

**ATTACHMENT F:
BACKGROUND ON WATER AVAILABILITY AND
SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS**

Background on Water Availability and Sustainability Standards

Prepared for the Spokane County Water Availability Advisory Group Meeting

Wednesday, February 29, 2012

Background

Ongoing water availability from individual wells is an emerging issue in Spokane County. There are homes that were built with an individual well that has subsequently gone dry, or where the flow is so low it can no longer supply adequate water for the residents. At times, new wells are installed and neighboring homes see their water flow reduced as more wells draw from a limited aquifer. Water systems are often asked to bring water to these homes; however, it can be very costly and inefficient to install water pipes to areas outside a water system's boundaries. In some instances, residents' only option is to haul water to their homes.

Water resource planning and land use planning have historically been disconnected. In the past, the state managed water and local governments managed land use. Water resources and land use, though, are fundamentally connected and over the past few decades the legal framework has begun to recognize this. According to current Washington State Law:

*"Each applicant for a building permit of a building necessitating potable water shall provide evidence of an adequate water supply for the intended use of the building. Evidence may be in the form of a water right permit from the department of ecology, a letter from an approved water purveyor stating the ability to provide water, **or another form sufficient to verify the existence of an adequate water supply.**"*

(RCW 19.27.097, emphasis added)

This leaves Counties the difficult task of creating standards to verify the existence of an adequate water supply. State law offers little to no guidance on issues related to the sustainability of the water supply or the seasonal variations in water availability. Spokane County is interested in reviewing current standards and determining if there are technically feasible and cost effective methods that could be utilized to evaluate not only the availability but also the sustainability of the water supply for a proposed development.

Watershed Planning Units have grappled with this issue over the past five years. Watershed plans from the Spokane area recommend a review of current water availability. At the core of the issue is the technical and economic feasibility of evaluating water supply sustainability in developments serviced by permit-exempt wells. These watersheds have joined together to form this Advisory Group. It is hoped that by bringing so many experts together a recommendation for an improved standard can be developed.

Current Standard

The current standard for permit exempt wells is that the pump test conducted over a 4-hour time period must demonstrate that the well can produce 1440 gallons in a 24-hour period.

Advisory Group Tasks

The Advisory Group is asked to examine the standards for identifying sufficient water from a permit-exempt well before a building permit is issued. The Advisory Group will attempt to address the following question:

Can a water availability standard be developed that is cost effective, technically sound, and legally defensible?

- **What are the criteria?**
 - **Current availability**
 - **Seasonal availability**
 - **Impacts to adjacent water users**
 - **Impacts to surface water**

- **What investigation methods are appropriate?**
 - **Degree of certainty**
 - **Availability of data**
 - **Cost**

Desired Outcomes

The desired outcomes for the Advisory Group are identification of criteria for a water availability standard and recommendations for next steps. The Advisory Group could affirm that the current standard is sufficient or recommend a new standard. The Advisory Group may also recommend additional items for Spokane County to consider, such as additional research.