

Protecting Archaeologic and Cultural Resources

“Archaeological sites are nonrenewable resources that contribute to our sense of history and place and define our collective shared heritage. The wise stewardship of these sites is our collective responsibility.”

These words are on the State of Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation’s (DAHP) web page. DAHP advocates for the preservation of Washington’s irreplaceable historic and cultural resources.

State regulations make it illegal to knowingly dig into any historic or prehistoric archaeological site or to remove any archaeological object from such sites. Those regulations name DAHP as the appropriate agency to ensure the rules aren’t broken and to conserve, preserve, and protect the state’s archaeological resources. DAHP also has the responsibility to facilitate the scientific study of these resources.

To assist DAHP with its mission and to provide some local control over how archaeological sites are protected in the city, in 2019 the City adopted regulations designed to ensure that sites where historic and cultural artifacts can be found are not disturbed.

All archaeological sites, whether previously recorded or still unrecognized, would be covered by the new regulations. The sites will include, but not be limited to, those pertaining to prehistoric and historic American Indian activities. Their artifacts, such as projectile points, arrowheads, skeletal remains, basketry, grinding stones, knives, or other tools, and rock carvings and paintings, are considered to be archaeological resources.

The regulations apply to all sites with a known or suspected presence of archaeological or cultural resources.

They include provisions requiring:

- An archaeology survey report for any development application or site disturbance of a known or suspected archaeological site before any construction begins; and
- Immediate cessation of work on projects if during the course of construction, which includes grading, archaeological resources are found.

The goal of the regulations is to proactively prevent archaeological sites from being unexpectedly disturbed. If sites are disturbed, the code proscribes steps to preserve the archaeological resources discovered.