Guidelines for Affixing Decorative Lighting to Street Trees

November 1, 2013

General Provisions

The mission of SDOT Urban Forestry is to preserve, protect, sustain, and regenerate the City’s urban forest in public rights-of-way for Seattle residents and businesses so that social, economic, and environmental benefits are maximized.

Decorative or seasonal lighting in street trees can be an identifying characteristic within business and neighborhood districts in the City of Seattle, adding interest and vibrancy to the streetscape. Property or business owners, corporations, or associations are allowed to install temporary decorative or seasonal lighting on trees in the public right-of-way.

There may be up to two separate Street Use permits needed for your tree lighting project: 1) Street Use Seasonal Lighting permit and/or 2) Street Use Mobility Impact permit.

- A Street Use Seasonal Lighting permit is NOT required for temporary tree lighting installations of less than 3 months.
- A Street Use Mobility Impact permit is NOT required when the installation or removal of the lighting is with a ladder 14 feet or less in height.
- A Street Use Seasonal Lighting permit is required to affix tree lighting for a duration longer than 3 months (and not to exceed 3 years). The purpose of this permit is to ensure that the lighting is installed and maintained in a manner that protects public safety and the health of the tree. The City Arborist will inspect these permitted installations after the initial installation and removal of the lights. If the installation is longer than one year, an additional annual inspection would be required.

- An additional Street Use Mobility Impact permit and Traffic Control Plan may be required for both the installation and removal of the lighting based on the method of installation or removal that is proposed (like a scissor lift or a truck-mounted aerial lift) in order to coordinate potential mobility impacts with other uses of the right-of-way.

The property or business owners, corporations, or associations shall install and maintain the lights in accordance with the following standards and conditions.

Standards

- The trees should have a minimum 4-inch trunk diameter in order to properly support the lighting and prevent damage to the tree.
- Pruning of branches to accommodate the installation and removal of lights shall NOT be allowed under the Seasonal Lighting permit. Tree pruning associated with Seasonal Lighting requires an additional Tree Pruning permit.
- If any trees, tree trunks, branches, or limbs on trees within the right-of-way are cut, pruned, or damaged as the result of the lighting activity, the permittee (or adjacent property owner if a permit was not required) shall be assessed for damages per Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) 15.43.
- Strands of lights shall be installed at a height that does not impair or otherwise impede pedestrian or vehicle traffic. The strands shall not overhang sidewalks below 8 feet or travel or parking lanes below 14 feet.
- All installations must conform to National Electrical Standards and Codes. Applicant is responsible for obtaining any additional necessary permits from Seattle City Light for temporary or long term installations.
- All installation and removal activities shall adhere to the Traffic Control Manual for In-Street Work: http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/trafficcontrolmanual.htm
- Lights and related components, such as attachments and electric cords, shall be limited to those that blend in with the color of the tree bark and branches.
• If at any time the lighting devices or their components become a safety hazard, they shall be removed at the expense of the permittee (or adjacent property owner if a permit was not required).
• All old and non-functioning light strands shall be removed from the trees by the permittee (or adjacent property owner if a permit was not required) before new light strands are installed.
• After a major storm event where tree damage may have occurred, the permittee (or adjacent property owner if a permit was not required) shall inspect the trees for damage and alert the City Arborist of any problems found.
• SDOT reserves the right to prune or remove trees to abate potential risk to the public. In the event of an emergency that requires action on trees that contain permitted seasonal lighting, SDOT will not be held responsible for damages done to the fixtures and associated equipment.

**LIGHTING ATTACHMENT**

• All work on the lighting (either installation or removal) shall be performed while the trees are dormant. In general, work in the trees shall NOT be performed from March 1 through May 30 to prevent bark damage and to avoid injury to the developing buds.
• Installation and removal of lighting shall be done in a manner that does not harm the trees.
• At least a ½ inch gap between the fastener/string of lights and the trunk/branch to allow adequate room for seasonal growth. In addition, adequate space (approximately ½ inch gap between the tie/light string and the branch) shall be left between the branch and the strand to allow for branch sway during normal, anticipated wind. Any lights found by the City not having adequate space or otherwise causing damage to the tree shall be loosened or removed and replaced by the permittee (or adjacent property owner if a permit was not required).
• Under no circumstances should light fixtures, electrical wires, or other devices be attached to tree trunks, branches, or limbs with wire, duct tape, or masking tape.
• Be advised that there is a Holiday Moratorium in effect for the Downtown Retail Core and Pioneer Square from Thanksgiving to January 1. No Street Use permits will be issued for installation or removal of lighting during that time period. Refer to Client Assistance Memo (CAM) 2107 for more information.
• There are three methods of installing strings of lights in trees: tracing, draping, and wrapping. The preferred methods are tracing or draping. These methods are less harmful than wrapping.

• **Tracing Method:** The string of lights is installed along the tree branch, see Figure 1. The string of lights is affixed to a 2-inch in diameter or greater tree branch with either Velcro, florist tape, or other similar fastener. Intermittent wrapping is also acceptable, but the lights shall not be affixed to the branch at an interval more frequent than 18 inches. Tracing can be used for either short-term or long-term installations.
• **Draping Method:** The string of lights is installed along the outside of the tree canopy, see Figure 2. The string of lights is affixed to a 1-inch in diameter or greater tree branch with either Velcro, florist tape, or other similar fastener. The lights shall not be affixed to the branch at an interval more frequent than 18 inches. Draping can be used for either short-term or long-term installations.
• **Wrapping Method:** The string of lights is installed by loosely wrapping the string around the trunk or branch, see Figure 3. Wrapping is done by winding the string of lights loosely around the trunk or to a 2-inch in diameter or greater tree branch. The lights should not be affixed to the branch at an interval more frequent than 2 – 3 inches. Wrapping tightly is not recommended. Wrapping can only be used for short-term installations of less than 3 months.

**SEASONAL LIGHTING PERMIT**

The Street Use Seasonal Lighting permit has a permit fee of $146 with a minimum inspection deposit of $172 due at the time of issuance. This inspection deposit will be used to assess the condition of the trees after lighting installation and verify the number of additional inspections necessary based on the number of permitted trees and duration of permit to ensure the ongoing health of the trees.

Additional inspections will be assessed annually; fees are based on the number of trees that will have lighting installed.

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<th>Number of Trees</th>
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<tr>
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<td>$344.00</td>
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Additionally, a final inspection with a fee of $86 is required after the removal of lighting when the permit expires. You must call the City Arborist (206) 684- TREE (8733) to schedule this inspection on the first business day following the removal of all equipment. If electrical lights, wires, connectors, or other devices are found on street trees after the permit expiration date or found without a permit, they may be removed and discarded by the City without notice. Expenses

**LEGAL DISCLAIMER:** This Client Assistance Memo (CAM) should not be used as a substitute for codes and regulations. The applicant is responsible for compliance with all code and rule requirements, whether or not described in this CAM.
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**Figure 2: Draping Method** The string of lights is installed along the outside of the tree canopy. The string of lights is affixed to a 1-inch in diameter or greater tree branch with either Velcro, florist tape, or other similar fastener. The lights shall not be affixed to the branch at an interval more frequent than 18 inches.

Draping can be used for either short-term or long-term installations.

**Figure 3: Wrapping Method** The string of lights is installed by loosely wrapping the string around the trunk or branch. Wrapping is done by loosely winding the string of lights around the trunk or to a 2-inch in diameter or greater tree branch. The lights should not be affixed to the branch at an interval more frequent than 2 – 3 inches. Wrapping tightly is not recommended.

Wrapping can only be used for short-term installations of less than 3 months.

**SDOT Contacts:**

For more information regarding the Tree Lighting Program, contact the City Arborist’s office at 684-TREE (8733).

For more information regarding the Street Use Mobility Impact permits, contact the Street Use Permit Office at 684-5253.