South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District Code Update

City of Tacoma | Planning and Development Services

City Council Study Session
August 12, 2025

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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

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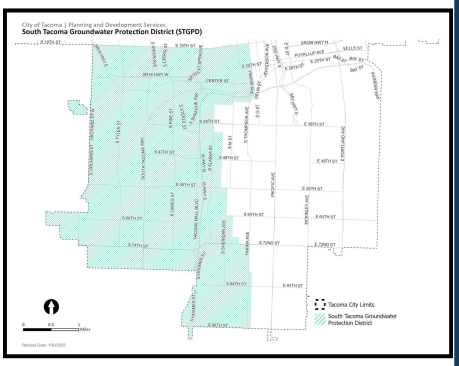
STGPD Background

- 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)



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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

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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

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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)

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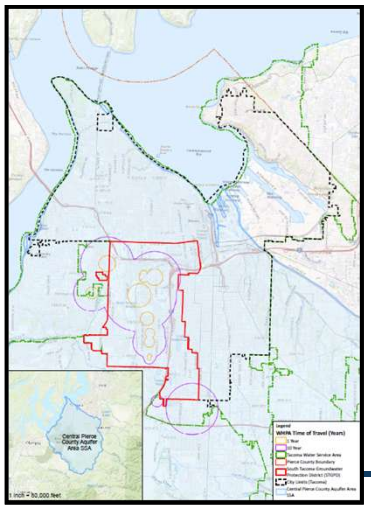
Map Refinements

- **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**



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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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