

Private Property Tree Regulations Update FAQ

1) What is the purpose of the update?

Overall, the purpose of this proposal is to implement the goals of the City's Urban Forest Management Plan to enhance the environmental, economic, and social benefits of trees to the City, while acknowledging other citywide policies for sustainability and growth management as well as the goals of property owners including solar access, accessory structures, and property access.

Specifically, the proposal would improve existing tree regulations and add a number of new measures that would expand or improve development standards to better mitigate the impacts of development. These proposals are part of a city-wide effort, guided by an updated Urban Forest Management Plan, to expand the urban forest in Seattle and advance goals for a more livable and sustainable community.

2) Where is DPD in the process of updating Private Property Tree Regulations?

DPD began the process of updating these regulations with the formation of the Emerald City Task Force, a ten-member group representing the development, architecture, landscape architecture, real estate, and tree care professions, in 2007. This effort was followed by meetings with various stakeholder groups and an urban forest workshop facilitated by the Urban Forest IDT and attended by urban forest stakeholders from throughout the region. In 2010, the Department of Planning and Development released a proposal for updating the City of Seattle's regulations regarding trees on private property. During July through December of 2010, DPD conducted extensive outreach on this proposal. A summary of comments received during this process was compiled and is available on our website at www.seattle.gov/dpd/planning/trees. The update process was put on temporary hold due to staffing cuts and council priorities, but was restarted in 2012. In early 2012, DPD began working with elected officials to update the proposal in response to comments heard from the public process. The updated proposal, including draft legislation, was released in July 2012. DPD is seeking public comment on the proposal through October 1, 2012. After this period, final legislation will be prepared for Council and is anticipated to be submitted in early 2013.

3) How does DPD's Tree Regulations Update relate to other city efforts?

DPD's Tree Regulations Update is part of a city-wide effort to implement the Urban Forest Management Plan coordinated by the Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team. Over the last two years, the City's Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team has been working on a substantial update of the policies and regulations governing trees in the City. In addition to DPD's update of private property tree regulations, this effort also includes:

- An update of the Urban Forest Management Plan, which establishes the City's overall goals and actions for improving the urban forest, was released in July for public discussion through September (www.seattle.gov/trees/management.htm)

- A draft update of the Street Tree Ordinance, which provides regulations governing street trees, was the subject of a public comment period from December 2011 to March 2012 and is anticipated to be forwarded to City Council in July (www.seattle.gov/transportation/treeordinance.htm)

4) What's the current state of Seattle's tree canopy?

Canopy cover analysis found that the city-wide tree canopy in 2007 was 23%

5) How was that assessment made?

The canopy cover assessment was completed by NCDL Imaging using 2-ft resolution Quickbird satellite data and methods developed by the United States Forest Service's Center for Urban Forest Research and the University of California-Davis. A copy of the report is available at www.seattle.gov/trees.

6) What is the City's goal for increasing the canopy?

The City's Urban Forest Management Plan, as adopted in 2007 and as proposed for update, establishes a goal of increasing canopy cover to 30% by 2037. There are also specific goals broken down by different management areas.

7) Is the City's canopy cover increasing or decreasing?

Comparison of canopy cover analysis is difficult because results can vary significantly between different analysis methods and times of year. Additionally, reliable canopy analysis technologies have only been developed in the last 10-15 years. The best data that the City has on recent canopy cover comes from the NCDL study which used a consistent data source and analysis method to look at data in 2003 and 2007. This analysis found that canopy had increased from 22.5% to 22.9%; however, given the uncertainty in the data, it is unclear if this is an indication of a long term trend.

The City also has reviewed studies conducted prior to 2003; however, the limited resolution of these studies makes comparison with early conditions impractical.

8) Did canopy cover increase or decrease in certain areas of Seattle more than others?

Within the city, canopy cover analysis indicates that the city gained canopy between 2003 and 2007 in all management areas except natural areas, where there was small drop due to the impacts of invasive species. Canopy cover gains were greater in the right-of-way than private property, but gains were seen in both areas. However, some neighborhoods gained canopy while others decreased. Maps of canopy cover changes by area are available at www.seattle.gov/trees/canopycover.htm. The City is specifically targeting neighborhoods with low or declining canopy cover through its tree give-away programs www.seattle.gov/trees/treesforneighborhoods.htm.

In addition to natural areas, redeveloped parcels, which only represented about 1.8% of the city during this 3 year period, showed a substantial loss of trees. The average canopy on lots that were redeveloped between 2003 and 2007 went from 30% to 17.7% in single-family areas, from 17.7% to

5.4% in multifamily areas, and from 6.5% to 4.3% in commercial areas. It is unknown to what extent this decline on redeveloped parcels represents a loss of tree canopy potential over time or the replacement of mature trees with new plantings that will grow over time; however, existing landscaping and Green Factor requirement, which was enacted after this period, will tend to ensure this canopy will increase in the future.

9) How is the city working to meet its urban forestry goals?

The City's Urban Forest Interdepartmental team, consisting of representatives of all departments that manage trees, develops annual work plans to guide implementation, available at <http://www.seattle.gov/trees/workplans.htm>.

In addition to this regulatory update, key actions include:

- Updating the city's Urban Forest Management Plan – www.seattle.gov/trees/management.htm
- Updating the city's street tree regulations - www.seattle.gov/transportation/treeordinance.htm
- Implementing a policy that all city-maintained trees that are removed must be replaced with 2 new trees; this program, in combination with other capital programs, resulted in the planting of 2,634 new trees on public property in 2011
- Trees for Neighborhoods program - a program that provides free trees to Seattle residents in target neighborhoods.
- Green Seattle Partnership –program that has recruited and managed 87,000 hours of volunteer support to restore city natural areas
- ReLeaf - public outreach campaign

10) How do the new regulations support the city's goal?

The proposed update is likely to result in substantially greater canopy cover potential by:

- Making existing exceptional tree regulations more effective;
- Applying more rigorous landscaping standards during construction; and
- Expanding the scope of existing regulations, such as to institutions in single-family zones and retail and commercial uses in industrial zones.

11) Would the City require a tree removal permit for sites not undergoing development?

Property owners would be required to get approval to remove any tree in or adjacent to environmentally critical areas such as streams, wetlands, or steep slope or any trees 24 inches in diameter or greater in single family, multi-family or commercial zones.

12) What do other similar sized cities do to promote tree growth?

There are a variety of approaches used by other cities to promote tree growth. Seattle's proposed approach would provide stronger protections for trees than any other large Pacific Northwest cities. Many small cities in the region have more comprehensive permit requirements, but these regulations are primarily focused on limiting yearly removal rather than on preservation of existing trees.