



City of Medical Lake Planning Department

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STAFF REPORT TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION

File: Periodic Update: MLMC Critical Areas

Date of Staff Report: September 17, 2026

Date of Hearing: September 24, 2026

Staff Planner: Elisa Rodriguez 509-565-5019 or erodriguez@medical-lake.org

SEPA: Determination of Non-Significance was made on August 28, 2026

Procedure: This request requires a legislative review, therefore, the Planning Commission will hold a public hearing and make a recommendation to the City Council. The City Council will hold a public hearing to consider an ordinance to adopt the amendments to the Medical Lake Municipal Code. The complete process can be found in the Medical Lake Municipal Code (MLMC), Section 19.270.050 – Type IV Reviews.

Proposal: It is proposed to amend the Critical Areas Ordinance, also known as Chapter 17.10 of the Medical Lake Municipal Code, to add sections for Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas and Geologically Hazardous Areas, and to update the Wetland standards to conform with the best available science as presented in Department of Ecology guidance.

Summary: The proposed amendments update the City of Medical Lake Critical Areas Ordinance as part of the State Growth Management Act periodic update process. The amendments reorganize the chapter for clarity, add comprehensive regulations for Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas and Geologically Hazardous Areas, and update wetland standards to reflect current Washington Department of Ecology guidance. The amendments are intended to ensure continued protection of critical areas while providing a predictable permitting framework for property owners and development applicants.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

SEPA DNS Issued – August 28, 2026

Notice of a Public Hearing Published in Cheney Free Press – August 27, 2026

Public Comment Period Closed – September 10, 2026

PROPOSED LANGUAGE

The proposed clean draft of MLMC Chapter 19.810 and a redlined comparison with existing Chapter 17.10 are attached as Exhibits A and B.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The Department of Natural Resources submitted comments regarding geologically hazardous areas. They recommended providing more detail for what is needed in a geologic hazard report and a clearer definition for a qualified professional when it comes to geologic hazards. No other written comments had been received as of the date of this staff report.

ZONING CODE APPROVAL CRITERIA

Amendments to development regulations are subject to MLMC Section 19.143.050 – Approval Criteria.

- A. The proposed amendment(s) implements the goals, policies, and objectives of the Medical Lake Comprehensive Plan.

Findings: The proposed amendments implement Comprehensive Plan goals and policies related to environmental protection, public safety, natural resource stewardship, and compliance with state law. The draft language establishes clear standards for all five categories of critical areas required under the Growth Management Act and provides updated review procedures consistent with current regulatory requirements. **For these reasons, the criterion is met.**

- B. The proposed amendment(s) complies with all requirements of the state's Growth Management Act (GMA, including growth boundaries, critical areas, and future housing needs.)

Findings: The amendments are specifically intended to maintain compliance with the Growth Management Act by addressing wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas, frequently flooded areas, geologically hazardous areas, and critical aquifer recharge areas. The regulations incorporate current best available science, provide no-net-loss standards, and establish procedures for mitigation and critical area review. **For these reasons, the criterion is met.**

- C. The proposed amendment(s) does not conflict with the Shoreline Master Program.

Findings: The proposed amendments do not modify shoreline jurisdiction boundaries or shoreline regulations and therefore do not conflict with the Shoreline Master Program. The amendments function as complementary environmental protections that support existing shoreline regulations. **For these reasons, the criterion is met.**

- D. The proposed amendment(s) is consistent with other adopted City plans, including, but not limited to, the Strategic Plan, Capital Facilities Plan, Parks Master Plan, Water Plan, Sewer Plan, Stormwater Plan, and Transportation Plan.

Findings: The amendments are consistent with adopted City plans. Protecting groundwater resources, minimizing geologic hazards, preserving habitat functions, and reducing flood risk support the objectives of the Strategic Plan, Capital Facilities Plan, Water Plan, Sewer Plan, Stormwater Plan, Parks Master Plan, and Transportation Plan. **For these reasons, the criterion is met.**

- E. The proposed amendment(s) will not adversely affect the ability to provide City services in a cost-effective manner.

Findings: The proposed amendments largely update regulatory standards and review procedures and are not expected to require substantial new public facilities or services. Clear standards and mitigation requirements help ensure that future development occurs in a manner that minimizes public costs associated with environmental degradation, flooding, erosion, and infrastructure damage. **For these reasons, the criterion is met.**

- F. The proposed amendment(s) will not be detrimental to and will result in long-term benefits to the community as a whole and is in the public interest.

Findings: The amendments provide long-term community benefits by protecting environmentally sensitive areas, improving public safety, preserving water quality, reducing hazard risks, and maintaining compliance with state law. The regulations balance resource protection with reasonable use provisions and exceptions when justified. **For these reasons, the criterion is met.**

- G. The proposed amendment(s) will not result in adverse impacts to public infrastructure, wetlands, lakes, businesses, or residents.

Findings: The amendments are not anticipated to create adverse impacts to public infrastructure, wetlands, lakes, businesses, or residents. Instead, the updated standards are designed to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to critical areas while providing greater regulatory clarity for property owners and development applicants. **For these reasons, the criterion is met.**

CONCLUSION

Staff finds that the proposed Critical Areas Ordinance amendments are consistent with the Medical Lake Comprehensive Plan, comply with the requirements of the Growth Management Act, are supported by best available science, and are in the public interest. The amendments strengthen protection of critical areas while providing clear and predictable regulations for development review. Staff therefore recommends that the Planning Commission recommend approval of the proposed amendments to the City Council.

POSSIBLE ACTIONS BY THE PLANNING COMMISSION

1. Recommend approval of the proposed amendments to the City Council.
2. Recommend approval of modified amendments to the City Council.
3. Request City Staff to address concerns and return with modified language.