

RCW 43.21C.075 Appeals. (1) Because a major purpose of this chapter is to combine environmental considerations with public decisions, any appeal brought under this chapter shall be linked to a specific governmental action. The State Environmental Policy Act provides a basis for challenging whether governmental action is in compliance with the substantive and procedural provisions of this chapter. The State Environmental Policy Act is not intended to create a cause of action unrelated to a specific governmental action.

(2) Unless otherwise provided by this section:

(a) Appeals under this chapter shall be of the governmental action together with its accompanying environmental determinations.

(b) Appeals of environmental determinations made (or lacking) under this chapter shall be commenced within the time required to appeal the governmental action which is subject to environmental review.

(3) If an agency has a procedure for appeals of agency environmental determinations made under this chapter, such procedure:

(a) Shall allow no more than one agency appeal proceeding on each procedural determination (the adequacy of a determination of significance/nonsignificance or of a final environmental impact statement);

(b) Shall consolidate an appeal of procedural issues and of substantive determinations made under this chapter (such as a decision to require particular mitigation measures or to deny a proposal) with a hearing or appeal on the underlying governmental action by providing for a single simultaneous hearing before one hearing officer or body to consider the agency decision or recommendation on a proposal and any environmental determinations made under this chapter, with the exception of:

(i) An appeal of a determination of significance;

(ii) An appeal of a procedural determination made by an agency when the agency is a project proponent, or is funding a project, and chooses to conduct its review under this chapter, including any appeals of its procedural determinations, prior to submitting an application for a project permit;

(iii) An appeal of a procedural determination made by an agency on a nonproject action; or

(iv) An appeal to the local legislative authority under RCW 43.21C.060 or other applicable state statutes;

(c) Shall provide for the preparation of a record for use in any subsequent appeal proceedings, and shall provide for any subsequent appeal proceedings to be conducted on the record, consistent with other applicable law. An adequate record consists of findings and conclusions, testimony under oath, and taped or written transcript. An electronically recorded transcript will suffice for purposes of review under this subsection; and

(d) Shall provide that procedural determinations made by the responsible official shall be entitled to substantial weight.

(4) If a person aggrieved by an agency action has the right to judicial appeal and if an agency has an administrative appeal procedure, such person shall, prior to seeking any judicial review, use such agency procedure if any such procedure is available, unless expressly provided otherwise by state statute.

(5) Some statutes and ordinances contain time periods for challenging governmental actions which are subject to review under this chapter, such as various local land use approvals (the "underlying governmental action"). RCW 43.21C.080 establishes an

optional "notice of action" procedure which, if used, imposes a time period for appealing decisions under this chapter. This subsection does not modify any such time periods. In this subsection, the term "appeal" refers to a judicial appeal only.

(a) If there is a time period for appealing the underlying governmental action, appeals under this chapter shall be commenced within such time period. The agency shall give official notice stating the date and place for commencing an appeal.

(b) If there is no time period for appealing the underlying governmental action, and a notice of action under RCW 43.21C.080 is used, appeals shall be commenced within the time period specified by RCW 43.21C.080.

(6) (a) Judicial review under subsection (5) of this section of an appeal decision made by an agency under subsection (3) of this section shall be on the record, consistent with other applicable law.

(b) A taped or written transcript may be used. If a taped transcript is to be reviewed, a record shall identify the location on the taped transcript of testimony and evidence to be reviewed. Parties are encouraged to designate only those portions of the testimony necessary to present the issues raised on review, but if a party alleges that a finding of fact is not supported by evidence, the party should include in the record all evidence relevant to the disputed finding. Any other party may designate additional portions of the taped transcript relating to issues raised on review. A party may provide a written transcript of portions of the testimony at the party's own expense or apply to that court for an order requiring the party seeking review to pay for additional portions of the written transcript.

(c) Judicial review under this chapter shall without exception be of the governmental action together with its accompanying environmental determinations.

(7) Jurisdiction over the review of determinations under this chapter in an appeal before an agency or superior court shall upon consent of the parties be transferred in whole or part to the shorelines hearings board. The shorelines hearings board shall hear the matter and sign the final order expeditiously. The superior court shall certify the final order of the shorelines hearings board and the certified final order may only be appealed to an appellate court. In the case of an appeal under this chapter regarding a project or other matter that is also the subject of an appeal to the shorelines hearings board under chapter 90.58 RCW, the shorelines hearings board shall have sole jurisdiction over both the appeal under this section and the appeal under chapter 90.58 RCW, shall consider them together, and shall issue a final order within one hundred eighty days as provided in RCW 90.58.180.

(8) For purposes of this section and RCW 43.21C.080, the words "action", "decision", and "determination" mean substantive agency action including any accompanying procedural determinations under this chapter (except where the word "action" means "appeal" in RCW 43.21C.080(2)). The word "action" in this section and RCW 43.21C.080 does not mean a procedural determination by itself made under this chapter. The word "determination" includes any environmental document required by this chapter and state or local implementing rules. The word "agency" refers to any state or local unit of government. Except as provided in subsection (5) of this section, the word "appeal" refers to administrative, legislative, or judicial appeals.

(9) The court in its discretion may award reasonable attorneys' fees of up to one thousand dollars in the aggregate to the prevailing party, including a governmental agency, on issues arising out of this chapter if the court makes specific findings that the legal position of a party is frivolous and without reasonable basis. [1997 c 429 s 49; 1995 c 347 s 204; 1994 c 253 s 4; 1983 c 117 s 4.]

Severability—1997 c 429: See note following RCW 36.70A.3201.

Finding—Severability—Part headings and table of contents not law—1995 c 347: See notes following RCW 36.70A.470.