

# City of Seattle Proposed Tree Regulations Summary

July 14, 2010

The Department of Planning and Development (DPD) is proposing to revise Seattle's regulations governing trees on private property. These revisions are intended to advance the goals of the City's Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP), established in April 2007 to maintain and enhance a thriving and diverse urban forest. The UFMP set a goal of increasing Seattle's tree canopy to 30% by 2037 and established general strategies for accomplishing this goal. Canopy cover analysis commissioned by the City found that Seattle's tree canopy was approximately 23% in 2007. While canopy cover appeared to increase slightly between 2003 and 2007 across all zones, this analysis also demonstrated that canopy cover is not increasing at a rate sufficient to meet our overall goals. Additionally, redeveloped parcels, which only represented about 1.8% of the city during this 3 year period, showed a substantial loss of trees. The regulatory proposal summarized below is a key element of a city-wide update of policy, programs, and regulations designed to increase canopy cover with the City to meet the goals of the UFMP.

DPD's proposed amendments seek to enhance the health of the city's urban forest by applying more rigorous landscaping standards and expanding the scope of existing regulations to address institutions and street trees in single family zones as well as larger retail and commercial uses in industrial zones. Additionally, DPD is proposing to repeal provisions that are not achieving their intent and to streamline others to support voluntary retention of trees in order to ensure that trees are not seen as a burden to property owners. DPD believes that these proposals, together with public education and enhanced incentives to plant and retain trees, will expand the urban forest in Seattle and advance goals for a more livable and sustainable community.

DPD is seeking public review and comment until October 31, 2010, prior to the Mayor submitting his recommendations to the City Council in 2011.

Overall, key aspects of the proposal are as follows:

- Implement a tree credit requirement in Single-family zones, rather than retaining existing "exceptional tree" provisions. A tree credit standard would require applicants proposing new or replaced homes to provide one tree credit per 200 sq. ft. of lot area after the first 1500 sq. ft. Tree credits could be provided through retention or planting according to the table below. A 25% bonus would be given for native or evergreen trees.

Tree Provided	Tree Credits
New small species tree	1
New small/medium species tree	2
New medium/large species tree	3
New large species tree	4
Preserved tree 6-9"	6
Preserved tree 9-12"	7
Preserved tree 12-15"	8
Preserved tree 15-18"	9
Preserved tree 18-21"	10
Preserved tree 21-24"	11
Preserved tree 24-28"	12
Preserved tree 28-32"	13
Preserved tree 32-36"	14
Preserved tree 36" and greater	15

## Example Case

Lot size = 6000 sq. ft.  
Minimum Tree Credit =  
 $(6000-1500)/200 = 23$

### Sample Planting Plan

Preserve one 23" tree = 11 credits  
Preserve one 6" tree = 6 credits  
Plant one native large tree = 5 credits  
Plant one small tree = 1 credit

- Implement tree requirements for institutions in single-family zones, similar to those proposed for single-family homes.
- Require street trees during development of new or replaced homes in single-family zones. Street trees are already required in multi-family, commercial, and downtown zones. Standards for street trees are contained in the Seattle Department of Transportation’s (SDOT) Right-of Way Improvement Manual.
- Expand application of Seattle’s Green Factor as an incentive-based approach to tree retention during development, and repeal “exceptional tree” regulations in Lowrise, Midrise, and Commercial zones. Green Factor is a flexible alternative to traditional landscaping standards that allows applicants to meet an overall environmental services goal by choosing from a menu of options including tree retention, new planting, green roofs, green walls, and permeable pavement. As part of this process, DPD will revisit the Green Factor scoring methodology to consider further incentives for the retention of large trees.
- Add Green Factor requirement for principal commercial and retail uses over 4,000 sq. ft. in size in Industrial areas. Industrial areas pose particularly difficult challenges for tree planting due to the requirements for freight mobility and low-cost, flexible space that is able to accommodate a variety of storage, staging, and manufacturing uses.
- Simplify the process for allowing departures to height, setbacks, and parking to preserve large trees during development.



- Integrate tree regulations into SMC Title 23, Land Use Code.
- Repeal interim tree regulations.

Additionally, DPD is seeking further input before recommending the following requirements as elements of the proposal:

1. Require maintenance bonds to ensure establishment of new plantings in Multi-family and Commercial zones. A maintenance bond would require project applicants to set aside funds to ensure that trees and landscaping are maintained after initial planting for a specified period of time (likely two to three years). After which applicants would be required to schedule an inspection to demonstrate that required landscaping has been established.
2. Allow payment in lieu of planting in single family zones. As an alternative to meeting the proposed new tree credit requirement entirely through planting and retention, this option would allow homeowners to contribute to a fund to meet part or all of their obligation through off-site planting undertaken by the City.

For more information about this Tree Regulations Update process or to obtain a copy of the full proposal, go to [www.seattle.gov/dpd/planning/SeattleTreeRegulationUpdate/](http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/planning/SeattleTreeRegulationUpdate/).

For more information on city-wide tree efforts and the Urban Forest Management Plan, go to: [www.seattle.gov/trees/](http://www.seattle.gov/trees/).

