

Legislative Summary 2026 Stormwater Code Update March 6, 2026

Overview

The primary purpose of this legislation and update of associated SPU/SDCI Directors' Rule (Stormwater Manual) is to comply with the 2024–2029 Phase I Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permit (Permit) issued by the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) under federal and state water quality laws.

In addition to maintaining Seattle's compliance with state and federal water quality permits, there are independent City policy and usability improvements developed using best available science including:

- Aligning requirements with recent land use code updates
- Modernizing technical standards to reflect current science and Ecology guidance
- Supporting City priorities related to urban greening, resilience, and water quality
- Improving clarity and predictability for applicants and reviewers

To meet the Permit requirements, all code and rule updates must be adopted and take effect no later than **July 1, 2026**.

Background

The Permit was issued by the Ecology under both the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program established by the federal Clean Water Act and the State of Washington Water Pollution Control Law. The Permit was issued on July 1, 2024, and became effective on August 1, 2024.

The Permit requires that the City's Stormwater Code and associated Stormwater Manual include minimum requirements, thresholds, definitions, and other specified requirements, limitations and criteria, determined by Ecology to be equivalent to Appendix 1 of the Permit for new development, redevelopment, and construction. In addition, stormwater facilities and maintenance provisions must be at least as protective of facility function as, and source control provisions must be functionally equivalent to, Ecology's Stormwater Management Manual for Western Washington (SWMMWW, Ecology 2024).

The purpose of the City of Seattle's Stormwater Code (Chapters 22.800 – 22.808 SMC) is to protect life, property, public health, and the environment from the adverse impacts of urban stormwater runoff. Adverse impacts can include flooding, water pollution, landslides, and erosion. The Stormwater Code was substantially updated in 2009 and revised in 2015, 2016, and 2021.

The Code applies broadly to:

- Land disturbing activity
- Drainage and erosion control
- Discharges to public drainage, combined sewer systems, or receiving waters
- New and existing development and land uses

The Code is implemented through the Seattle Stormwater Manual, issued jointly by SPU and SDCI, and consists of the following sections:

- Volume 1 – Project Minimum Requirements (pursuant to the Stormwater Code Minimum Requirements)
- Volume 2 – Construction Stormwater Control
- Volume 3 – Project Stormwater Control
- Volume 4 – Source Control
- Volume 5 – Enforcement
- Appendices

Summary of Legislation

The proposed updates and modifications to the Stormwater Code and Manual will affect administration, source control, development, and construction site stormwater pollution prevention control. A Table of Key Changes on SDCI's Stormwater Code and Manual Update 2026 website provides detailed lists of key changes to the code and manual¹.

Summary of Key Changes

These changes are necessary to maintain the City's permit coverage:

- Updated definitions, thresholds, and requirements to match the Permit and SWMMWW including adding "Common Plan of Development or Sale".
- Revised utility work and pavement maintenance exemptions.
- Clarified vesting dates, thresholds, and "closely related projects" provisions.
- Updated drainage control review and application thresholds to ensure adequate erosion and construction stormwater review in dense urban settings.
- Modified roadway project thresholds, including removal of the 5,000 sq. ft. "new hard surface" trigger and use of combined "new plus replaced" surfaces.
- Updated metals treatment standards (terminology and thresholds).
- Revised wetland protection method for winter volume matching flexibility.

The following key updates were not equivalency related but made for consistency with current City policy including supporting housing development, increasing tree canopy, and improving water quality outcomes:

- Alignment with current Land Use Code updates, including removal of outdated single-family terminology.
- Expanded and refined on-site stormwater management BMP options to:
- Strengthened requirements for use of infiltration best management practices (BMPs) to the maximum extent feasible to support stream interflow.
- Revised ensure sufficient capacity threshold to address changing drainage patterns during construction.
- Added provisions to address water quality from pollution-generating surfaces not previously discharging to receiving waters.

¹ See Stormwater Code and Manual Update 2026 [Project Documents page](#) to access January 2026 second public review draft of Stormwater Manual (Volumes 1-5, Appendices A-J) and summary of changes document.

- Softening flow control thresholds for some parcel-based projects draining to small lakes or capacity-constrained systems (2,000 → 5,000 square feet.).
- Added direction for projects where wetland protection standards conflict with other requirements.
- Added exception regarding landscape areas (including artificial turf sports fields) requiring metals treatment.
- Clarified and streamlined drainage review processes.

Public Participation

Public outreach began in October 2024 and included a series of virtual public meetings to inform stakeholders about proposed Stormwater Code updates and to gather feedback. Participants included representatives from:

- Development and building industries
- Environmental advocacy organizations
- Regional and state agencies
- Engineering and consulting firms

Outreach included:

- 2024 industry listening session
- Public meetings in 2025 and January 2026
- Two public comment periods, the last ending February 9, 2026

Additional outreach methods included:

- Stormwater code update website
- Announcements distributed through the SDCI Stormwater Code Listserv and SPU Development Services Office (DSO) Subscribers Listserv
- Articles published in SDCI’s Building Connection Newsletter
- Information shared at Master Builders Association meetings

These efforts supported early awareness, technical input, and broader stakeholder engagement in advance of the legislative process. The dates and content of the virtual public meetings (**bold**), list serv announcements, the Building Connection newsletter, and meetings are shown below.

Date	Meetings, Announcements, Newsletters, Updates
12/11/2024	Listening Session with Developers, Builders, Design/Engineering Community
12/15/2024	Listening Session with Port of Seattle
5/8/2025	SDCI Building Connections Newsletter Announcement – General information and What’s Coming Up
5/8/2025	SDCI Listserv Announcement - General Information and What’s Coming Up
5/29/2025	DSO Listserv Newsletter Announcement – Save the Date for First Public Review Draft and Meeting
5/29/2025	SDCI Listserv Announcement - Save the Date for First Public Review Draft and Meeting
7/1/2025	SDCI Listserv Announcement – Public Meeting Details and Registration Info

Date	Meetings, Announcements, Newsletters, Updates
7/7/2025	SDCI Listserv Announcement – Documents Available and Repeat of Public Meeting Details and Registration Info
7/14/2025	SDCI Listserv Announcement – Public Meeting Reminder
7/15/2025	1st Public Meeting
7/22/2025	SDCI Listserv Announcement – Public Meeting Recording Available Online
8/11/2025	SDCI Listserv Announcement – Reminder to Provide Comments
8/22/2025	Mayor's Office Briefing - SW Code Update
9/3/2025	SDCI Listserv Announcement – Fall Listening Session Registration
9/3/2025	DSO Listserv Newsletter Announcement – Fall Listening Session Registration
9/15/2025	DWW LOB E-Team WQ BMP ROW Briefing
9/22/2025	SDCI Listserv Announcement – Fall Listening Session Reminder and Response to Comments Available Online
9/23/2025	DSO Listserv Newsletter Announcement- Fall Listening Session Reminder and Response to Comments Available Online
9/25/2025	Fall Listening Session with General Public
9/18/2025	Mayor's Office Weekly
10/15/2025	Listening Session with Port of Seattle
10/20/2025	Listening Session with Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
11/25/2025	SDCI Listserv Announcement – 2nd Public Meeting Details and Registration
11/26/2025	DSO Listserv Newsletter Announcement - 2nd Public Meeting Details and Registration
12/1/2025	SDCI Building Connections Newsletter Announcement - 2nd Public Meeting Details and Registration
12/16/2025	SDCI Listserv Announcement – Reminder: Second Public Meeting Details and Registration
12/17/2025	DSO Listserv Newsletter Announcement – Reminder: 2nd Public Meeting Details and Registration
1/5/2026	SDCI Building Connections Newsletter Announcement - 2nd Public Meeting Details and Registration
1/7/2026	SDCI Listserv Announcement – Public Meeting Reminder and Documents Available Online
1/7/2026	DSO Listserv Newsletter Announcement - Public Meeting Reminder and Documents Available Online
1/12/2026	SDCI Listserv Announcement – Public Meeting Reminder
1/13/2026	DSO Listserv Announcement – Public Meeting Reminder
1/14/2026	2nd Public Meeting
1/22/2026	SDCI Listserv Announcement – Public Meeting Materials Available Online, Public Comment Reminder, and Clarifications
1/22/2026	DSO Listserv Newsletter Announcement - Public Meeting Materials Available Online, Public Comment Reminder, and Clarifications