

SEPA Thresholds Update Legislation

Land Use Committee Briefing
October 31, 2025



Outline of Topics

- Objectives
- Key findings
- Proposed changes
- Non-residential SEPA thresholds
- Relationship to growth estimates
- Archaeological resources code, rule
- Transportation topics



Objectives

- Adopt State guidance for streamlining SEPA environmental review
- Speed housing production and encourage transit-oriented development
- Support small- and medium-sized businesses with easier permitting
- Streamline and clarify code and review processes
- Document existing code requirements that provide mitigation

Key Findings

- New Comprehensive Plan emphasizes citywide planning, especially for housing, and we should align SEPA review consistently with that
- “SEPA infill development” provisions* may be used citywide
 - This would exempt residential and mixed-use developments from SEPA review citywide until planned-for growth citywide is met
- Certain non-residential development will still require SEPA review
- Codes provide effective protection, SEPA mitigation is rarely imposed

* RCW 43.21C.229

Proposed Changes

- SEPA exemption for infill developments with housing, except for:
 - Shorelines, environmentally critical areas, historic locations
- Exemptions to last until citywide planned-for growth is achieved
- Align SDCI practices to State archaeological resource protections
 - Update a Director's Rule, update the grading code
- Update a non-SEPA transportation impact study
- Consolidate and clarify TMP, CMP requirements

Non-Residential SEPA Thresholds

- Stand-alone non-residential uses, align with State's limits:
 - 65,000 sq.ft. for most uses
 - 30,000 sq.ft. for retail uses
- Other:
 - Stand-alone parking lot greater than 90 spaces
 - 1,000+ cubic yards of grading
 - Large tank > 10,000 gallons or 60,000 gallons on industrial land

Relationship to Planned Growth Estimates

- Monitor growth at citywide level
- Replace infill targets of Urban Centers and Villages, and low zone-by-zone thresholds with Citywide growth targets
- Once Citywide targets are met, SEPA thresholds automatically revert to:
 - 200 dwelling units
 - 30,000 square feet of non-residential use

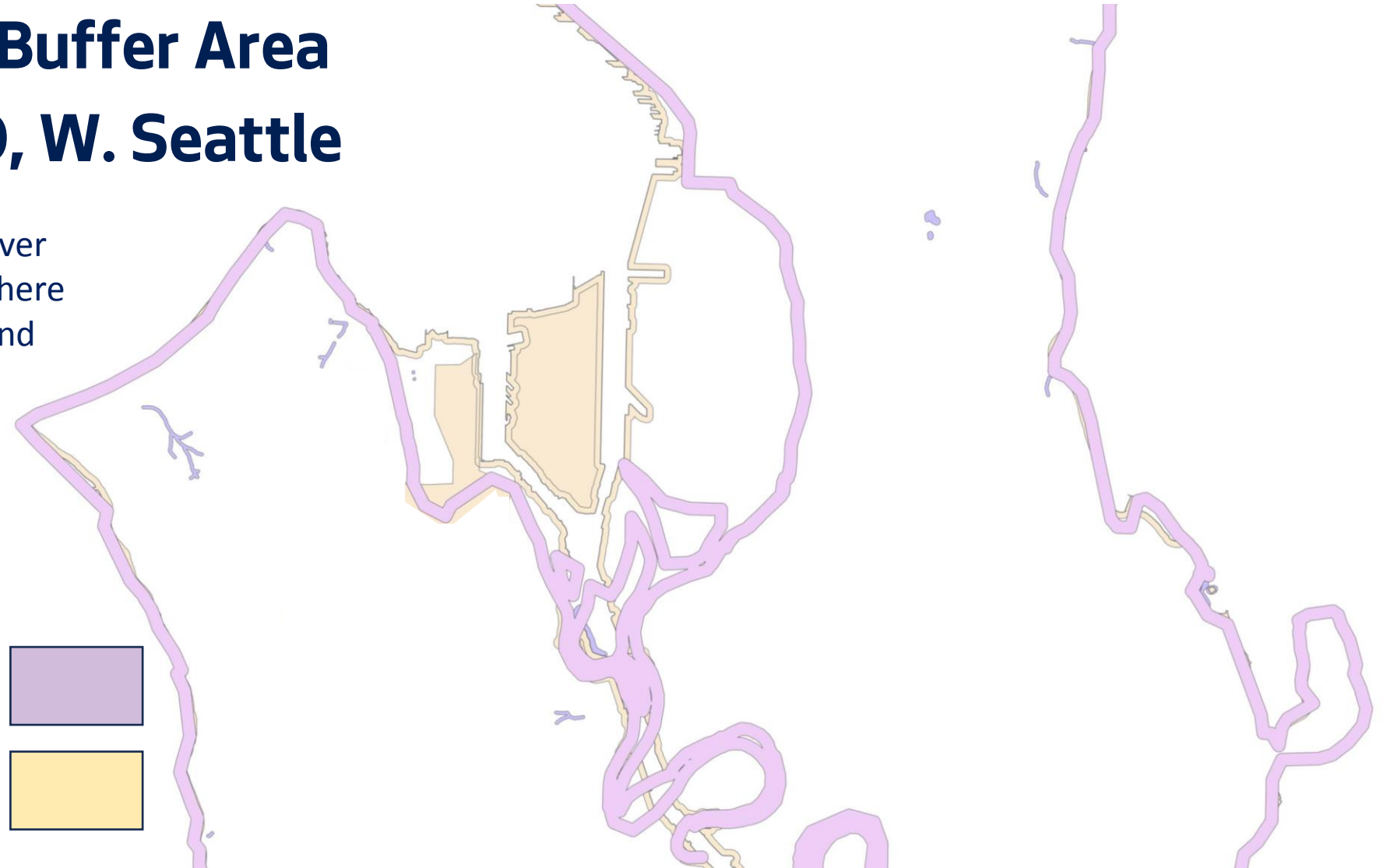
Update Archaeological Resource Protection

- Update SDCI Director's Rule to match State law
 - Keep the ability for pre-development assessments
 - Research historic info/literature
 - Evaluate soil characteristics if grading
 - Possible archaeologist site visit, on-site testing, and mitigation plan
 - If inadvertent discovery occurs, State law applies (stop work)
- Add grading review requirements in areas more likely to contain resources—"meander line buffer" areas

Meander Line Buffer Area

Excerpt: SODO, W. Seattle

This area includes former river and bay shoreline edges, where Indigenous peoples lived, and cultural resources may be present.



Retain Non-SEPA Transportation Impact Study

- Larger SEPA exempt projects will require transportation impact analysis (TIA):
 - 40,000+ square feet in stand-alone non-residential uses and mixed-use developments
- Not required in regional centers or major transit service areas; these areas already have good transportation access

Transportation & Construction Management Plans

- Transportation Management Plans (TMPs) are a Comprehensive Plan strategy for managing traffic congestion
 - SDOT-monitored incentives to use bus, light rail, carpool, bicycles, instead of single-occupant vehicles
 - Required in several zones
 - Simplify code: Restate existing TMP thresholds by building floor area or unit count, consolidate in Chapter 23.52
- Construction Management Plans (CMPs) are an SDOT strategy for managing construction traffic impacts on traffic flow, pedestrian safety, etc.
 - Establish a new size-based threshold for CMPs at: >25,000 sq.ft. or 25 residential units

Project Referrals to WSDOT

- WSDOT seeks referrals of proposed development projects in places where State facilities may be impacted, such as:
 - Freeway on-ramps
 - State routes such as SR 99 (Aurora Avenue)
- City department practices updated to refer permits to WSDOT
 - Fulfills a State request related to WAC 197-11-800(1), [WSDOT outreach]

Questions?

Gordon Clowers, SDCI Senior Urban Planner
gordon.clowers@seattle.gov

David Van Skike, SDCI Interim Policy Director
david.vanskike@seattle.gov

www.seattle.gov/sdci

