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March 12, 2014

TO: Plan Commissioners
FROM: Tirrell Black, Assistant Planner
RE: Materials for SEPA Categorical Exemptions Threshold Review Workshop

The following materials are included for your review prior to the workshop:

- Briefing Paper prepared for Planning, Community & Economic Development (PCED) meeting March 3, 2014 (which was cancelled)
- Draft of ordinance
- Draft of Exhibit A and Exhibit B to be included in the Plan Commission's findings as required by WAC 197-11-800(1)(c) for local governments wishing to raise the exemption levels
- WAC 197-11-800

Full copy of the Spokane Municipal Code is available on www.spokanecity.org; the SEPA section is 17E.050.

BRIEFING PAPER
City of Spokane
Planning and Development Services
March 3, 2014

Subject

A proposed ordinance increasing the SEPA (State Environmental Protection Act) Flexible Thresholds for Categorical Exemptions for minor new construction to maximum permitted levels and amending SMC 17E.050.070.

Background

SEPA was adopted in 1971 by the State of Washington. Since then, additional rules governing the environment, including the Growth Management Act and Shoreline Management Act have been put in place.

The Washington State Department of Ecology was directed by the 2012 legislature to modernize the rules that guide state and local agencies in conducting SEPA (State Environmental Protection Act) reviews. Local governments may update the SEPA thresholds for categorical exemptions, or projects which are exempt from SEPA review, per WAC 197-11-800.

A Table illustrating the maximum thresholds permitted is attached.

Impact

Spokane County and the City of Spokane Valley have already adopted the maximum allowed categorical exemption levels. Adoption of these levels would standardize the SEPA process for applicants within the region.

SEPA review for minor construction projects does not frequently result in any project modifications or mitigation. Reducing the amount of SEPA review time may be advantageous to the development community in many ways that affect financing, construction windows, and project schedules. The City also may realize savings of staff time by eliminating the SEPA review process for smaller projects.

Action

Plan Commission is scheduled to hold a workshop on this topic on March 12, 2014. A Plan Commission Public Hearing is tentatively scheduled for March 26, 2014. This item will then come before the City Council for action to revise the SMC.

Funding

No funding impacts.

The table below compares the increased thresholds authorized under the WAC with the existing SEPA thresholds of the Spokane Municipal Code.

Project Types	Existing Spokane Municipal Code Thresholds	Maximum Permitted Thresholds
Single family residential	20 units	30 units
Multifamily residential	20 units	60 units
Barn, loafing shed, farm equipment storage, produce storage or packing structure	20,000 sq. ft.	40,000 sq. ft.
Office, school, commercial, recreational, service or storage building and associated parking	12,000 sq. ft. and 40 parking spaces	30,000 sq. ft. and 90 parking spaces
Parking lots	40 parking spaces	90 parking spaces
Landfill or excavation	500 cubic yards	1,000 cubic yards

Draft proposed revisions to 17E.050.070

ORDINANCE NO. _____

An ordinance relating to the revision of SEPA Flexible Thresholds for Categorical Exemptions amending SMC 17E.050.070;

Section 17E.050.070 Flexible Thresholds for Categorical Exemptions

In addition to those exemptions identified in Part Nine (Categorical Exemptions) of this ordinance, the City of Spokane establishes the following exempt levels for minor new construction under WAC 197-11-800(1)(c), based on local conditions, except when undertaken wholly or partly on lands covered by water as defined in WAC 197-11-756:

- A. ~~((For residential dwelling units in WAC 197-11-800(1)(b)(i): up to twenty dwelling units.))~~ The construction or location of 30 or fewer single-family residential units;
- B. The construction or location of 60 or fewer multifamily residential units;
- C. ~~B.((For agricultural structures in WAC 197-11-800(1)(b)(ii): up to twenty thousand square feet))~~The construction of a barn, loafing shed, farm equipment storage building, produce storage or packing structure, or similar agricultural structure, covering 40,000 square feet or less, to be used only by the property owner or his or her agent in the conduct of farming the property. This exemption shall not apply to feed lots;
- D. ~~C.((For office, school, commercial, recreational, service or storage buildings in WAC 197-11-800(1)(b)(iii): up to twelve thousand square feet and up to forty parking spaces.))~~ The construction of an office, school, commercial recreational, service or storage building with 30,000 square feet or less of gross floor area, and with associated parking facilities designed for 90 or fewer automobiles;
- E. ~~D.((For parking lots in WAC 197-11-800(1)(b)(iv): up to forty parking spaces.))~~ The construction of a parking lot designed for 90 or fewer automobiles;
- F. ~~E.((For landfills and excavations in WAC 197-11-800(1)(b)(v): up to five hundred cubic yards.))~~ Any landfill or excavation of 1,000 cubic yards or less;

end

WAC 197-11-800

Categorical exemptions.

The proposed actions contained in Part Nine are categorically exempt from threshold determination and EIS requirements, subject to the rules and limitations on categorical exemptions contained in WAC 197-11-305.

Note: The statutory exemptions contained in chapter 43.21C RCW are not included in Part Nine. Chapter 43.21C RCW should be reviewed in determining whether a proposed action not listed as categorically exempt in Part Nine is exempt by statute from threshold determination and EIS requirements.

(1) Minor new construction - Flexible thresholds.

(a) The exemptions in this subsection apply to all licenses required to undertake the construction in question, except when a rezone or any license governing emissions to the air or discharges to water is required. To be exempt under this subsection, the project must be equal to or smaller than the exempt level. For a specific proposal, the exempt level in (b) of this subsection shall control, unless the city/county in which the project is located establishes an exempt level under (c) of this subsection. If the proposal is located in more than one city/county, the lower of the agencies' adopted levels shall control, regardless of which agency is the lead agency.

(b) The following types of construction shall be exempt, except when undertaken wholly or partly on lands covered by water:

- (i) The construction or location of four detached single family residential units.
- (ii) The construction or location of four multifamily residential units.
- (iii) The construction of a barn, loafing shed, farm equipment storage building, produce storage or packing structure, or similar agricultural structure, covering 10,000 square feet, and to be used only by the property owner or his or her agent in the conduct of farming the property. This exemption shall not apply to feed lots.
- (iv) The construction of an office, school, commercial, recreational, service or storage building with 4,000 square feet of gross floor area, and with associated parking facilities designed for twenty automobiles. This exemption includes stand-alone parking lots.

(v) Any landfill or excavation of 100 cubic yards throughout the total lifetime of the fill or excavation not associated with an exempt project in subsection (b)(i), (ii), (iii), or (iv); and any fill or excavation classified as a Class I, II, or III forest practice under RCW 76.09.050 or regulations thereunder.

(c) Cities, towns or counties may raise the exempt levels up to the maximum specified in (d) of this subsection by implementing ordinance or resolution. Such levels shall be specified in the agency's SEPA procedures (WAC 197-11-904). Separate maximum optional thresholds are established in (d) of this subsection applying to both incorporated areas and unincorporated urban growth areas in fully planning jurisdictions under RCW 36.70A.040; other unincorporated areas in fully planning counties; and jurisdictions in all other counties. Agencies may adopt the maximum level or a level between the minimum and maximum level. An agency may adopt a system of several exempt levels (such as different levels for different geographic areas).

At a minimum, the following process shall be met in order to raise the exempt levels.

(i) Documentation that the requirements for environmental analysis, protection and mitigation for impacts to elements of the environment (listed in WAC 197-11-444) have been adequately addressed for the development exempted. The requirements may be addressed in specific adopted development regulations, and applicable state and federal regulations.

(ii) Description in the findings or other appropriate section of the adopting ordinance or resolution of the locally established project-level public comment opportunities that are provided for proposals included in these increased exemption levels.

(iii) Before adopting the ordinance or resolution containing the proposed new exemption levels, the local government shall provide a minimum of twenty-one days notice to affected tribes, agencies with expertise, affected jurisdictions, the department of ecology, and the public and provide an opportunity for comment.

(d) The maximum exemption levels applicable to (c) of this subsection are:

Project types	Fully planning GMA counties		All other counties
	Incorporated and unincorporated UGA	Other unincorporated areas	Incorporated and unincorporated areas
Single family residential	30 units	20 units	20 units
Multifamily residential	60 units	25 units	25 units

Project types	Fully planning GMA counties		All other counties
	Incorporated and unincorporated UGA	Other unincorporated areas	Incorporated and unincorporated areas
Barn, loafing shed, farm equipment storage, produce storage or packing structure	40,000 square feet	40,000 square feet	40,000 square feet
Office, school, commercial, recreational, service, storage building, parking facilities	30,000 square feet and 90 parking spaces	12,000 square feet and 40 parking spaces	12,000 square feet and 40 parking spaces
Landfill or excavation	1,000 cubic yards	1,000 cubic yards	1,000 cubic yards

(2) **Other minor new construction.** The following types of construction shall be exempt except where undertaken wholly or in part on lands covered by water (unless specifically exempted in this subsection); the exemptions provided by this section shall apply to all licenses required to undertake the construction in question, except where a rezone or any license governing emissions to the air or discharges to water is required:

(a) The construction or designation of bus stops, loading zones, shelters, access facilities and pull-out lanes for taxicabs, transit and school vehicles.

(b) The construction and/or installation of commercial on-premise signs, and public signs and signals.

(c) The construction or installation of minor road and street improvements such as pavement marking, freeway surveillance and control systems, railroad protective devices (not including grade-separated crossings), grooving, glare screen, safety barriers, energy attenuators, transportation corridor landscaping (including the application of Washington state department of agriculture approved herbicides by licensed personnel for right of way weed control as long as this is not within watersheds controlled for the purpose of drinking water quality in accordance with WAC 248-54-660), temporary traffic controls and detours, correction of substandard curves and intersections within existing rights of way, widening of a highway by less than a single lane width where capacity is not significantly increased and no new right of way is required, adding auxiliary lanes for localized purposes, (weaving, climbing, speed change, etc.), where capacity is not significantly increased and no new right of way is required, channelization and elimination of sight restrictions at intersections, street lighting, guard rails and barricade installation, installation of catch basins and culverts, and reconstruction of existing roadbed (existing curb-to-curb in urban locations), including adding or widening of shoulders, addition of bicycle lanes, paths and facilities, and pedestrian walks and paths, but not including additional automobile lanes.

(d) Grading, excavating, filling, septic tank installations, and landscaping necessary for any building or facility exempted by subsections (1) and (2) of this section, as well as fencing and the construction of small structures and minor facilities accessory thereto.

(e) Additions or modifications to or replacement of any building or facility exempted by subsections (1) and (2) of this section when such addition, modification or replacement will not change the character of the building or facility in a way that would remove it from an exempt class.

(f) The demolition of any structure or facility, the construction of which would be exempted by subsections (1) and (2) of this section, except for structures or facilities with recognized historical significance.

(g) The installation of impervious underground tanks, having a capacity of 10,000 gallons or less.

(h) The vacation of streets or roads.

(i) The installation of hydrological measuring devices, regardless of whether or not on lands covered by water.

(j) The installation of any property, boundary or survey marker, other than fences, regardless of whether or not on lands covered by water.

(3) **Repair, remodeling and maintenance activities.** The following activities shall be categorically exempt: The repair, remodeling, maintenance, or minor alteration of existing private or public structures, facilities or equipment, including utilities, involving no material expansions or changes in use beyond that previously existing; except that, where undertaken wholly or in part on lands covered by water, only minor repair or replacement of structures may be exempt (examples include repair or replacement of piling, ramps, floats, or mooring buoys, or minor repair, alteration, or maintenance of docks). The following maintenance activities shall not be considered exempt under this subsection:

(a) Dredging;

- (b) Reconstruction/maintenance of groins and similar shoreline protection structures; or
- (c) Replacement of utility cables that must be buried under the surface of the bedlands. Repair/rebuilding of major dams, dikes, and reservoirs shall also not be considered exempt under this subsection.
- (4) **Water rights.** Appropriations of one cubic foot per second or less of surface water, or of 2,250 gallons per minute or less of groundwater, for any purpose. The exemption covering not only the permit to appropriate water, but also any hydraulics permit, shoreline permit or building permit required for a normal diversion or intake structure, well and pumphouse reasonably necessary to accomplish the exempted appropriation, and including any activities relating to construction of a distribution system solely for any exempted appropriation.
- (5) **Purchase or sale of real property.** The following real property transactions by an agency shall be exempt:
- (a) The purchase or acquisition of any right to real property.
- (b) The sale, transfer or exchange of any publicly owned real property, but only if the property is not subject to an authorized public use.
- (c) The lease of real property when the use of the property for the term of the lease will remain essentially the same as the existing use, or when the use under the lease is otherwise exempted by this chapter.
- (6) **Minor land use decisions.** The following land use decisions shall be exempt:
- (a) Except upon lands covered by water, the approval of short plats or short subdivisions pursuant to the procedures required by RCW 58.17.060, but not including further short subdivisions or short platting within a plat or subdivision previously exempted under this subsection.
- (b) Granting of variances based on special circumstances, not including economic hardship, applicable to the subject property, such as size, shape, topography, location or surroundings and not resulting in any change in land use or density.
- (c) Classifications of land for current use taxation under chapter 84.34 RCW, and classification and grading of forest land under chapter 84.33 RCW.
- (7) **Open burning.** Opening burning and the issuance of any license for open burning shall be exempt. The adoption of plans, programs, objectives or regulations by any agency incorporating general standards respecting open burning shall not be exempt.
- (8) **Clean Air Act.** The granting of variances under RCW 70.94.181 extending applicable air pollution control requirements for one year or less shall be exempt.
- (9) **Water quality certifications.** The granting or denial of water quality certifications under the Federal Clean Water Act (Federal Water Pollution Control Act amendments of 1972, 33 U.S.C. 1341) shall be exempt.
- (10) **Activities of the state legislature.** All actions of the state legislature are exempted. This subsection does not exempt the proposing of legislation by an agency (WAC 197-11-704).
- (11) **Judicial activity.** The following shall be exempt:
- (a) All adjudicatory actions of the judicial branch.
- (b) Any quasi-judicial action of any agency if such action consists of the review of a prior administrative or legislative decision. Decisions resulting from contested cases or other hearing processes conducted prior to the first decision on a proposal or upon any application for a rezone, conditional use permit or other similar permit not otherwise exempted by this chapter, are not exempted by this subsection.
- (12) **Enforcement and inspections.** The following enforcement and inspection activities shall be exempt:
- (a) All actions, including administrative orders and penalties, undertaken to enforce a statute, regulation, ordinance, resolution or prior decision. No license shall be considered exempt by virtue of this subsection; nor shall the adoption of any ordinance, regulation or resolution be considered exempt by virtue of this subsection.
- (b) All inspections conducted by an agency of either private or public property for any purpose.
- (c) All activities of fire departments and law enforcement agencies except physical construction activity.
- (d) Any action undertaken by an agency to abate a nuisance or to abate, remove or otherwise cure any hazard to public health or safety. The application of pesticides and chemicals is not exempted by this subsection but may be exempted elsewhere in these guidelines. No license or adoption of any ordinance, regulation or resolution shall be considered exempt by virtue of this subsection.
- (e) Any suspension or revocation of a license for any purpose.
- (13) **Business and other regulatory licenses.** The following business and other regulatory licenses are exempt:
- (a) All licenses to undertake an occupation, trade or profession.
- (b) All licenses required under electrical, fire, plumbing, heating, mechanical, and safety codes and regulations, but not including building permits.
- (c) All licenses to operate or engage in amusement devices and rides and entertainment activities, including but not limited to cabarets, carnivals, circuses and other traveling shows, dances, music machines, golf courses,

and theaters, including approval of the use of public facilities for temporary civic celebrations, but not including licenses or permits required for permanent construction of any of the above.

(d) All licenses to operate or engage in charitable or retail sales and service activities, including but not limited to peddlers, solicitors, second hand shops, pawnbrokers, vehicle and housing rental agencies, tobacco sellers, close out and special sales, fireworks, massage parlors, public garages and parking lots, and used automobile dealers.

(e) All licenses for private security services, including but not limited to detective agencies, merchant and/or residential patrol agencies, burglar and/or fire alarm dealers, guard dogs, locksmiths, and bail bond services.

(f) All licenses for vehicles for-hire and other vehicle related activities including, but not limited to, taxicabs, ambulances, and tow trucks: Provided, That regulation of common carriers by the utilities and transportation commission shall not be considered exempt under this subsection.

(g) All licenses for food or drink services, sales, and distribution, including but not limited to restaurants, liquor, and meat.

(h) All animal control licenses, including but not limited to pets, kennels, and pet shops. Establishment or construction of such a facility shall not be considered exempt by this subsection.

(i) The renewal or reissuance of a license regulating any present activity or structure so long as no material changes are involved.

(14) **Activities of agencies.** The following administrative, fiscal and personnel activities of agencies shall be exempt:

(a) The procurement and distribution of general supplies, equipment and services authorized or necessitated by previously approved functions or programs.

(b) The assessment and collection of taxes.

(c) The adoption of all budgets and agency requests for appropriation: Provided, That if such adoption includes a final agency decision to undertake a major action, that portion of the budget is not exempted by this subsection.

(d) The borrowing of funds, issuance of bonds, or applying for a grant and related financing agreements and approvals.

(e) The review and payment of vouchers and claims.

(f) The establishment and collection of liens and service billings.

(g) All personnel actions, including hiring, terminations, appointments, promotions, allocations of positions, and expansions or reductions in force.

(h) All agency organization, reorganization, internal operational planning or coordination of plans or functions.

(i) Adoptions or approvals of utility, transportation and solid waste disposal rates.

(j) The activities of school districts pursuant to desegregation plans or programs; however, construction of real property transactions or the adoption of any policy, plan or program for such construction of real property transaction shall not be considered exempt under this subsection.

(15) **Financial assistance grants.** The approval of grants or loans by one agency to another shall be exempt, although an agency may at its option require compliance with SEPA prior to making a grant or loan for design or construction of a project. This exemption includes agencies taking nonproject actions that are necessary to apply for federal or other financial assistance.

(16) **Local improvement districts.** The formation of local improvement districts, unless such formation constitutes a final agency decision to undertake construction of a structure or facility not exempted under WAC 197-11-800 and 197-11-880.

(17) **Information collection and research.** Basic data collection, research, resource evaluation, requests for proposals (RFPs), and the conceptual planning of proposals shall be exempt. These may be strictly for information-gathering, or as part of a study leading to a proposal that has not yet been approved, adopted or funded; this exemption does not include any agency action that commits the agency to proceed with such a proposal. (Also see WAC 197-11-070.)

(18) **Acceptance of filings.** The acceptance by an agency of any document or thing required or authorized by law to be filed with the agency and for which the agency has no discretionary power to refuse acceptance shall be exempt. No license shall be considered exempt by virtue of this subsection.

(19) **Procedural actions.** The proposal or adoption of legislation, rules, regulations, resolutions or ordinances, or of any plan or program relating solely to governmental procedures, and containing no substantive standards respecting use or modification of the environment shall be exempt. Agency SEPA procedures shall be exempt.

(20) **Building codes.** The adoption by ordinance of all codes as required by the state Building Code Act (chapter 19.27 RCW).

(21) **Adoption of noise ordinances.** The adoption by counties/cities of resolutions, ordinances, rules or regulations concerned with the control of noise which do not differ from regulations adopted by the department of ecology under chapter 70.107 RCW. When a county/city proposes a noise resolution, ordinance, rule or regulation, a portion of which differs from the applicable state regulations (and thus requires approval of the department of ecology under RCW 70.107.060(4)), SEPA compliance may be limited to those items which differ from state regulations.

(22) **Review and comment actions.** Any activity where one agency reviews or comments upon the actions of another agency or another department within an agency shall be exempt.

(23) **Utilities.** The utility-related actions listed below shall be exempt, except for installation, construction, or alteration on lands covered by water. The exemption includes installation and construction, relocation when required by other governmental bodies, repair, replacement, maintenance, operation or alteration that does not change the action from an exempt class.

(a) All communications lines, including cable TV, but not including communication towers or relay stations.

(b) All storm water, water and sewer facilities, lines, equipment, hookups or appurtenances including, utilizing or related to lines eight inches or less in diameter.

(c) All electric facilities, lines, equipment or appurtenances, not including substations, with an associated voltage of 55,000 volts or less; the overbuilding of existing distribution lines (55,000 volts or less) with transmission lines (up to and including 115,000 volts); within existing rights of way or developed utility corridors, all electric facilities, lines, equipment or appurtenances, not including substations, with an associated voltage of 115,000 volts or less; and the undergrounding of all electric facilities, lines, equipment or appurtenances.

(d) All natural gas distribution (as opposed to transmission) lines and necessary appurtenant facilities and hookups.

(e) All developments within the confines of any existing electric substation, reservoir, pump station or well: Provided, That additional appropriations of water are not exempted by this subsection.

(f) Periodic use of chemical or mechanical means to maintain a utility or transportation right of way in its design condition: Provided, That chemicals used are approved by the Washington state department of agriculture and applied by licensed personnel. This exemption shall not apply to the use of chemicals within watersheds that are controlled for the purpose of drinking water quality in accordance with WAC 248-54-660.

(g) All grants of rights of way by agencies to utilities for use for distribution (as opposed to transmission) purposes.

(h) All grants of franchises by agencies to utilities.

(i) All disposals of rights of way by utilities.

(24) **Natural resources management.** In addition to the other exemptions contained in this section, the following natural resources management activities shall be exempt:

(a) Issuance of new grazing leases covering a section of land or less; and issuance of all grazing leases for land that has been subject to a grazing lease within the previous ten years.

(b) Licenses or approvals to remove firewood.

(c) Issuance of agricultural leases covering one hundred sixty contiguous acres or less.

(d) Issuance of leases for Christmas tree harvesting or brush picking.

(e) Issuance of leases for school sites.

(f) Issuance of leases for, and placement of, mooring buoys designed to serve pleasure craft.

(g) Development of recreational sites not specifically designed for all-terrain vehicles and not including more than twelve campsites.

(h) Periodic use of chemical or mechanical means to maintain public park and recreational land: Provided, That chemicals used are approved by the Washington state department of agriculture and applied by licensed personnel. This exemption shall not apply to the use of chemicals within watersheds that are controlled for the purpose of drinking water quality in accordance with WAC 248-54-660.

(i) Issuance of rights of way, easements and use permits to use existing roads in nonresidential areas.

(j) Establishment of natural area preserves to be used for scientific research and education and for the protection of rare flora and fauna, under the procedures of chapter 79.70 RCW.

(25) **Personal wireless service facilities.**

(a) The siting of personal wireless service facilities are exempt if the facility:

(i) Is a microcell and is to be attached to an existing structure that is not a residence or school and does not contain a residence or a school;

(ii) Includes personal wireless service antennas, other than a microcell, and is to be attached to an existing structure (that may be an existing tower) that is not a residence or school and does not contain a residence or

school, and the existing structure to which it is to be attached is located in a commercial, industrial, manufacturing, forest, or agriculture zone; or

(iii) Involves constructing a personal wireless service tower less than sixty feet in height that is located in a commercial, industrial, manufacturing, forest, or agricultural zone.

(b) For the purposes of this subsection:

(i) "Personal wireless services" means commercial mobile services, unlicensed wireless services, and common carrier wireless exchange access services, as defined by federal laws and regulations.

(ii) "Personal wireless service facilities" means facilities for the provision of personal wireless services.

(iii) "Microcell" means a wireless communication facility consisting of an antenna that is either:

(A) Four feet in height and with an area of not more than five hundred eighty square inches; or

(B) If a tubular antenna, no more than four inches in diameter and no more than six feet in length.

(c) This exemption does not apply to projects within a critical area designated under GMA (RCW 36.70A.060).

[Statutory Authority: RCW 43.21C.110. WSR 13-02-065 (Order 12-01), § 197-11-800, filed 12/28/12, effective 1/28/13. Statutory Authority: RCW 43.21A.090, chapter 43.21C RCW, RCW 43.21C.035, 43.21C.037, 43.21C.038, 43.21C.0381, 43.21C.0382, 43.21C.0383, 43.21C.110, 43.21C.222. WSR 03-16-067 (Order 02-12), § 197-11-800, filed 8/1/03, effective 9/1/03. Statutory Authority: 1995 c 347 (ESHB 1724) and RCW 43.21C.110. WSR 97-21-030 (Order 95-16), § 197-11-800, filed 10/10/97, effective 11/10/97. Statutory Authority: RCW 43.21C.110. WSR 84-05-020 (Order DE 83-39), § 197-11-800, filed 2/10/84, effective 4/4/84.]