



Critical Areas Ordinance 2026 Update

Planning and Development Services

City Council Meeting
July 7, 2026
Ordinance No. 29114

Critical Areas Ordinance Update

- Comply with the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA)
- Maintain consistency with the One Tacoma Comprehensive Plan
- Incorporate new Best Available Science (BAS), requirements or guidelines
- Ensure no net loss of critical area functions and value



Wetlands



Fish & Wildlife
Habitat Conservation
Areas



Critical Aquifer
Recharge Areas



Geologically
Hazardous Areas



Flood Hazard
Areas

Public Notice and Engagement

- Social media
- Webpage
- Email distribution
- Notice to Puyallup Tribe
- Notices to State
- Press release
- Language Ambassadors

Other Engagement:

- Sustainability Expo – May 2, 2026
- Community Event – May 9, 2026
- Meetings with Puyallup Tribe
- Planning Commission Public Hearing and three Informational Meetings
- Meetings with environmental organizations, development community, and agencies
- Community Survey Online

3



Public Comments: Industry and Utility Comments

- **Comment:** Critical Aquifer Recharge Area (CARA) use consistency with the Tideflats Subarea Plan.
- **Comment:** Concerns about bonding requirements.
- **Comment:** Specific language in the reasonable use legal test and vegetated buffers sections could be clarified.
- **Comments:** There should be additional allowances for utility installations when no impacts occur.

Staff Response:

- CARA: The Planning Commission recommendation proposed the most conservative standards.
- Bonding: The current process is flexible enough to address concerns.
- Clarifications are supported by staff.
- New utilities could be added to existing allowances

4

Public Comments: Neighborhood and Ecology

- **Comments – Biodiversity Areas:** Clarity on vegetation composition needed.
- **Comments – Nesting Birds and Wildlife:** Require nesting bird surveys before clearing a site and independent ecological review
- **Comment:** Ecology recommends updating the definitions of ‘Mitigation’ and ‘Wetlands’ to align with GMA

Staff Response:

- **Biodiversity Areas:** The code could be clarified to ensure that all vegetation be evaluated.
- **Nesting birds:** Expanding critical areas review exceeds BAS/Gap analysis.
- **Definitions:** Both corrections should be incorporated into the code.



Next Steps and Schedule

July 14, 2026

Ordinance – Final Reading



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Tacoma