

New Critical Areas Regulations Adopted by City Council

The Des Moines City Council adopted new Critical Areas regulations on March 8th following a public hearing. The revised environmental regulations, fashioned with the help of the Planning Agency, Council Environment Committee, review agencies and the public, took effect April 7, 2007.

The state's Growth Management Act requires cities to update their Critical Areas code on a periodic basis, using the "best available science" and broad community input. The revised regulations affect sensitive areas such as wetlands, streams, steep slopes and fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas (FWHCAs). Frequently flooded and aquifer recharge areas are some of the other critical areas affected.

This update is similar to updates in other cities that requires wider buffers in some areas and better protections for streams, wetlands, FWHCAs and geologically hazardous areas. In some cases, however, the required buffers can be reduced if property owners take steps to enhance the natural habitat in the remaining buffer area.

The City Council and Planning Agency wanted to build in more flexibility than before to adapt the rules for specific property circumstances. The new regulations allow us that flexibility on a case-by-case basis.

The final Critical Areas ordinance and other information can be viewed on the City's website at www.desmoineswa.gov. The update is codified in Chapters 18.04 and 18.86 of the Des Moines Municipal Code.