned to the Planning Commission.

EVALUATION AND FOLLOW UP:

Staff will collaborate with partner agencies, such as the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, to evaluate the ongoing impacts of the code amendments and recommend further updates as necessary. Additionally, the code will be subject to periodic review in accordance with the Washington State Growth Management Act to ensure continued effectiveness and alignment with evolving best available science.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the City Council conduct the first reading of ordinance on August 26, 2025, followed by the final reading on September 9, 2025.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact related to the adoption of the STGPD Code Update.



City of Tacoma

City Council Action Memorandum

ATTACHMENTS:

- [Draft South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District Code](#)
- [Planning Commission Recommendation](#)
- [South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District Website](#)