



South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District Code Update

City of Tacoma | Planning and Development Services

City Council Study Session
August 12, 2025



1

OVERVIEW



Purpose of the meeting: Prepare for the public hearing on the South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District (STGPD) code update and share the Planning Commission's recommendation.

Overview:

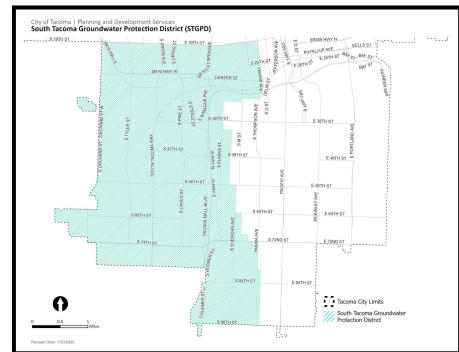
- Background
- Why This Matters
- What's Changing in the Code
- Planning Commission Recommendation
- Outreach & Engagement
- Next Steps

2

2

STGPD Background

- Created in 1988, prior to the State's establishment of the Growth Management Act (GMA) and its guidance on Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas (CARAs)
- **Purpose:** Protect the South Tacoma aquifer from contamination
- **Key Regulations in STGPD:**
 - Applies primarily to commercial and industrial uses
 - Prohibits incompatible land uses
 - Establishes standards for:
 - Hazardous substance storage
 - Stormwater infiltration
 - Spill prevention
 - Inspections, testing and enforcement
- **Lead agencies:**
 - Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department (TPCHD)
 - Tacoma Water
 - Environmental Services
 - Planning and Development Services (PDS)



3

3

Why This Matters: Tacoma Water IRP

Integrated Resource Plan (IRP): Tacoma Water's long-term planning study of water supply and demand through 2030

- Based on IRP findings, **Tacoma will increasingly rely on groundwater** as climate change and population growth stress surface water systems
- The South Tacoma Aquifer was identified as critical to ensuring long-term water reliability

These IRP findings informed the STGPD Code Update by:

- Reinforcing the urgency to act
- Justifying stronger protections for the aquifer
- Guiding policy alignment between land use and water planning

Tacoma Water IRP Public Advisory Committee:

- Members
 - Other local jurisdictions
 - State regulators (Department of Health)
 - South Tacoma Neighborhood Council (STNC) Representative
- Meetings
 - Five meetings held May 2024 – January 2025

4

4

Why This Matters: HIA



TPCHD's Health Impact Assessment (HIA) evaluated how proposed STGPD code changes may impact community health, focusing on groundwater quality and air pollution.

- The assessment found that residents in the STGPD area are more vulnerable to environmental health risks.

The HIA informed the STGPD Code Update by:

- Reinforcing the need to protect the aquifer as a public health priority
- Guiding land use regulations that reduce the possibility of groundwater contamination
- Identified public health benefits of the proposed code amendments

HIA Advisory Group:

- Members
 - Public (Representing regulated businesses and Tacoma residents)
 - STNC Representative
- Meetings
 - Five meetings held July 2024 – March 2025

5

5

What's Changing in the Code



1. Improve Integration with Critical Areas Ordinance (TMC 13.11)
2. Map Refinements
3. High Impact Use Standards
 - Includes uses temporarily prohibited by the moratorium: underground storage tanks and metal recycling/auto wrecking facilities
4. Definition of "Periodic Update"
5. Enforcement & Monitoring
6. General Program Awareness
7. Stormwater Infiltration & Impervious Surface Standards
8. Landscaping & Tree Canopy Standards
 - Industrial Zones in STGPD, South Tacoma Manufacturing and Industrial Center (STMIC), Tacoma Mall Regional Growth Center (RGC)

6

6

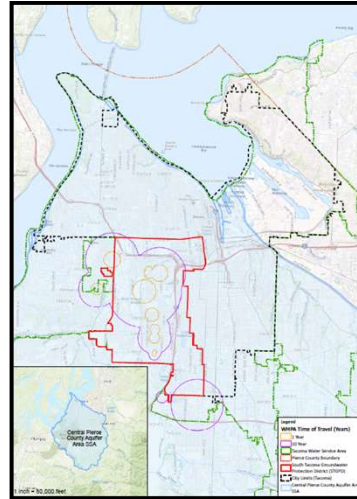
Map Refinements

Current Status

- Current STGPD map does not include the Manitou neighborhood (annexed in 2024)
- The existing map doesn't show the Sole Source Aquifer (SSA) area

Recommendation (See Exhibit A, Pages 13-4 & 13-9)

- Updated map now includes the **Manitou neighborhood**
- New map created showing:
 - **Wellhead Protection Area Time of Travel zones** within the STGPD
 - **The entire Central Pierce County SSA**



7

High Impact Use Standards

Current Status:

- **7 high impact uses** are currently prohibited by the STGPD overlay, and **5 more** are prohibited by the underlying base zoning
- The State doesn't mandate a set list of prohibited uses but offers guidance and example jurisdictions

Recommendation: (See Exhibit A, Pages 13-10 through 13-12)

- Apply **tiered protections** based on vulnerability, using Wellhead Protection Area Time of Travel (TOT) Zones
- Use an approach that distinguishes between prohibited uses and those allowed with conditions
- Example - Auto Repair Shops:
 - Prohibited in the 1-year TOT
 - Allowed with a STGPD permit in the 10-year TOT & the remainder of the STGPD

8

Stormwater Infiltration



▪ Current Status

- Existing code primarily focuses on **protecting groundwater from contamination** and does not emphasize the **importance of recharge** in CARAs

▪ Recommendation *(See Exhibit A, Page 13-13)*

- Affirm infiltration as the preferred stormwater management method in CARAs, provided the infiltrated water meets quality standards that protect groundwater resources
- Require soil contamination assessments** to evaluate infiltration feasibility and potential risks

9

9

Impervious Surface Standards



▪ Current Status

- Regulated through Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC) 12.08D and the Stormwater Management Manual
 - 2,000+ sq ft → Must apply Low Impact Development (LID)
 - 5,000+ sq ft → Must meet stormwater flow control requirements
- The One Tacoma Plan includes policies that support the preservation of open space

▪ Recommendation *(See Exhibits B, C & D)*

- Add language to TMC Title 13 to limit impervious surfaces by:
 - Developing new landscaping standards in the South Tacoma Industrial Districts & Tacoma Mall RGC
 - Establishing maximum lot coverage for industrial districts

10

10

Planning Commission Recommendation

❖ Unanimous recommendation to adopt proposed code amendments

• Affirmed:

- Use of Best Available Science
- Alignment with One Tacoma Plan, Puget Sound Regional Council Vision 2050, and state mandates
- Balanced approach to economic development and environmental protection

• Additional recommendations:

- Prioritize contaminated site remediation
- Explore renaming the STGPD overlay zone to reflect its citywide water significance
- Reinforce infiltration as the preferred stormwater management method in CARAs and apply stricter infiltration and LID best management practices in the STGPD
- Integrate watershed-level planning into Stormwater Management Manual and support the hydrologic and ecological health of Flett Creek and its watershed
- Coordinate with regional partners to develop consistent protections for the Central Pierce County SSA
- Ensure future updates reflect health equity priorities from the HIA and address disparities from environmental exposures

11

11

Outreach & Engagement

- ☐ Spotlight on South Tacoma (January, February, March 2024)
- ☐ Sustainability Expo (April 13, 2024)
- ☐ Dia de los Ninos/Eastside Mini-Olympic Games Family Event (May 4, 2024)
- ☐ Nine One Tacoma Comprehensive Plan Update Visioning Workshops (May-June 2024)
- ☐ Ocean Fest (August 2024)
- ☐ South Tacoma Neighborhood Plan Steering Committee (August 22, 2024)
- ☐ Tacoma Permit Advisory Group (September 18, 2024)
- ☐ South Tacoma Business District Association (September 19, 2024)
- ☐ Four One Tacoma Comprehensive Plan Update Workshops (February 20-March 1, 2025)
- ☐ Sustainability Expo (April 26, 2025)
- ☐ Community Informational Meeting (May 15, 2025)
- ☐ Planning Commission Public Hearing (May 21, 2025)
- ☐ South Tacoma Neighborhood Council
- ☐ Tacoma Water IRP Public Advisory Committee
- ☐ STGPD Health Impact Assessment Advisory Group

12

12

NEXT STEPS



2025 Dates	Actions
August 12	City Council - Public Hearing
August 19	Study Session - Public Hearing Debrief
August 26	City Council - Ordinance (First Reading)
September 9	City Council - Ordinance (Final Reading)
September 20	Current Moratorium Expires

13

13



South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District Code Update

City of Tacoma | Planning and Development Services

City Council Study Session
August 12, 2025



14