

What is Stratigraphy?

Stratigraphy is geological term and system of identification that helps archaeologists better understand the rock layers and their stratification (layering known as stratum). A stratigraphic profile completed prior to redevelopment (as part of archaeological testing) is a good way to help us understand and date artifacts that may found during redevelopment or archaeological testing.



A stratigraphic profile not only defines the stratigraphic layers, but also relates these layers to general time periods and use. This is helpful because artifacts that are 75 years old or older (on private, City or State lands) found below ground are considered archaeological resources and are currently protected under the requirements of state, and local regulations. The top layer is modern fill. Stratums 1 & 2 are from the historic period (1800-1900;1900-1946). Native soils (in Salem – the darker color soil seen above in Stratum 3) are the layer in the stratigraphic profile which as been identified as the depth where Indigenous peoples occupied and used the land that is now occupied by residents of the City of Salem (10,000BCE-1800). Indigenous artifacts such as flaked stone tools, obsidian tools and arrowheads as well as waste flakes and beads could potentially be found within undisturbed soils at this level. Stratum 4 is prior to that, approximately 12,000 years ago and earlier during the period of the Missoula flood (13,000-15,000 years ago) when water extended over this area and a large amount of gravel was deposited.

Contact: Kimberli Fitzgerald, City Archaeologist 503 540-2397 kfitzgerald@cityofsalem.net