



## **MINUTES**

(Approved on February 4, 2026)

**MEETING:** Regular Meeting (hybrid)

**DATE/TIME:** Wednesday, May 21, 2025, 5:00 p.m.

**PRESENT:** Anthony Steele (Vice-Chair), Morgan Dörner, Robb Krehbiel, Brett Marlo (arrived at 5:03 p.m.), Matthew Martenson, Jordan Rash, Payton Swinford

**ABSENT:** Christopher Karnes (Chair)

### **A. Call to Order**

Vice-Chair Steele called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. A quorum was declared.

Vice-Chair Steele read the Land Acknowledgement.

### **B. Approval of Agenda**

*Commissioner Dörner moved to approve the agenda as submitted. Commissioner Rash seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.*

### **C. Approval of Minutes**

There were no meeting minutes to approve.

### **D. Public Comments**

There were no written comments received for public comment.

No individuals addressed the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Marlo arrived here at 5:03 p.m.

Public comment ended at 5:04 p.m.

### **E. Disclosure of Contacts and Recusals**

There were no disclosures of contacts or recusals.

### **F. Discussion Item**

#### **1. Critical Areas Ordinance Update**

Robin Bolster-Grant, Land Use Division Manager, and Lisa Spadoni, Natural Resources Program, presented the 2025 Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) update, including regulatory framework, the One Tacoma Comprehensive Plan update, CAO update requirements, Best Available Science (BAS) and Gap analysis, the South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District, public outreach, next step, and timeline.

Discussion ensued regarding the no net loss policy, climate change impacts, FEMA maps, tribal consultation and co-management possibility, replacement ratios, tree canopy, maps, stakeholder meetings, geological hazardous areas, and Category IV wetlands less than 4,000 square feet.

## H. Upcoming Meetings (Tentative Agendas)

- (1) Agenda for the June 4, 2025, meeting includes:
  - Tidelands Subarea Plan and EIS – Public Hearing
  - South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District – Debrief and Direction
- (2) Agenda for the June 18, 2025, meeting includes:
  - Tidelands Subarea Plan and EIS – Debrief
  - South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District – Recommendation

## I. Communication Items

The Commission acknowledged receipt of communication items on the agenda.

Stephen Atkinson, Principal Planner, provided updates on City Council Resolution No. 41682 – related to the Urban Forestry Program, new State planning requirements on housing and other topics of interest to the Commission, and staff departures and capacity impacts.

The Planning Commission recessed at 5:44 p.m. and reconvened at 6:00 p.m.

## G. Public Hearing

### 1. South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District (STGPD) Code Update

Vice-Chair Steele called the public hearing to order at 6:00 p.m. and outlined the public hearing procedures. The Commissioners introduced themselves.

Maryam Moeinian, Senior Planner, provided an overview of the STGPD code update, including background, the updated Work Plan, State regulations, Code review and recommendations, outreach and engagement, and next steps.

The following individuals provided testimony:

- (1) Kit Burns – I live in Tacoma. I've lived here for the last 35 years, or maybe even longer. What I want to do is speak on the ground water protection district. I have sent via email, some drawings and some comments, which you'll obviously get a copy of. My comments on these are related to certain things that I think would make this even more effective. I appreciate your volunteering. I'm a volunteer too, so we have that in common. What I want to do is make sure that the clarity of the Groundwater Protection District is adhered to. So one of my comments is to make sure there's a memo of understanding between the health department and the planning department on the process and procedures for implementing this. My dad was an airline pilot, and he flew for over 35 years. He landed 1000s of times. They took off 1000s of times, but he always had a checklist. This is complex enough that things could be missed if it's not down in writing, so I would like to have a memo of understanding of what that process and procedure is. Another comment I have is on the letter from environmental services from 2017 I believe it needs to be corrected and updated. I'm happy to meet with the planning commission and also staff to discuss about those specifically, although I've given some written information/documentation on that. Another item that I find falls through the crack - there's different ways you can locate information in a document. There's the wild goose chase, there's the Easter egg hunt, there's the horse hunt-which is very expensive, but you'll find it-and there's a snipe hunt-you'll look for it, but it's not there. So I want to make sure that this information is well organized, easy to find and clarity for people that are doing business in that area or development. Thank you.
- (2) Chad Sutter – I'm the owner of Sutter metals. I'm also the chair of the Environmental Services Commission for the City of Tacoma. I have to introduce myself to you, because you guys have never seen me, and I'm the only impacted business that the moratorium that you're about ready to put into place affects within the district. So it's almost like a "shame on you", in terms of, nobody's called me, nobody's reached out. Nobody's wanted to engage us on what we're doing, how it's going to impact us, essentially, what those changes are going to do to our business and the 58 families that we employ. It's a massive misstep from this commission when you guys started with

this moratorium and put it way down the road into this. We've made a significant investment into the city. We continue to plan. We continue to want to invest in this city and follow that track. But with this moratorium, it's going to make it incredibly hard. We want to be able to continue to provide great economic impact as well as good paying jobs to the citizens here. So it's hugely important to us that you engage with us and take time to hear our side as well, and we'll have more to share in our public comments that we send in via email. But I just wanted you guys to be able to see a face and understand what this really impacts as you guys move forward with your decisions. So I appreciate your time. Thank you.

- (3) Ryan Spence – I'm here on behalf of the Tacoma Pierce County Chamber and the Manufacturing Industrial Council to comment on the proposed amendments to the South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District. First, thank you for your continued efforts to support vibrant communities and economic growth across South Tacoma and the Tideflats. We value our partnership in this work. I want to acknowledge the success of the South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District. Since 1988, it has protected our aquifer and ensured access to clean drinking water. As noted by the Health Department on May 7, Tacoma Water reported no drinking water violations - proof that industry and environmental protection can coexist. We believe that the current health of the aquifer does not warrant the additional proposed prohibitions. These changes would place a disproportionate burden on industrial recyclers, businesses essential to the sustainable circular economy and are aligned with the city's Green Economy Strategy. Supporting these businesses is key to job creation and to meeting the needs of a growing region. Scaling operations would allow use of existing rail lines, reduce truck traffic emissions and congestion in South Tacoma. Industrial recycling also supports shipbuilding, manufacturing, construction sectors, while offering low barrier high wage jobs. It's critical that the city distinguish between permitted recyclers who meet environmental standards and operate with proper containment systems and unregulated pop-up scrap yards that lack oversight. We are also concerned that the vague language of the proposed stop work policy as written creates a risk of arbitrary enforcement without due process. Permitted businesses are already monitored by multiple agencies and have demonstrated compliance. Policy updates should reflect that. I would like to encourage the commission and the city to continue to partner with industry in order to ensure that we are maximizing community and economic benefit through sound, evidence-based policy. Thank you for your time and consideration.
- (4) Heidi Stephens – I have not submitted my written comments yet, as I'm still reviewing the proposed changes. Because despite submitting the annual amendment over four years ago for this update, we were not allowed to be part of the actual code review or drafting, unlike applicants of other amendments. In our original amendment application from March of 2021, as well as the moratoriums intention, which were both resident-driven proposals, not instigated by the city, pending countless public comments regarding the mega warehouse, we spelled out specific agencies in modern day best science direction, including input from an independent, internationally known expert hydrogeologist of the data needed going forward. Sadly, this many years later, the city has deliberately avoided proper study at appropriate agencies, and to my great dismay and utter disbelief, has still not included impervious surface standards after decades of improperly omitting critical area reviews from aquifer recharge area development. This commission has repeatedly asked for benchmarking of other jurisdictions in the county regarding impervious surfaces, which again was referred to but not detailed tonight, most all other jurisdictions have impervious surface limits, but that was completely glossed over this evening. This is a sole source aquifer, more precious than gold, with the highest recharge directly within South Tacoma, and can never be replaced, but this is being squandered by the city at the most critical time of pending climate change, while not applying basic geohydrology measures to protect infiltration for groundwater levels before it's too late. Sutter Metal should have never been approved in the first place to operate directly over the most environmentally sensitive aquifer area, and the code does not currently include all contaminants that it should. This entire process in the currently proposed update, had been extremely disappointing, and I ask that this commission think for itself and not be so easily led and misled by the city. Thank you.
- (5) Cathie Urwin – I am a South Tacoma resident, District three, and also another volunteer. I wanted to let you know that I will be submitting comments written with more specific information and

comments details with this code update. I also wanted to share that the informational meeting last week that I attended - I counted six residents there, and it was very helpful to be able to talk with different people from different departments. I really appreciated that. And it was especially helpful to be able to talk to the consultants directly. My question that I have not yet had answered by the planners all this time has been, was the Bridge Industrial Project even factored into the loss of impervious surfaces within the South Tacoma area? The consultant's answer was no. They were told not to include information on the Bridge Industrial Project with their best available science studies. So therefore, why are we calling this best available science? Because they chose to ignore a project that has significant impacts on the aquifer, with regards to infiltration, impossible water impurities. I am concerned that we are moving forward and that the planning department has taken an approach of keeping the public minimally informed, not offering more than a South Tacoma meeting. We actually had somebody at that informational meeting last week who said she never received any information about this update. She discovered it by accident, and she said, "I do live within the South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District area, but I live in the south end and never received any information on it." So this is a very different situation than what we saw with the neighborhood planning program. And this is not a situation where, apparently the planners want the residents talking with any of the consultants that have been doing the science part. This is a very disappointing process. Thank you.

- (6) Jamie C – I'm a Tacoma Community member and member of Climate Alliance of the South Sound. We have attended as Climate Alliance many of the moratorium updates. And I just want to echo what the elders before me said about and the people before me said about the impervious surface and the South Tacoma mega warehouse. At the last City Council Study Session in the summer, Council Member Scott asked, what would be the impact of adding impervious services to the moratorium, to the update, and it just got ignored. "It would take too much time." "Oh, we haven't reviewed it before, so we'd have to review it now." This is the whole point of an update, is it not? Is to review these things, you've continuously ignored the community, and really, I see it as you bowing down to business instead of listening to your constituents. I understand that business is on the top of y'all mind. I even have a family member who worked for the concrete company that poured all of that concrete over our aquifer for the mega warehouse. Okay, I understand. But guess what? My family member also needs to breathe clean air and drink clean water. Without those things, they don't have a job because they don't have a life. So let's start prioritizing the life of our community over the money of big businesses that are already rich, that aren't even local to here. They're local to Chicago, and they're off putting their pollution on this the people of South Tacoma, specifically, which is a historically red lined neighborhood that you are contributing to environmental racism. So this is just ridiculous. Honestly, I'm speaking more to the community here than to y'all because you clearly don't listen to the constituents. Thank you.
- (7) Gemini – I just bought a house in District three in Tacoma, and I'm pregnant. I'm about to have a baby. So, you know, this is really, really exciting. A lot of things I'm really excited about, but more than ever, is it important to me, on a personal level, that this Groundwater Protection District be as strong as possible. We cannot afford, we cannot afford to pave over more of our aquifer. Pave over more of our areas. Like I said, I'm pregnant right now, and diesel exhausts and all the negative consequences of the mega warehouse that was allowed to be built in South Tacoma can cause birth defects. They can cause early or premature births. And I have been coming to this city council meetings and these hearings for years talking about the problems in Tacoma, specifically around South Tacoma, and if something happens to my baby, I'm going to hold you guys personally accountable, because the way that you have ignored our pleas and our demands, and the way that you have silenced us as we come to the city council meetings is shocking and, quite frankly, disturbing. So I think that it is never too late for you to start listening to the voices of your constituents and actually put the protections in place that we need. But again, like Jamie already said, I'm not super confident that you're going to do that. So this is for everybody else who's listening. Let's stand up. Let's fight back. Let's not let them pave over our children's futures. Thank you.

Vice-Chair Steele closed the public hearing at 6:41 p.m.

## **J. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:41 p.m.

*\*These minutes are not a direct transcription of the meeting, but rather a brief capture. For full-length audio recording of the meeting, please visit: <https://tacoma.gov/planningcommission>*