



City of Medical Lake
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8/27/2026 Planning Commission Meeting

To: Planning Commission
From: Elisa Rodriguez, Senior Planner
TOPIC: Periodic Update: MLMC amendments regarding Critical Areas

Requested Action:

Provide feedback and guidance on potential amendments regarding critical areas to the Medical Lake Municipal Code (MLMC).

Key Points:

The Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) requires jurisdictions to identify and protect five categories of critical areas:

- Wetlands
- Frequently flooded areas
- Fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas
- Geologically hazardous areas
- Critical aquifer recharge areas (CARAs)

The City's Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO), codified as Chapter 17.10 of the Medical Lake Municipal Code, was comprehensively updated through Ordinance No. 1108 in March 2023. The update incorporated the best available science at that time, including the Washington State Department of Ecology's *Wetland Guidance for Critical Area Ordinance Updates*.

Ecology released revised wetland guidance in October 2022 while the City's CAO update was underway. Staff will compare the adopted 2023 provisions against that guidance and recommend amendments where necessary.

The City of Medical Lake has not previously adopted regulations addressing Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas. Following adoption of the 2023 CAO, City staff were notified by the Washington State Department of Commerce that the City is required to adopt CARA regulations. A primary challenge is that the specific aquifer supplying the City's municipal water system has not been identified. Consequently, it is unclear whether the aquifer is particularly vulnerable to surface contamination or susceptible to reduced recharge.

Additionally, the City's municipal wellheads are located within unincorporated Spokane County. While protecting these facilities remains a priority, the City does not have regulatory authority over lands outside its jurisdiction; therefore, Spokane County is responsible for regulating activities in those areas. Nevertheless, the City must address CARAs within its municipal code and implement measures to protect groundwater resources. Proposed code language will focus on activities that could affect groundwater quality and the draft regulations are expected to include the use of state-approved best management practices and all known, available, and reasonable methods of prevention, control, and treatment to minimize the risk of pollutant releases to soil and groundwater.

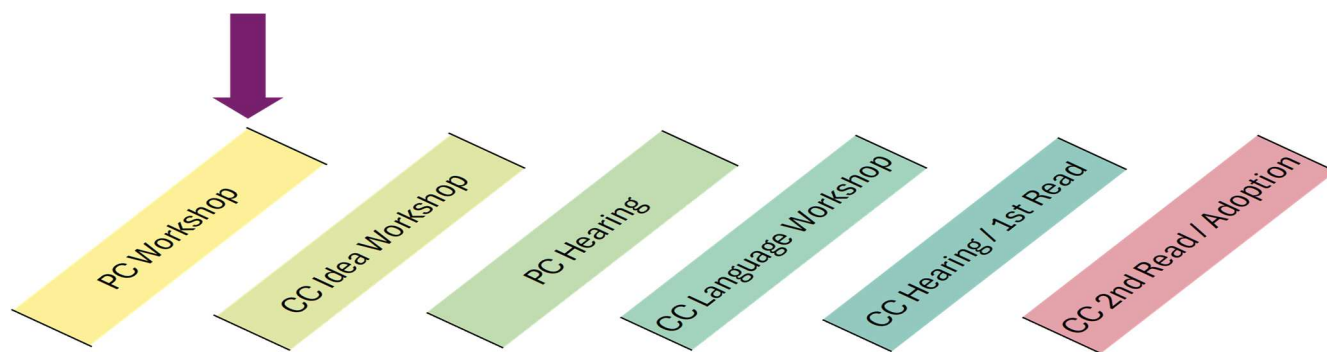
Prior to the 2023 update, the City's CAO included provisions addressing geologically hazardous areas. Those provisions were removed during the 2023 revision because available mapping and data were insufficient to accurately identify and regulate such hazards. At the time, the City's primary source of information was a 2004 steep-slope map included in the Comprehensive Plan, which did not provide sufficient scale, detail, or coverage to support updated regulations addressing the full range of geologic hazards recognized under the GMA. Since then, additional research and data collection have been completed, and staff will develop code revisions to address the specific geologic hazards known to exist within the City.

In April 2026, Spokane County published an updated *Best Available Science Review for Critical Areas*. As a jurisdiction located within Spokane County, the City may rely on this information to support updates to its Critical Areas Ordinance and ensure consistency with current scientific guidance.

Background Discussion:

The first Medical Lake CAO was adopted in 1994 and amended in 2010. The 2023 update replaced the entire chapter.

This workshop is the first step in a 6-meeting process for adopting amendments to the municipal code.



Public Involvement:

A public hearing will be held with both the Planning Commission and the City Council. In addition, language will be provided on the City website for review and comment by the public.

Next Steps:

After a workshop with the City Council on September 1, 2026, amendment language will be provided to the Planning Commission prior to the public hearing on September 24, 2026. At that meeting, the Planning Commission will be expected to make a recommendation to the City Council.