

Seattle Permits

— part of a multi-departmental City of Seattle series on getting a permit

Tree Requirements Associated with Development

December 29, 2022

The purpose of this Tip is to outline the tree protection requirements for sites undergoing development. It also details the information SDCI needs to review projects on sites in neighborhood residential, lowrise, midrise, and commercial zones with trees a diameter of 6 inches or greater when measured at 4.5 feet above ground.

Trees are valuable because they enhance the City's health and beauty. Trees need protection through careful and thoughtful design as development and density increases in Seattle. To preserve trees during construction, and help maintain Seattle's urban canopy, [Seattle Municipal Code \(SMC\) 25.11](#) and Director's Rule 16-2008, [Designation for Exceptional Trees](#), outline tree protection requirements. Tree protection requirements apply to trees 6 inches DBH (diameter at breast height) or DSH (diameter at standard height), both of which are a trunk diameter measurement taken at 4.5 feet above ground.

Certain trees are protected and may not be removed unless specific requirements are met. You should consider the location and canopy spread of the existing trees on your site in the earliest stages of your design to retain them. SDCI needs accurate, detailed, and complete information about each tree to determine whether they are required for retention. Providing that information will save time in the design and review process. If your site is designed with the assumption, based on inaccurate information, that a tree may be removed, and it must be retained, it will be a time-consuming change.

Where do tree requirements apply?

The tree requirements for the Tree Protection Code apply to properties zoned neighborhood residential, lowrise, midrise, or commercial with trees 6 inches DSH or greater on-site. The requirements also apply to trees 6 inches DSH or greater in those zones that are off-site with canopies overhanging and/or roots extending onto the project site.

This Tip does not apply to trees located in an environmentally critical area (ECA) or its buffers. These trees are subject to review per SMC 25.09, [Regulations for Environmentally Critical Areas](#). Follow guidance in Tip 331, [Environmentally Critical Areas—Tree and Vegetation Overview](#), and direct inquiries to our staff via email at SDCI-trees@seattle.gov or through SDCI's [Submit a Request](#) form. To help route your request, indicate that you need help with "Permits, codes, zones, plans," then select "Land Use" as the type of help you need, and then select "Trees" in the description field. If necessary, we can set up a virtual meeting to discuss potential or actual projects.

What are the tree requirements when developing property?

If you are developing a property, you may remove trees if retaining them prevents you from achieving the allowed lot coverage or floor area of the site's land use zone. For exceptional trees and for trees 24 inches DSH or greater, you must show that it is not possible to retain the trees by using various "departures" and "modifications" from the zone's land use code development standards (see SMC [25.11.060](#), [25.11.070](#), and [25.11.080](#)). We will review your tree and vegetation plans as part of your permit application.

Tree Protection Areas

Tree protection areas are generally within the dripline of the tree. The City restricts development disturbance of the tree protection area. The tree protection area may be reduced if approved by the Director according to a Tree Protection Report prepared by a registered Tree Service Provider.



Tree Replacement

In all zones, you must replace each exceptional tree, and any tree 24 inches DSH or greater authorized for removal in association with development, with a tree that will provide the same canopy coverage at maturity unless the removed tree qualifies as a hazardous tree.

What Information is needed in an arborist report?

SDCI requires an arborist report if you propose a reduction in the tree protection area. If a report is required, it shall be completed by a registered Tree Service Provider and include an assessment of impacts to the tree resulting from the proposed development.

The report must include:

- A complete and accurate inventory of all trees 6 inches DSH or greater on-site or off-site with canopies overhanging and/or roots extending onto the site
- Accurate identification including common name and scientific name (genus and species)
- Diameter at Standard Height (DSH)
- A scaled drawing that locates all trees in relation to existing site conditions such as buildings, driveways, rockeries, fences, utilities, etc.
- Dripline diameter and dimensioned/scaled representation on a site plan
- General tree health (pre-development condition)
- A tree risk assessment, if applicable
- Exceptional status by size or grove
- Signature and credentials of the registered Tree Service Provider completing the report
- Pruning plan, if applicable
- Monitoring plan, if applicable

If the proposed development reduces or modifies the tree protection areas of an exceptional tree(s), the report shall also provide:

- An assessment of the proposed design determining if the proposed disturbance will negatively impact the tree's health. No disturbance is allowed in the inner half of the dripline (inner root zone).
- An evaluation of each tree's health, location, and extent of anticipated disturbance to support any proposed encroachment into up to 1/3 of the outer dripline (outer root zone) with Director's approval per SMC 25.11.

- Fact-based information for methods to minimize impacts of the encroachment into the driplines of trees by suggesting design changes and/or alternative construction methods. Specifically, how anticipated impacts could be reduced, minimized, and/or mitigated. Examples include air-excavation, pier and beam construction, slab on-grade, etc.
- A calculation of the total area (square feet) of proposed disturbance in the outer half of the tree's dripline divided by the total area of the outer half of the dripline (square feet) that cannot exceed 33 percent or 1/3 of the outer dripline.

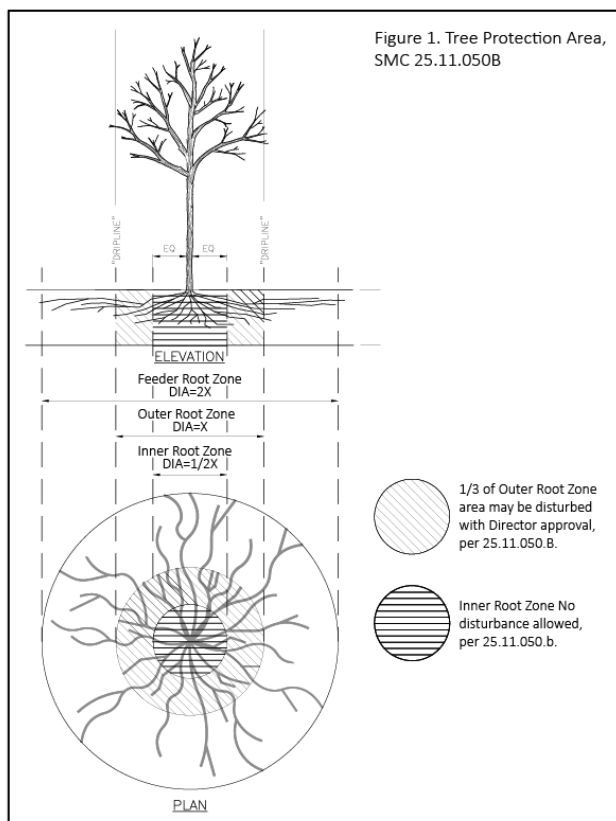


Figure 1. Tree protection area, SMC 25.11.050.B.

If the proposed development includes removal of a hazardous exceptional tree, the report must also include:

- An [International Society of Arboriculture \(ISA\) Basic Tree Risk Assessment](#) form included with the Tree Protection Report. You need to document the conditions that contribute to the high-risk rating, for example, photographs of visible decay or defects or a declining canopy.

- This form must be completed by a registered Tree Service Provider with a minimum of three years of experience in tree evaluation and possesses a current Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ), as established by the ISA.

What information is needed in the plan set?

Site plan drawings in submitted architectural, civil (CSC and DWC), and landscape plan sheets must clearly show and label the information below. Occasionally, projects will need to provide tree related information on architectural elevations and/or structural foundation plans or detail sheets. We will issue a correction notice if there are inconsistencies between your submitted drawing sheets (survey, architectural, civil CSC & DWC, and landscape site plans).

- All trees 6 inches DSH or greater on-site or off-site with canopies overhanging and/or roots extending onto site. Be sure to identify those that will be preserved and those that are proposed for removal. Only on-site trees will be evaluated for removal.
- Exceptional trees.
- Extent of all tree's outer dripline and of inner root zones for exceptional trees. If you are proposing any disturbance in the outer half of an exceptional tree's dripline, show the percent of disturbance.
- All areas of over-excavation for proposed construction located within 5 feet of tree protection areas.
- Delineation of tree protection areas for all trees to be retained, with dimensions from tree trunk or other site feature to be fenced so workers and inspectors can accurately locate them in the field. All tree protection areas must be protected with tree protection fencing and include the SDCI approved construction detail: [Tree and Vegetation Protection Detail](#).
- When tree protection is required, a note indicating that "No disturbance is permitted within the fenced area."
- Architectural elevation drawing: If a proposed building would require pruning of an exceptional tree branch in the tree protection area, show the tree and the proposed building to demonstrate the percentage of the tree's canopy removed.
- A table listing common name, genus, species, trunk diameter at standard height (DSH), dripline diameter, general health, exceptional status by size or grove, and whether the trees are proposed for removal or retention.
- Drainage and Wastewater Control Plan (DWC): Show trees to be preserved and tree protection areas.
- Construction Stormwater Control Plan (CSC): Show trees to be preserved and tree protection areas. If perimeter protection is required, note that filter fence that requires trenching is not allowed in the Tree Protection Area. It should either be placed outside the tree protection fence or replaced with compost sock, which is a less-invasive erosion control technique.
- Notes and/or instruction from the Tree Protection Report for specific construction techniques to minimize or avoid disturbance within the tree protection area.
- Required tree replacement plantings shown graphically and in table format on a site or landscape plan.

Contact Us

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Clarification of Terms

Arborist Report: For the purposes of this tip, "arborist report" refers to any document prepared by an arborist including, but not limited to, a tree protection report, tree inventory, tree assessment, or report/plan required by SDCI.

Dripline: Area encircling the base of a tree, the minimum extent of which is delineated by a vertical line extending from the outer limit of a tree's branch tips down to the ground.

■ **Inner Dripline:** The area encircling the base of a tree equal to one-half (1/2) the diameter of the dripline.

■ **Outer Dripline:** Area between the inner dripline and the extent of the dripline.

Exceptional tree: A tree or group of trees that because of its unique historical, ecological, or aesthetic value constitutes an important community resource, and is determined as such by the Director according to standards and procedures promulgated by SDCI.

Hazardous tree: Any tree or tree part that poses a high risk of damage to persons or property, and that is designated as such by the Director according to the tree

hazard evaluation standards established by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA).

Tree Protection Area: The area of a tree's dripline that must be protected from development.

Tree Service Provider: Any person or entity engaged in commercial tree work.

Protected tree: A protected tree is one defined in SMC 25.11 as either an exceptional tree, exceptional grove, or any tree or trees 6 inches DSH or greater on undeveloped land.

Qualified Professional: This person is qualified to undertake tree risk assessment as part of a development application. (See Director's rule 16-2008.) This person shall have a minimum of 3 years' experience in tree evaluation and shall have worked directly with the protection of trees during construction, as well as having one of the following credentials:

- Society of American Foresters (SAF) Certified Forester
- American Society of Consulting Arborists (ASCA) Registered Consulting Arborist
- Washington State Registered Landscape Architect
- International Society of Arborists (ISA) Certified Arborist with an Associate Degree and/or a minimum of 2 years of college-level credit and/or 120 Continuing Education Units. In addition, this professional must be on the SDCI Tree Service Provider Registry.

Read the Code

For more information on existing regulations, read:

- Tree Protection, Seattle Municipal Code (SMC 25.11) https://library.municode.com/wa/seattle/codes/municipal_code?nodeId=TIT25ENPRHIPR_CH25.11TRPR
- Environmentally Critical Areas, Seattle Municipal Code (SMC 25.09) https://library.municode.com/wa/seattle/codes/municipal_code?nodeId=TIT25ENPRHIPR_CH25.09REENCRAR
- Specific Environmental Policies, Seattle Municipal Code (SMC 25.05.675.N) https://library.municode.com/wa/seattle/codes/municipal_code?nodeId=TIT25ENPRHIPR_CH25.05ENPOPR_SUBCHAPTER_VIISEAGDE_25.05.675SPENPO
- Design Review Applicability, Seattle Municipal Code (SMC 23.41.004.C.2)

https://library.municode.com/wa/seattle/codes/municipal_code?nodeId=TIT23LAUSCO_SUBTITLE_IIILAUSRE_CH23.41DERE_23.41.004AP

- Director's Rule 17-2018, Calculating Tree Valuations and Civil Penalties for Tree Protection Code Violations www.seattle.gov/dpd/codes/dr/17-2018%20tree.pdf
- Director's Rule 16-2008, Designation of Exceptional Trees www.seattle.gov/dpd/codes/dr/DR2008-16x.pdf
- Director's Rule 11-2020, Standards for Landscaping, including Green Factor www.seattle.gov/dpd/codes/dr/DR2020-11.pdf
- Director's Rule 8-2022, Administration of the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections Tree Service Provider Registry www.seattle.gov/dpd/codes/dr/DDR2022-8.pdf
- Tip 103, Site Plan Requirements www.seattle.gov/DPD/Publications/CAM/cam103.pdf
- Tip 103A, Site Plan Guidelines, How to Prepare a Site Plan www.seattle.gov/DPD/Publications/CAM/cam103A.pdf
- Tip 242, Tree Code Overview www.seattle.gov/DPD/Publications/CAM/cam242.pdf
- Tip 242B, Hazard tree Removal on Private Property www.seattle.gov/DPD/Publications/CAM/Tip242B.pdf
- Tip 242C, SDCI Tree Service Provider Registry www.seattle.gov/DPD/Publications/CAM/Tip242C.pdf
- Tip 242D, Tree Public Notice www.seattle.gov/DPD/Publications/CAM/Tip242D.pdf
- Tip 331, Environmentally Critical Areas – Tree and Vegetation Overview www.seattle.gov/DPD/Publications/CAM/cam331.pdf
- Tip 331A, Environmentally Critical Areas – Vegetation Restoration www.seattle.gov/DPD/Publications/CAM/cam331a.pdf
- Standard Detail (SDCI): Tree and Vegetation Protection Detail www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/SDCI/Codes/TreeDetail.pdf
- Standard Detail (SDCI): Tree Protection Area Sign/Placard www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/SDCI/Codes/TreeProtectionAreaSign.pdf

Other helpful resources include:

- Application instructions (SDCI): Hazard Tree Removal and Vegetation Restoration Approval on private property.
<https://seattlegov.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360039043813-How-to-Apply-for-SDCI-Approval-for-Haz>
- Basic Tree Risk Assessment Form (ISA).
www.isa-arbor.com/Portals/0/Assets/PDF/Certification-Applications/ISA-Basic-Tree-Risk-Form-fillable.pdf
Instructions www.isa-arbor.com/Portals/0/Assets/PDF/Certification-Applications/ISA-Basic-Tree-Risk-Assessment-Form-Instructions.pdf
- Managing Hazards and Risk: Trees are Good (ISA).
www.treesaregood.org/treeowner/treehazards
- Maps (City of Seattle ECA): Advisory and intended to help identify critical areas and do not delineate the exact boundaries of ECAs. Environmentally Critical Areas that are not identified on the maps are still subject to ECA regulations.
<https://seattlecitygis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=f822b2c6498c4163b0cf908e2241e9c2>
- Maps (SDOT): Street Tree Inventory Map.
www.seattle.gov/transportation/projects-and-programs/programs/trees-and-landscaping-program/seattle-tree-inventory-map
- Snags (WDFW): The Wildlife Tree. Guidance from Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.
<https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/living/snags#wildlife>
- Tree Identification (Free Service): UW Hyde Herbarium.
<https://botanicgardens.uw.edu/center-for-urban-horticulture/visit/otis-douglas-hyde-herbarium/plant-identification-service-by-the-hyde-herbarium/>
- Trees in the Right-of-Way (SDOT) Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT).
www.seattle.gov/transportation/projects-and-programs/programs/trees-and-landscaping-program
- Trees for Seattle: Umbrella for Seattle's Urban Forestry efforts. Planting & Care, Restoration, Management, Regulations, and Illegal Cutting.
www.seattle.gov/trees/
- Tree protection on Construction and Development Sites (DNR): A good overview of tree care and protection measures during your construction project. As this is the Washington Department of Natural

Resources' guidance, some details and requirements are different from ours. In those few situations, you need to follow SDCI's tree protection rules.

<https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/SDCI/Codes/TreeProtectionConstructionDevelopmentSites.pdf>

- Tree service providers: SDCI Tree Service Provider Directory.
[www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-\(a-z\)/trees-and-codes/tree-service-provider-directory](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-(a-z)/trees-and-codes/tree-service-provider-directory)
- Tree cutting: Reporting illegal tree cutting.
www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/make%C2%A0a-prop-erty-or-building-complaint

Access to Information

Links to SDCI Tips, Director's Rules, and forms are available on our website at www.seattle.gov/sdci.