

DELIBERATIVE DOCUMENT DOES NOT REFLECT THE OPINION OF THE URBAN FORESTRY COMMISSION AND MAY OR MAY NOT MOVE FORWARD TO VOTE.
DRAFT 10-9-19

SIMPLER, SMARTER, AND STRONGER PROTECTIONS FOR SEATTLE’S URBAN FOREST
The Urban Forestry Commission’s recommendations for Seattle’s tree protection ordinance update

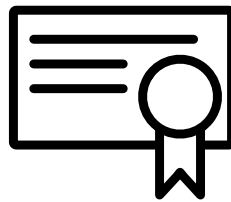
Seattle’s trees form an urban forest that is vital to our quality of life. Trees remove air pollutants, provide shade and block wind that reduces energy bills, decrease the city’s carbon footprint as part of Seattle’s response to the climate crisis, absorb runoff from rainstorms, offer habitat for birds and other wildlife, and improve people’s physical and mental health.

Seattle has had an interim tree protection ordinance in place since 2009. The Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) believes the protections the interim ordinance provides are weak, that the requirements are overly complicated, and that it is overall not effective. The UFC has submitted, upon the request of Seattle City Council and in alignment with Section 6 of Council’s March [2019 Mandatory Housing Affordability Companion Resolution](#), a proposed draft update that would simplify the ordinance and improve protections for trees and the benefits they provide to people.

THE [UFC’s JUNE 2019 DRAFT ORDINANCE](#) RECOMMENDS PROTECTING OUR URBAN FOREST IN SEVEN KEY WAYS.



1. EXPAND PERMIT PROGRAM. Give neighbors at least two-week public notice through posting of a permit application.



2. CERTIFY TREE SERVICE PROVIDERS. Require registration and certification for all tree service providers working on trees on private property in Seattle.



3. REPLACE SIGNIFICANT TREES. Replace any tree removed that had a trunk diameter of six inches or greater.



4. TRACK CHANGES IN THE URBAN FOREST. Compile data on tree removal and replacement for better urban forestry management.



5. PROTECT BIG TREES, GROVES, AND TREES ON UNDEVELOPED LOTS. Provide stronger protections for trees and groves which provide our city with the most benefits.



6. ENCOURAGE TREE RETENTION ON ALREADY DEVELOPED LOTS. permit fewer significant tree removals on already developed lots.



7. FUND AND ENFORCE. Allocate adequate funding in the City budget to ensure tree protections are enforced.

TURN OVER FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THESE RECOMMENDATIONS

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SIMPLER, SMARTER, AND STRONGER PROTECTIONS, EXPLAINED



1. EXPAND PERMIT PROGRAM. The UFC recommends expanding the tree removal and replacement permit program to give neighbors better notice of when and where legal tree removal is taking place. Public notice of tree removal and replacement would be posted starting two weeks before removal and ending one week after removal. This process is modeled after that used by the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) and would be required for removal and replacement of any tree with a trunk six inches in diameter or greater on private property in all land use zones, both during development and outside development.



2. CERTIFY TREE SERVICE PROVIDERS. Expanding SDOT's existing tree service provider's registration and certification to include all tree service providers working on trees on private property in Seattle would help ensure high-quality, knowledgeable tree care professionals are tending our urban forest.



3. REPLACE SIGNIFICANT TREES. Future generations should get to enjoy a tree-filled city like we do. By requiring replacement for any Significant Tree (those with a trunk six inches in diameter or greater) removed, this recommendation helps ensure inter-generational equity. The UFC recommends that replacement trees should reach a canopy volume in 25 years equivalent to the canopy volume lost. Replacement can take place on site or people can pay a fee-in-lieu for trees to be planted elsewhere in the city. Those fees would flow into a City-established Tree Replacement and Preservation Fund, which should also be able to accept fines, donations, and grants and to set up easements.



4. TRACK CHANGES IN THE URBAN FOREST. The UFC recommends tracking tree loss and replacement in a citywide database as part of the permitting process. The data will allow the city to better manage the urban forest and to satisfy public inquiry about legal tree removal through an online system.



5. PROTECT BIG TREES, GROVES, AND TREES ON UNDEVELOPED LOTS. Big trees provide the most benefits to people and wildlife. They also take the longest time to replace, if that's even possible. The UFC recommends that the threshold for Exceptional Trees be lowered to include trees with a trunk 24 inches in diameter or greater. Groves provide excellent habitat for birds and other wildlife and are becoming rare outside of parks. The UFC recommends maintaining tree grove protections, as well as prohibiting removal of any significant tree on undeveloped lots.



6. ENCOURAGE TREE RETENTION ON ALREADY DEVELOPED LOTS. The UFC recommends allowing removal of no more than two significant non-exceptional trees in three years per lot outside development. Current code allows removal of three such trees per year, a higher rate than that of other cities in the Pacific Northwest. The proposed change recognizes and appreciates the benefits urban trees provide.



7. FUND AND ENFORCE. In order for any updated tree protection ordinance to be successful, all elements should be appropriately resourced, including improved enforcement. This must be accommodated in the City budget.

WANT TO CONTRIBUTE? YOUR IDEAS MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

The UFC is actively soliciting comments on the proposed [draft update](#) to Seattle's tree protection ordinance. Please provide your comments, questions, concerns, admiration or frustration to Sandra Pinto de Bader at Sandra.Pinto_de_Bader@seattle.gov by December 31, 2019.