



# Critical Areas Ordinance Update

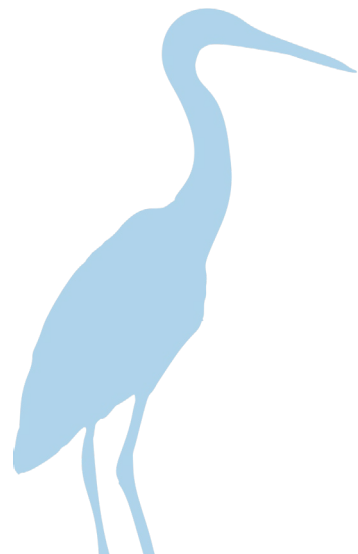
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Lisa Spadoni, Natural Resources Program Supervisor  
Karla Kluge, Senior Regulatory Compliance Analyst



# Presentation Outline



1. Introduction
2. Wetlands and Buffers
3. Streams and Buffers
4. FWHCA
5. Flood Hazard Areas
6. Geologically Hazardous Areas
7. Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas
8. Next Steps



# Critical Areas



Defined by state law in WAC 365-196-485



**Wetlands**



**Fish & Wildlife  
Habitat Conservation  
Areas**



**Critical Aquifer  
Recharge Areas**



**Geologically  
Hazardous Areas**



**Flood Hazard  
Areas**



# Regulatory Framework



## Growth Management Act (GMA) WAC 365-196

- Requires all cities and counties to adopt and periodically update regulations that conserve the functions of critical areas and protect the public from harm.
- Requires no net loss of ecological functions and values of critical areas
- Requires the use of best available science (BAS) in developing policies and regulations to protect the functions and values of critical areas.

## Federal and State Policy and Guidance

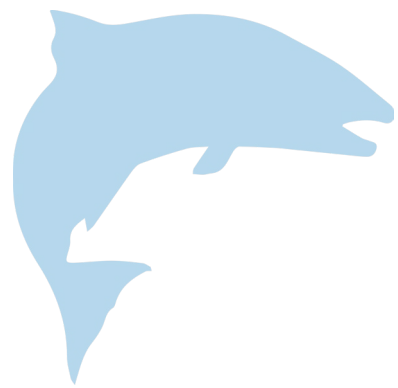
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- WA Department of Ecology
- WA Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Department of Natural Resources



# Process Overview



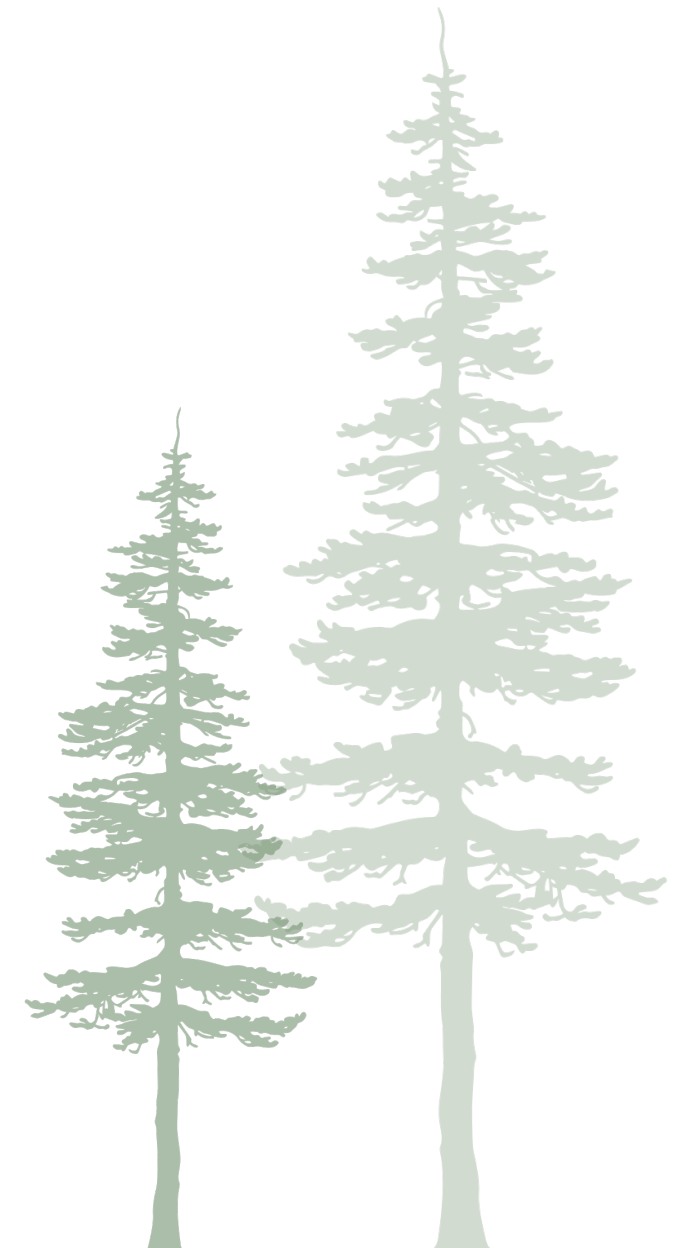
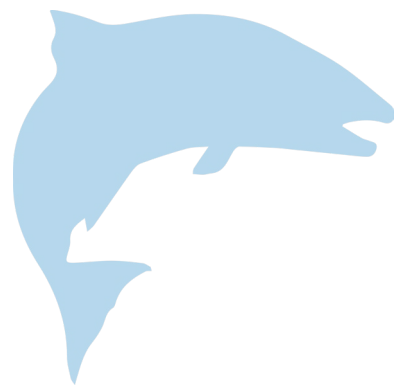
- Periodic update required by state law (RCW 36.70A.130)
- Goal: Ensure consistency with Best Available Science (BAS) and state guidance
- Consultant team retained to assist with technical review
  - Best Available Science review
  - Gap Analysis
  - Draft Code



# Gap Analysis – Key Themes



- Alignment with RCW / WAC definitions and terminology
- Clarify review procedures and submittal items
- Update references to state agency guidance
- Improve consistency and defensibility of code
- Update sections consistent with BAS



# Wetlands and Buffers



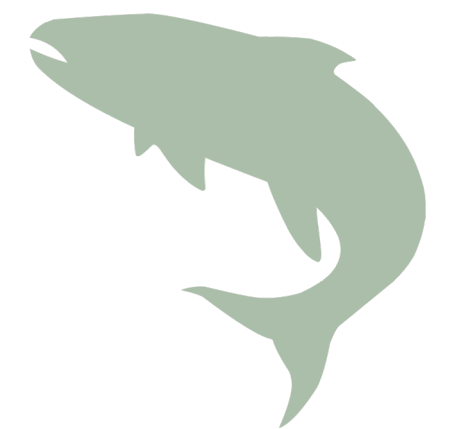
- Current wetland habitat scores, buffer widths, buffer modification allowances, and mitigation requirements don't meet Ecology (ECY) BAS.
- Draft Code:
  - Updates wetland habitat scores
  - Modifies required buffer widths
  - Standard width buffers must be well vegetated with native species.
  - Buffer reduction allowances change
  - Mitigation monitoring requirements extended (for all types of critical areas)
  - Additional allowances for mitigation banking and fee in-lieu of mitigation



# Streams and Buffers



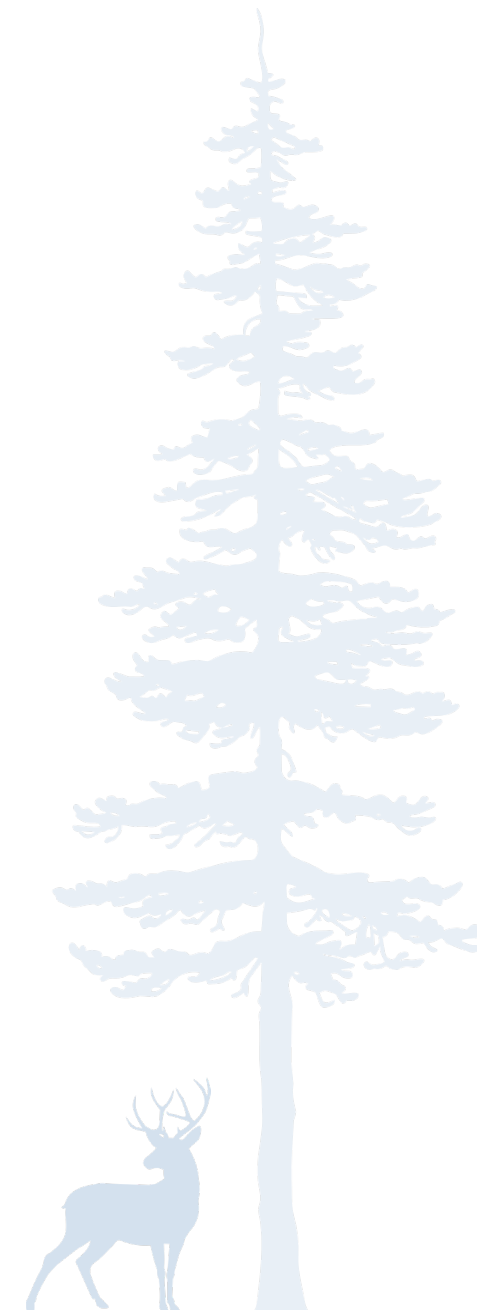
- Current stream typing, buffer widths, buffer modification allowances, and mitigation requirements don't meet Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) BAS.
- Draft Code:
  - Updates stream typing (classification)
  - Modifies required buffer widths
  - Standard width buffers must be well vegetated with native species.
  - Buffer reduction allowances removed, buffer averaging still allowed





## Biodiversity Areas and Oregon White Oak

- Draft Code
  - Clarifies biodiversity area definition based on WDFW BAS.
  - Clarifies the difference between biodiversity areas and corridors
  - Adds classification criteria for Oregon White Oak habitat
  - References Oregon White Oak mitigation requirements



# Flood Hazard Areas



## ➤ Draft Code:

- Clarifications added about compliance with Endangered Species Act
- Clarifies when a Habitat Assessment is required
- Clarifies the required contents of a Habitat Assessment
- Adds flood protection requirements for critical facilities, but discourages location of these facilities within the flood hazard areas



# Geologically Hazardous Areas

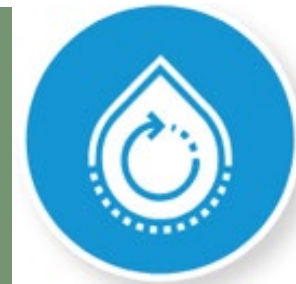


## ➤ Draft Code:

- Updates the definitions of geologically hazardous areas
- Clarifies the difference between a geo-buffer and geo-setback
- Updates language and requirements consistent with requirements in the Shoreline Master Program



# Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas



- Current code references the South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District (STGPD) for all CARA protections.
- Draft Code:
  - Incorporates CARA map from US EPA, which covers a larger area than the STGPD
  - Extends regulations similar to the STGPD to the larger CARA area
  - New regulations do not require permitting and review by TPCHD, but will be implemented with development permits



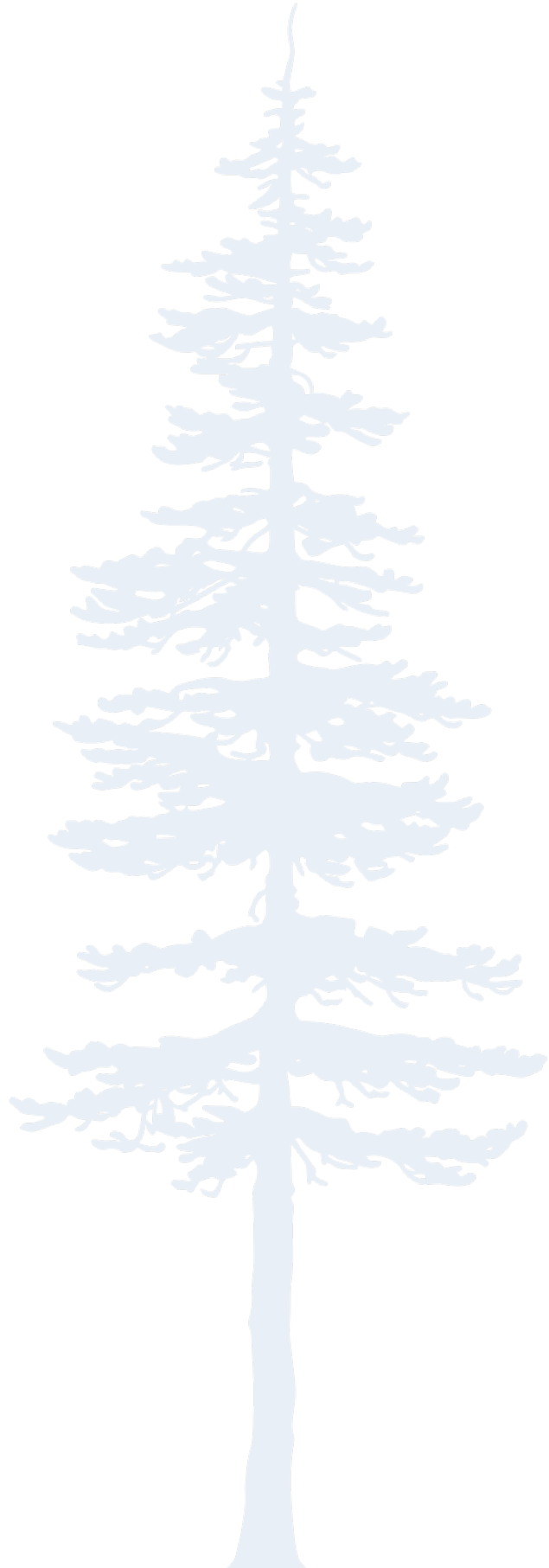
# Next Steps



## Planning Commission Public Hearing

- August 20, 2025, at 5:30 pm
- Comments can be provided in advance, at the Hearing, or after the Hearing.
- Comment deadline is Friday, August 22, 2025
- Any written comments need to be sent to: [planning@tacoma.gov](mailto:planning@tacoma.gov) or mailed to Planning Commission, 747 Market Street, Room 345, Tacoma, WA 98402



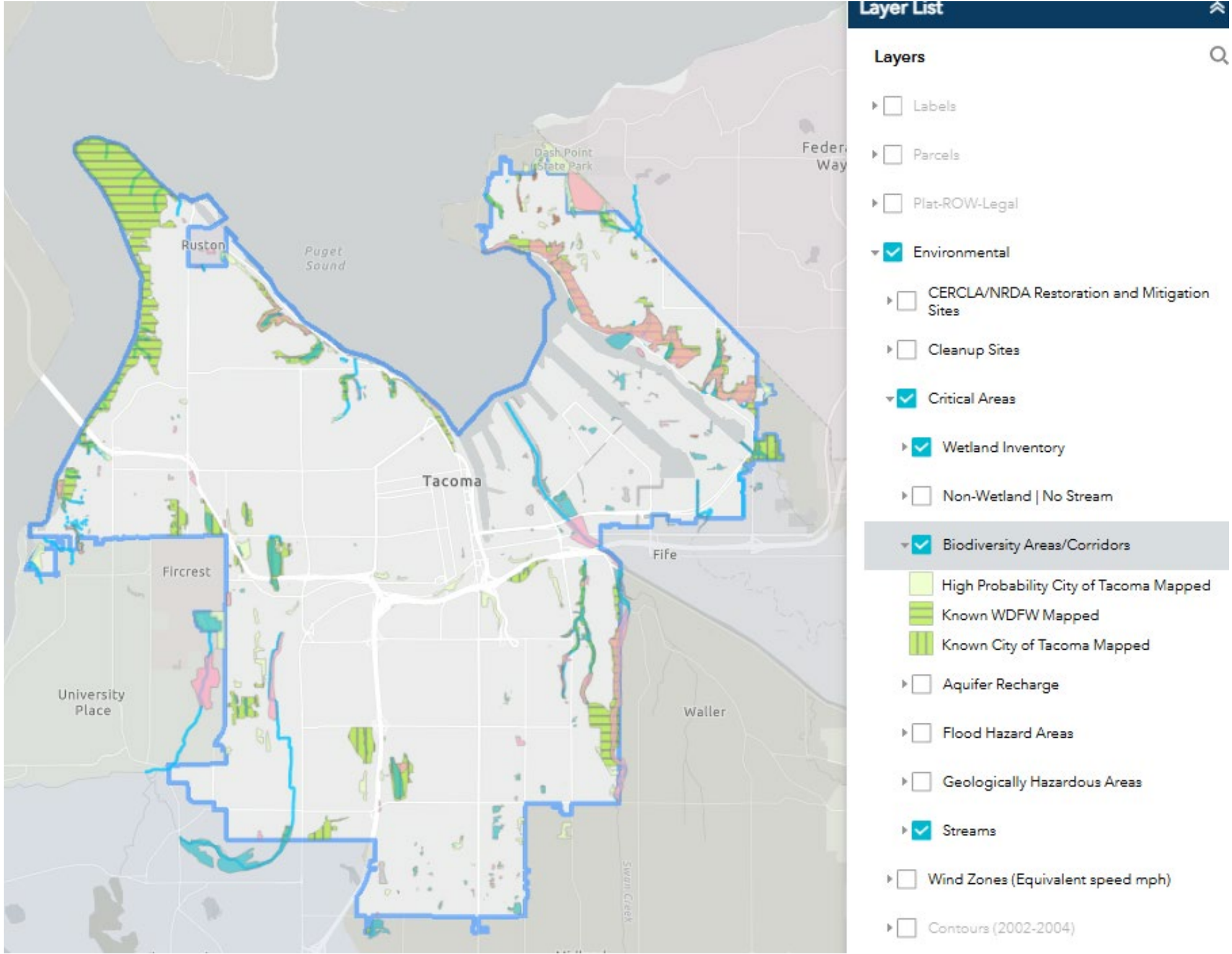


# THANK YOU

One Tacoma Comprehensive Plan Chapter 4  
 Environment and Watershed Health DRAFT  
 Exhibit 30. Tacoma Environmental Assets Map



City of Tacoma DART map  
<https://dart.cityoftacoma.org/#20230815>



# CAO Update Requirements

