

Summary of Proposed Changes to Director's Rule 6-2001 Relating to the Designation of Exceptional Tree

October 6, 2008

Director's Rule (DR) 6-2001, which provides standards and procedures for designating exceptional trees, is proposed to be updated as part of interim tree protection measures proposed by Mayor Nickels. These amendments would be accomplished through the adoption of a new DR 16-2008 which will supersede DR 6-2001. The purpose of this update is to redefine the term "exceptional tree" to include more individual trees with significant canopy, as well as groves of trees. The update would accomplish the following:

- Expand the definition of exceptional trees to include groves of trees. The updated director's rule defines a grove of trees as a group of 8 or more trees with a diameter of 12" or more that form a continuous canopy.
- Reduce the diameter threshold for non-native species from an American Forest Association (AFA) rating of 75% of the largest tree in Washington to a diameter threshold of 24" or 75% of the largest documented tree in Seattle, whichever is less.
- Maintain existing thresholds for most native trees while raising threshold diameters for three species that are commonly planted and faster growing (quaking aspen, paper birch, and shore pine) to 50% of the largest documented tree in Seattle. This modification was proposed in recognition of the fact these species have become commonly available commercially and may not be exceptional at very small sizes. Additionally, most non-planted native trees will be protected under the grove definition and existing Environmentally Critical Areas regulations.
- Add a new measurement section to clarify the technique for measurement of tree diameters based on International Society of Arboriculture standards. The diameter threshold for vine maple was increased from 6" to 8" to reflect changes to the standard measurement technique for multi-stemmed trees; however, these changes are likely to increase the number of vine maple designated as exceptional overall.
- Simplify the exceptional tree definition by providing a table that lists threshold diameters for common species.
- Reformat the rule to make the exceptional tree definition more prominent and to condense the discussion of SEPA implications.

The expanded definition of exceptional trees, including groves, is estimated to increase the number of trees regulated both through the interim tree protection proposal and through existing regulations for exceptional trees on sites undergoing development from about 1% to 5% of trees in Seattle.