

# Permanent Floodplain Development Regulations

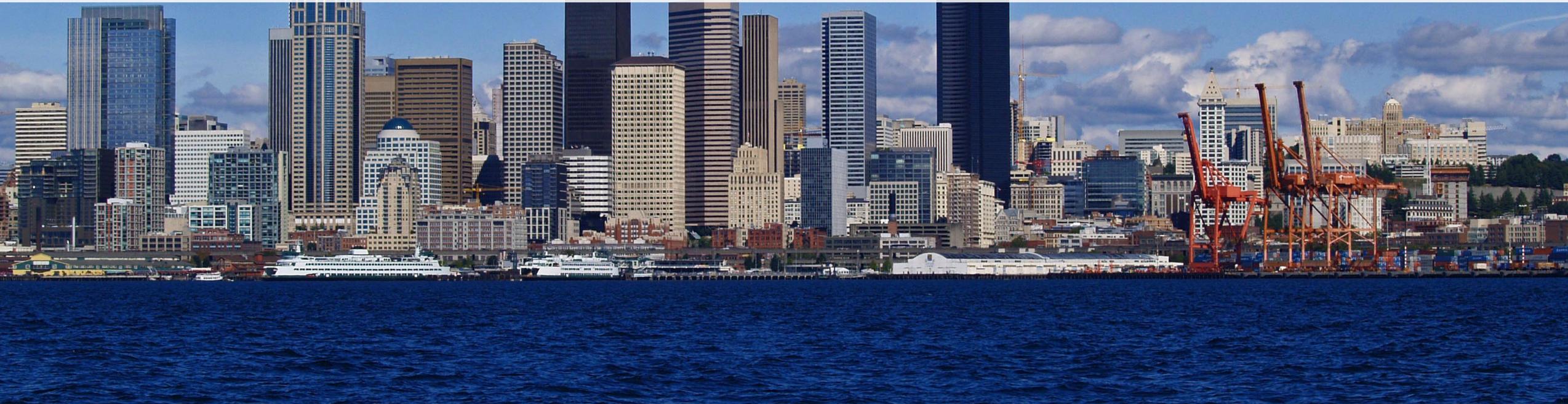


Photo by John Skelton



**Seattle** Department of  
Construction & Inspections

Land Use & Sustainability Committee

February 18, 2026

# FLOODPLAIN DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

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- Overview of floodplain regulations & reason for update
- Interim regulations & Ext 1 - 10
- Permanent regulations 1<sup>st</sup> proposal  
SEPA Decision & Port appeal
- 2<sup>nd</sup> proposal SEPA Decision +  
Addendum
- Final Proposed Permanent Floodplain  
Regulations



# OVERVIEW OF FLOODPLAIN DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

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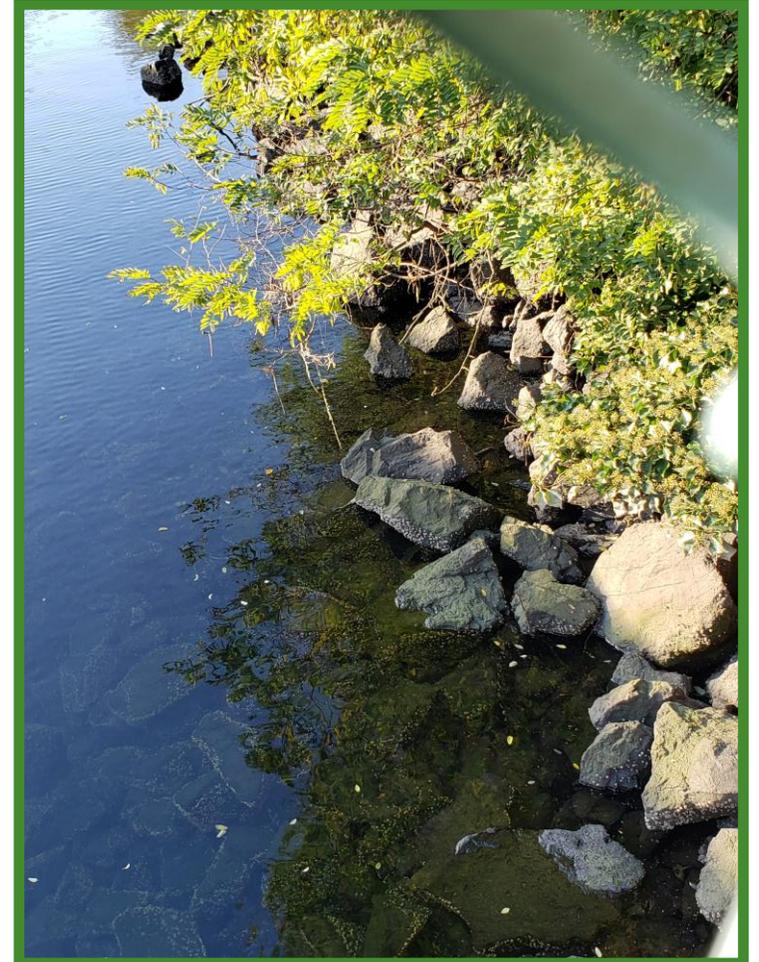
- Seattle City Codes – development standards that make homes, businesses, and people safer from flooding
- Mapped Areas -
  - **Floodplain** - FEMA special flood hazard areas;
  - **Flood-prone** - Growth Management Act (GMA) Environmentally Critical Areas
- Our codes apply to permit applications for construction on property within mapped areas



# FEMA & DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY

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- FEMA – establishes the maps of the special flood hazard areas and the minimum required standards for the regulations
- Minimum requirements – Code Federal Regulations 44 CFR 60.3
  - Where development can occur;
  - Elevation of development measured from expected flooding elevation (BFE); and
  - Methods for construction
- Ecology w/FEMA established a model code that includes standards that are recommended/optional



# REGULATIONS AND PROPERTY OWNERS

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- Floodplain regulations required for:
  - Communities to participate in National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)
  - Property owners to attain federally backed mortgages
  - Federal funding for mitigating flood risk
- Property owners required to comply with regulations for development
- SDCI required to implement and enforce floodplain regulations



Photo by David Hutchinson

# WHY DO WE NEED THE UPDATE?

- February 2020 - FEMA updated floodplain maps for King County
- All jurisdiction in King County required to update existing floodplain maps with new maps
- Review and update codes to meet FEMA standards in 40 CFR 60.3
- Update required by August 2020



# SPECIAL FLOOD HAZARD AREA - ZONE TYPES

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*General descriptions of Flood Zone, X, AE, AO and VE are provided below.*

***Flood Zone X*** is an area with a moderate or low risk of flooding, with a 1% or less chance of experiencing a flood in a given year. (Further details: “shaded X” areas have a flood risk between 0.2% and 1% chance in a given year, and “unshaded X” areas are lower than the 0.2% chance level).

***Flood Zone AE*** is an SFHA designated as a high-risk flood zone because of its proximity to floodplains, rivers, lakes, and other bodies of water. Flood Zone AE areas have a 1% risk of flooding annually.

***Flood Zone AO*** is an SFHA designated as a high-risk flood zone with a 1% risk of flooding annually. Flooding risk is associated with sheet-flow with average depth of one to three feet.

***Flood Zone VE*** is a high-risk coastal SFHA with a 1% or greater chance of annual flooding, and an additional hazard associated with storm waves (where wave action and fast-moving water can cause damage during a base flood event).

# NEW MAPS

- February 2020 - FEMA updated maps for King County
- Main change is in the Duwamish and areas along Puget Sound
- Map Legend

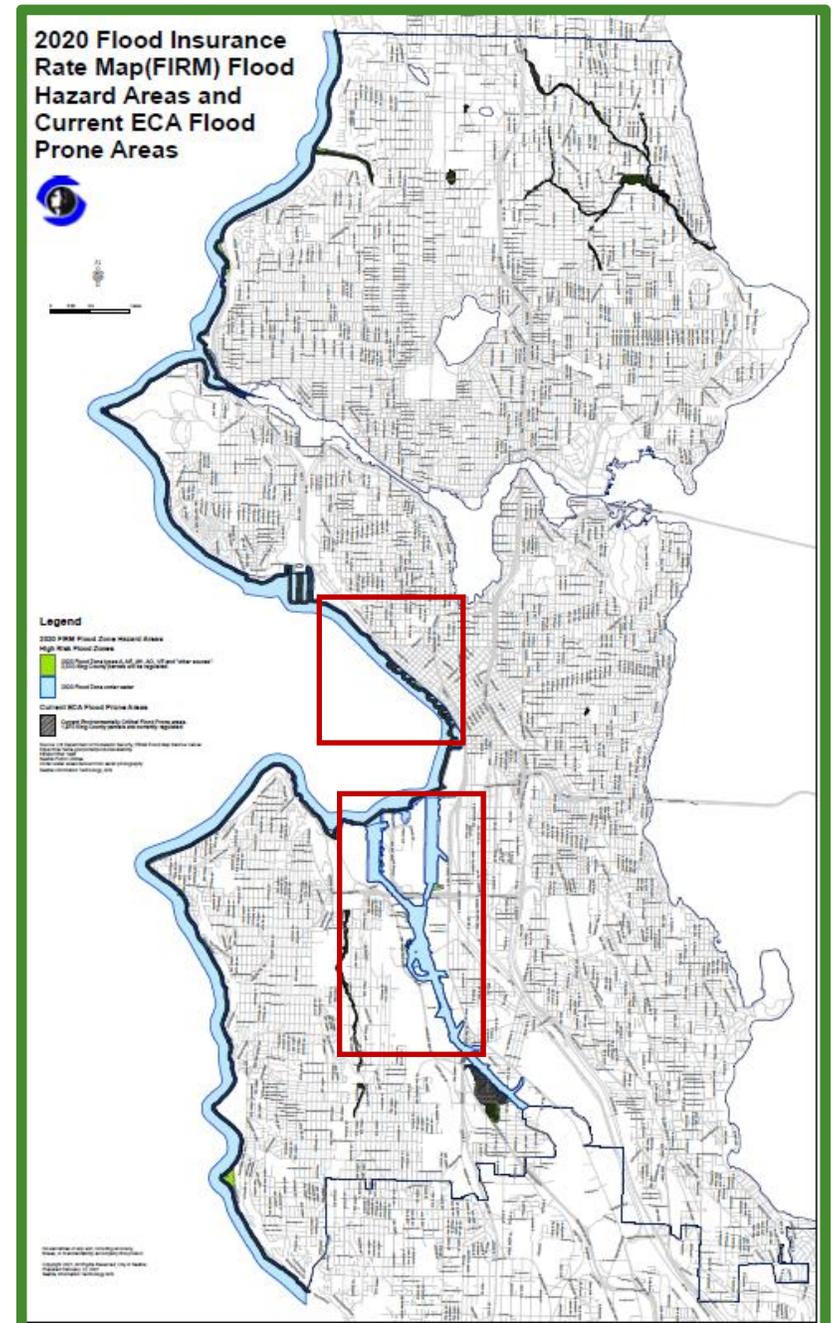
## 2020 FIRM Flood Zone Hazard Areas High Risk Flood Zones

-  2020 Flood Zone types A, AE, AH, AO, VE and "other sources".  
2,033 King County parcels will be regulated.
-  2020 Flood Zone under water

## Current ECA Flood Prone Areas

-  Current Environmentally Critical Flood Prone areas.  
1,970 King County parcels are currently regulated.

Source: US Department of Homeland Security, FEMA Flood Map Service Center  
<https://msc.fema.gov/portal/productAvailability>  
FEMA FIRM 1996  
Seattle Public Utilities  
Under water areas derived from aerial photography  
Seattle Information Technology, GIS



# PERMANENT REGULATIONS & PORT APPEAL

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- Draft permanent floodplain development regulations completed in June 2021
- Published SEPA decision on proposal on July 8, 2021
- SEPA decision appealed by the Port of Seattle on July 29, 2021
- SDCI withdrew the SEPA decision, and the appeal was dismissed February 18, 2022
- Working with Port staff to resolve issues raised since August 2021

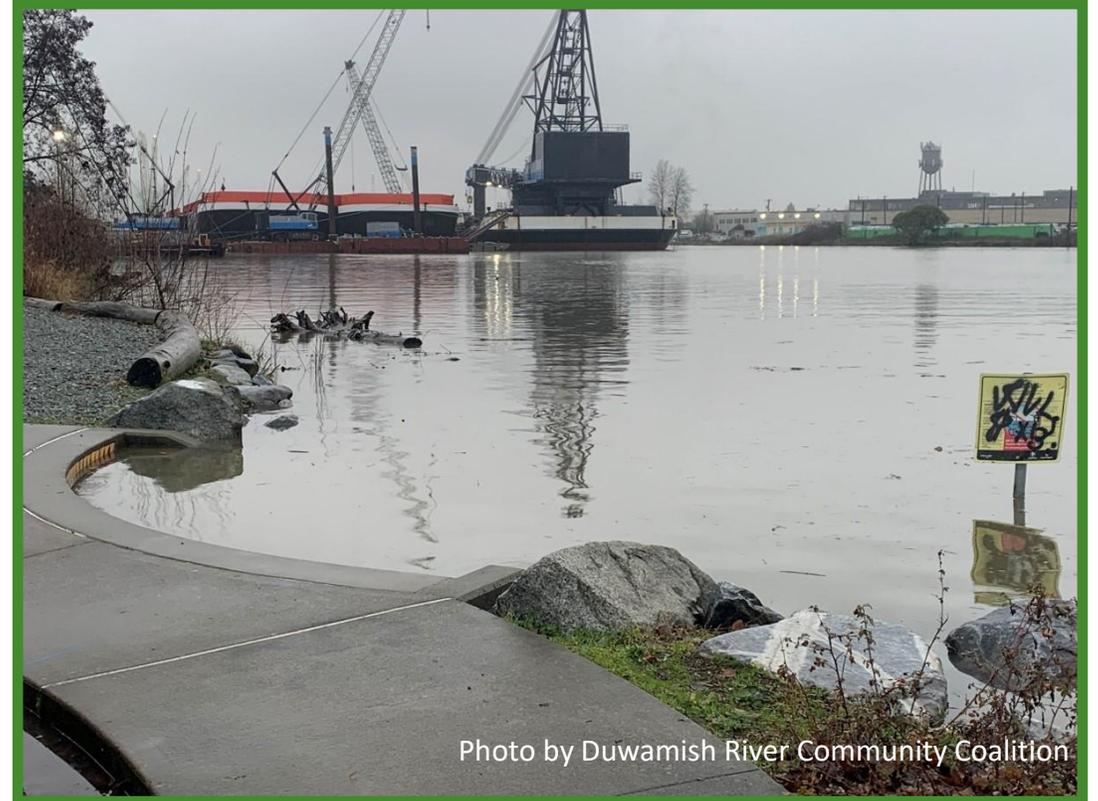


Photo by Duwamish River Community Coalition

# COORDINATION WITH PORT

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- Regular meetings with Port staff since August 2021
- Updated proposed permanent regulations - many clarifications on standards
- FEMA approved final proposed permanent regulations



# OVERVIEW OF MAIN CHANGES TO FLOODPLAIN REGULATIONS

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- Duwamish River and Harbor Island newly mapped areas
- Elliott Bay and Puget Sound changed from Zone A & X to Zone VE
- Shifts in mapped areas along Longfellow Creek and Thornton Creek
- In some areas elevation standards were decreased from + 2-ft elevation to 0-ft and increased from + 2-ft elevation to + 3-ft
- Included the minimum standards for storage



# AREAS WHERE DESIGNATION CHANGED FROM X 1995 TO VE 2020

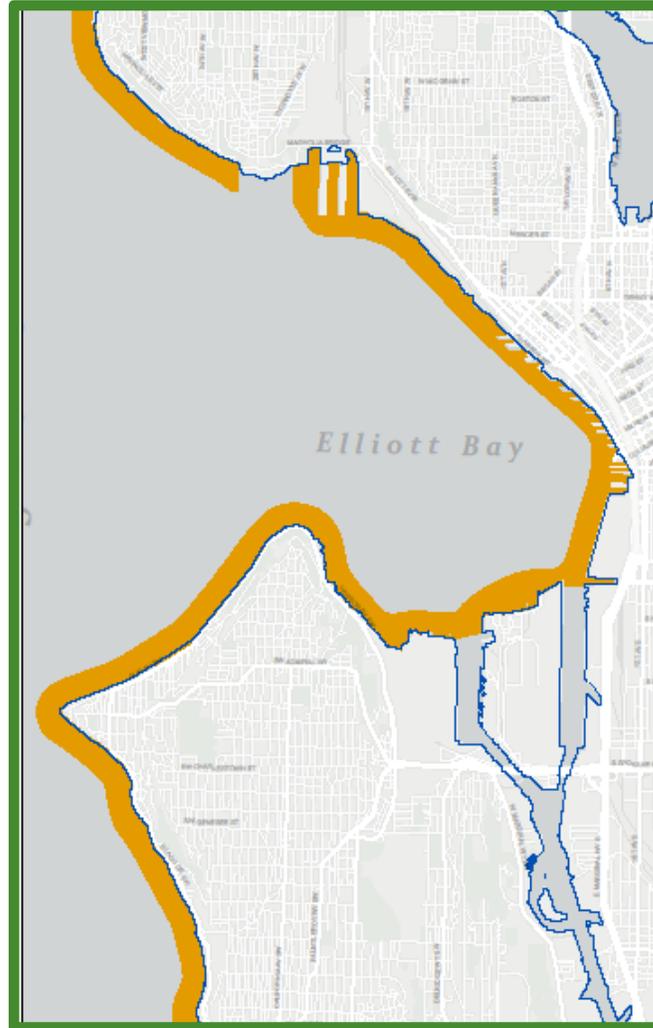
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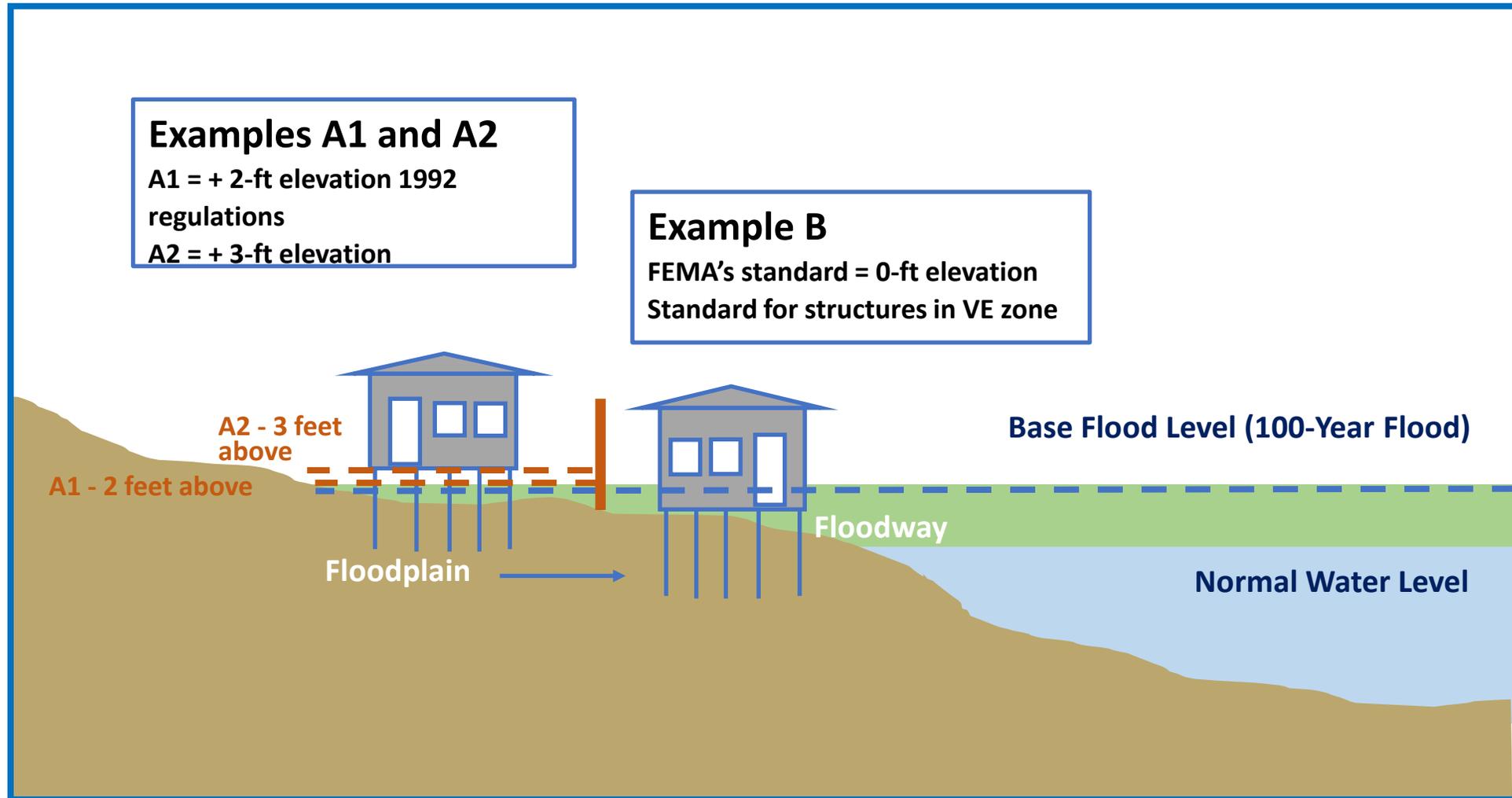


# AREAS WHERE DESIGNATION CHANGED FROM A 1995 TO VE 2020

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# BASE FLOOD ELEVATION



# AMENDMENTS TO THE PROPOSAL SINCE AUGUST 2024 SEPA PROPOSAL

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1. Change the minimum elevation requirement for the VE Zone to BFE and change other certain development scenarios in the A Zone
2. Replace specific standards for the storage of materials and equipment, including hazardous material, with the general provision that these uses are prohibited unless stored in a structure that meets the standards of the regulations or that they are stored in a manner that is reasonably safe from flooding.

# AMENDMENTS TO THE PROPOSAL SINCE AUGUST 2024 SEPA PROPOSAL CONTINUED

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3. Removed from the critical facilities definition “installations that use, or store hazardous materials or hazardous waste”
4. Tables - corrected information about size of areas for each type of change between the 1995 and 2020 FEMA maps.
5. Maps - updated map and graphic information to better portray affected areas.

# QUESTIONS?

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