

Summary of Pacific Northwest Municipal Tree Regulations  
Prepared by Seattle DPD in conjunction with Sound Tree Solutions  
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The attached table is the comparison of Seattle to eleven Pacific Northwest municipalities and their tree regulations. These cities included two large cities (Portland and Vancouver, BC), two medium cities (Bellevue, Olympia), four small cities (Kirkland, Shoreline, Redmond, Issaquah) and three small cities chose expressly because they were known to have strong regulations (Lake Forest, Beaux Arts, Woodinville). Below are the trends found amongst these entities regarding tree regulations related to single-family, multi-family, and commercial, both outside the development process and during development.

### **Single Family – Outside Development**

This comparison demonstrated a wide variety of approaches to limiting tree removal outside of development in Single Family zones. Most of the larger jurisdictions (Portland, Bellevue, Olympia, Kirkland, and Shoreline) only required tree removal permits for substantial tree removal or tree removal on undeveloped or sub-dividable lots. Smaller, more suburban jurisdictions surveyed (Redmond, Issaquah, Lake Forest Park, Beaux Arts, Woodinville) tended to require permits for all tree removal. In most cases, these requirements allowed a specific number of trees to be removed outright, but some individual jurisdictions, including Vancouver, B.C., require specific criteria be met for any tree removal or for removal above a certain threshold. Below is a more detailed summary of findings.

#### *Permit Requirements*

- Mostly permits are only required when tree removal is above a certain limit, for trees of a certain size or designation, or for a certain amount of site disturbance (commonly reviewed through grading permit).
- Portland and Olympia do not regulate any tree removal on smaller developed single-family that cannot be sub-divided but require a permit for trees on undeveloped properties.
- Vancouver BC and Lake Forest Park require a permit for any tree removal (of certain minimal size).
- Kirkland encourages a tree removal request form (not an 'official' permit) for removals within the allowance to make sure the tree removal is within the certain limits.
- Only Kirkland considers "groves" of trees differently than individual trees
- Most cities do not differentiate regulations based on tree species

#### *Permit Cost*

- When a permit fee is in place, the range is \$50-250 and some add cost of review time to base fee.
- Only a couple cities have no fee for single-family tree 'simple' removal permits.

#### *Maximum removal*

- Most of the cities that limit tree removal outside of development allow a specific number of trees to be removed without explanation. Removal above this limit usually requires meeting certain criteria (nuisance, hazard, conflict, etc.) and many can require an arborist report to demonstrate that the removal is necessary.

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- The maximum number of trees allowed to be removed without a permit ranges from one to three trees; Shoreline and Issaquah have multiple-year limits (six in three years and four in five years).
- Village of Beaux Arts and Woodinville do not limit the number of trees that can be removed, but require that a certain density of the trees be maintained through retention or new planting.
- Seattle and Redmond allow removal of certain trees (Exceptional, Landmark) only if deemed dead, dying, hazardous.

### *Replacement required*

- There is quite a variety of rules for replacement, but many of the cities require replacement to maintain a certain density.
- Three cities (including Seattle) never require replacement while two always require replacement (unless hazard tree).

### **Single Family – During Development**

The majority of the communities have a minimum tree density requirement that must be met post-construction through any combination of retention and/or replacement efforts. Many cities allow for replacement off-site or payment into an account if the trees cannot be planted on the subject site.

### *Retention*

- Four of the twelve cities surveyed state that if viable trees can be safely retained, they must be retained (Seattle, Vancouver BC, Kirkland, Redmond).

### *Planting & Replacement*

- Most jurisdictions require the post-construction property to meet a minimum tree density through planting or retention. Tree densities typically establish a minimum number of tree credits that must be achieved per area and establish a certain number of credits for trees based on the diameter of each, giving more credit to larger trees.
- Portland and Bellevue appear to have a highly discretionary review process and complex flexibility in determining requirements that can be met through a combination of planting and/or retention.
- Vancouver and Redmond appear to require replacement for all trees; however, Vancouver indicates that there is some flexibility and discretion with this requirement.

### **Multi-Family and Commercial**

Most cities utilize similar retention and planting requirements for multi-family and commercial zones as are used for single-family zones, both outside and during development; however, they generally require a lower minimum density. Some cities exempt certain business districts or high density zones from tree regulations entirely, and most rely on landscape standards to determine required replacement. A few nuances include:

- For tree removal outside development, Bellevue and Issaquah instead rely on the landscape standards to determine removal allowance and required replacements.
- Retention efforts during development are similar to single-family in majority of the cities, though maximum development potential and landscape perimeter standards take precedence.
- The predominant requirement during development is compliance with landscape standards for the zone.

		Seattle	Portland	Vancouver, B.C.	Olympia	Bellevue	Kirkland	
Single Family	Outside Development	Permit Required	No, except for hazard trees above maximum removal limit	Required for tree removal except for non-heritage trees in Single Family homes in SF zones that can not be further subdivided	Required for trees >8"	Only for undeveloped lots or lots greater than 2 acres	Only for tree removal resulting land disturbance of >1,000 sq ft; Bridle Trails (large lot district) has separate regulations	Only for hazard or nuisance trees beyond maximum removal; encourage a tree removal request for any tree removal to make sure within limits
	Permit Cost	N/A	\$35	\$57 for one tree, \$162 for each additional tree	\$50	N/A	N/A	
	Maximum Removal	No exceptional trees may be removed and no more than 3 non-exceptional trees 6" in diameter or greater may be removed in any year period	None, removal application must meet specific criteria related to health of tree and impact of removal	One tree is allowed per year or more if they satisfy certain conditions (interference with utility lines, nuisance, hazard).	Developed properties over two acres and Undeveloped property have removal restrictions.	None	up to 2 significant trees per year	
	Replacement	No replacement required	Required for removal under permit; same total dbh unless it would create hardship	Required unless it meets minimum requirements based on a density table	None	None	Replacement required if trees are one of last two significant trees on site.	
	Exemptions (other than dead, hazard, ROW, parks)		nuisance trees or prohibited species, trees within 10 feet of an existing building	nuisance, damage to utility lines or pipes	Commercial nurseries or Christmas tree farms, harvesting with a forest practices permit	None	utility management, commercial tree nurseries or tree farms	
During Development	Retention	Exceptional trees must be retained unless the maximum lot coverage could not be achieved while protecting the tree. Other trees may be removed where required for the construction of a new structure	No requirements for retention of trees during construction except for subdivision applications; subdivision applicant must choose from 5 retention/planting options and there is also an adjustment process to allow flexibility	Trees a safe distance from the building envelop must be preserved	No mandatory retention requirement	Highly discretionary process. For new and additions of over 20%, required to retain 30% of the existing diameter inches or meet alternative criteria; Bridle Trails (low density R-1) has higher retention requirement	Type 1 trees (>30", specimen trees, trees on slopes, groves) must be retained if in setbacks; no requirements for additions	
	Replacement/ Planting	Minimum 2 diameter inches of trees per 1000 sq ft must be retained or planted new	per landscaping standards	Replacement of removed trees	Must meet minimum tree density through planting and/or retention	Replacement allowed as alternative to retention if criteria are met	Planting required to meet minimum tree density	

Multifamily and Commercial	Outside Development	Outside of development	Same as SF	tree cutting requirements same as for SF	Same as SF	Same as Single Family	Must comply with landscape standards for these land uses	Same as Single Family
	During Development	Retention	Same as SF except that maximum development potential is standard rather than maximum lot coverage. Different landscaping standards	None, except for subdivision applications which follow same rules as SF except that most multi-family lots are small so trees must be retained if feasible	Same as SF, except that there is substantial discretionary control by planner to deviate	No mandatory retention requirement	For subdivisions, PUDs - shall retain all significant trees in perimeter landscaping area that do not constitute a safety hazard; at least 15% in interior area; Downtown Land Use District exempted	Type 1 trees (>30", specimen trees, trees on slopes, groves) should be retained in setbacks and landscaped areas if feasible
		Replacement/Planting	Landscape Standards apply	None	Same as SF, except that there is substantial discretionary control by planner to deviate	For developing properties - meet minimum tree density (30 tree units per acre). For proposed additions - 1 tree unit for every 500 ft site disturbance and 3 tree units for every tree unit removed, up to minimum tree density	Landscape standards only	No minimum density; must meet landscape standards only
	Other	Departures allowed to accommodate retention	Heritage tree program, posting requirement	Heritage landscapes	Landmark program, subdivision plans, conversion harvest option for sites going from forest to subdivision	Discounted value (diameter inches) for alder and cottonwood; director discretion to utilize non-significant trees to meet diameter inch minimum density	Landmark designation program, grove protections; off-site or fee-in-lieu options	

		Shoreline	Redmond	Issaquah	Lake Forest Park	Village of Beaux Arts	Woodinville	
Single Family	Outside Development	Permit Required	required if more than 3,000 sq ft are cleared or more than 6 significant trees are to be removed	Permit required for any significant (>6") tree	Permit required for any significant (>6") tree above limit, landmark trees, thinning a heavily wooded lot, nuisance (physical damage) or solar access issue	Level I permit for up to 2 significant trees (6"+); Level II permit for 3-5 significant trees (may require arborist report)	Permit required for removal of coniferous, evergreen, madrone, oak or big leaf maple with a diameter greater than 1 foot or any tree planted as mitigation (Significant); Landmark trees are > 3 feet diameter	Yes - up to two trees can be removed without an arborist report
	Permit Cost	N/A	No fee for single family, \$250 base fee	\$240; \$480 if non-emerg. after the fact; free for hazard trees	\$100 for a Level II permit; Treble if unpermitted tree removal	\$50 + hourly rate for Town Arborist review and report	\$75 + review time (fee currently waived)	
	Maximum Removal	Up to 6 significant trees in 3 years or required to replace and maintain a minimum 20% density	Maximum of 2 significant trees per year for lots up to 10,000 sq ft (increases for increased lot sizes); Landmark (>30") or protected trees may only be removed if dead or dying or through exemption process.	Up to 2 trees per year and 4 trees in 5 years for lots up to 10,000 sq ft allowed outright; above this threshold must meet criteria (causing physical damage to structure or pavement, impeding use of solar, or for thinning and improved health of surrounding trees)	Up to 5 significant trees in a 12-month period (with a Level II permit); require that a minimum of 35% of all significant trees retained for five years	Can remove up to 20% of Protected Tree Units within a twelve-month period. Tree unit = 12 diameter inches	Maintain either the lesser of the minimum tree density or 50% greater tree credit than currently exists if not meeting the minimum tree density; if site has no tree credits, a total of 10 credits is required	
	Replacement	for more than six significant trees per year and then must maintain 20% of the significant trees on-site at a 1:1 to 3:1 replacement ratio depending on size of tree	Required except for replacement of dead, diseased, dying or structurally unsound trees	Required if lot is below 2 significant trees per 5,000 sq ft unless tree was hazardous	required with \$300 fee in lieu of replace option, one for one replacement for significant trees and two for one for landmark trees (28" or larger)	Must maintain minimum of 1 tree unit per 1,000 sq ft of lot area - plant mitigated trees if fall below through removal; 8 foot tall minimum, must be native or protected species	Supplemental trees required to meet tree density requirements (above)	
	Exemptions (other than dead, hazard, ROW, parks)	certain cemeteries			Emergency removals only (hazard trees require permit and replacement)	Holly and laurel	utility management, commercial tree nurseries or tree farms	
During Development	Retention	Must retain a minimum of 20% of the trees on the property with limited exemptions	minimum of 35% of all significant trees shall be retained (variance required to fall below)	No mandatory retention requirement	No mandatory retention requirement	No mandatory retention requirement	No mandatory retention requirement	
	Replacement/ Planting	Only if beyond 6 tree/3 year limit	all trees must be replaced with allowances for off-site or fee-in-lieu	Required to meet minimum density through retention and/or replacement equal to 30% of existing total diameter	Required to meet minimum density through retention and/or replacement equal to 35% of existing total diameter	Required to meet minimum density through retention and/or replacement (one tree unit per 1,000 sq ft)	Required to meet minimum density through retention and/or replacement	

Multifamily and Commercial	Outside Development	Outside of development	same as SF for up to R-48 zoning (about L2 or L3), no requirements for other zones	No more than five significant trees per acre per year; Landmark (>30") or protected trees may only be removed if dead or dying or through exemption process.	Same requirements as SF but with minimum density of 4 significant trees per 5,000 sq ft and comply with maintenance and landscape code requirements	Same regulations as for Single Family (Level I or II depending on # of trees requesting to remove)	No Commercial/Multi-family in Village	Same as for Single Family
	During Development	Retention	same as SF for up to R-48 zoning (about L2 or L3), no requirements for other zones	Minimum of 35 percent of all significant trees shall be retained (variance required to fall below)	No mandatory retention requirement	No mandatory retention requirement	No Commercial/Multi-family in Village	Minimum 30 tree credits per acre in Central Business District; significant trees must be retained where possible on commercial and industrial developments (Office/Research Park Overlay) and notable trees in Tourist District
		Replacement/Planting	same as SF for up to R-48 zoning (about L2 or L3), no requirements for other zones	Same as Single Family	25% of the total diameter inches in the developable area of the site through retention and replacement; landscape screen buffer requirements apply	Same regulations as for Single Family (Level II )	No Commercial/Multi-family in Village	To meet minimum density where applicable
Other						Posting requirement for permits	Distinguishes Landmark Trees with \$25,000 fine for illegal removal; Posting of all tree removal permits within days after City receipt of complete application - 14 day notification period; Protected Tree Species: conifer, evergreen, madrone, oak, big leaf maple	Incentive to plant native species; tree credit calculation unconventional (non-linear nor evenly assigned); residential density incentive for higher tree retention on-site