



Memo

Date: September 29, 2023
To: Councilmember Dan Strauss, Chair, Land Use Committee
From: Nathan Torgelson, SDCI Director
Subject: Tree Protection Update Follow-up

The City Council passed [Council Bill 120534](#) on May 23, 2023 which included [Attachment 1 - Tree Protection Requests and Additional Actions](#). Attachment 1 directs SDCI to complete four tasks with various due dates. This memo responds to the initial two items, Item 2 and Item 4. The remaining items are due at various times in the future and SDCI will prepare materials for Council accordingly.

Item 2 – strategies to reduce financial burden for hazardous tree removal on low-income applicants

The Council requested that SDCI identify strategies to reduce the financial burden on applicants requesting approval to remove a hazardous tree outside of development if the applicant’s annual household income is at or below 80 percent of area median income (AMI). In addition, the Council requested that SDCI include an annual estimate of the resources that would be necessary for a reduced- or no-fee review, including the resources needed to determine if the applicant meets the income eligibility requirements.

In his 2024 budget, Mayor Harrell is proposing an across-the-board 50 percent reduction in the fee for hazardous tree removal. If adopted by Council, the fee will be reduced from \$439 to \$219.50. This reduction is proposed due to a reassessment of SDCI’s costs to review and approve these permits and the proposed fee is in alignment with actual costs.

If the City Council is interested in eliminating the fee for hazardous tree removal permits entirely, SDCI estimates that this would result in a revenue reduction of approximately \$180,000 per year. In order to cover the costs associated with these permit reviews, SDCI would require a General Fund offset in the same amount.

Creating and operating an income-based program would likely result in additional resource needs and costs. SDCI does not currently verify the income of permit applicants for the purpose of applying permit fees and does not recommend varying fees by income for hazardous tree removal permits.

Item 4 – plan to conduct culturally- and linguistically-appropriate outreach on updated tree protection regulations

The Council requested that SDCI, in consultation with OSE and DON, and other departments as needed, develop a plan to conduct culturally- and linguistically-appropriate outreach to inform residents and tree service providers about the updated tree protection regulations, particularly those related to tree removal limits outside of development. The plan should include a proposed timeline, budget, and detailed description of the proposed outreach strategy.

The table below summarizes outreach work activities in response to Item 4 completed to date:

Work Activity – Completed	Outreach Type	Community Benefits
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updates on our Trees & Codes website including links to ordinance, new and revised Tips and Director’s Rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated SDCI website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General information broadly available for homeowners, permit applicants and others. Translation of educational materials available to help non-English speakers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New single one-stop email address for all tree-related questions; the best way to contact our staff is via email at sdci-trees@seattle.gov or through SDCI’s Submit a Request form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New single point of contact using one-stop email address 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminates/reduces confusion by having one email address that routes all tree-related questions directly to a team of tree experts that allows for faster help. Translation assistance available using phone number (206) 233-5185
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SDCI’s “Building Connections” blog posts; July newsletter contained content letting public know updates to tree protection ordinance are coming; August newsletter included content that new ordinance now in effect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subscriber information service (subscriptions list includes homeowners, renters, and others) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media reaches a wider audience than the SDCI website and has ability to include information as well as links to future up-to-date news English only, but can access Google Translate, Google’s service offered free of charge, instantly translates webpages between English and over 100 languages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Customer Email(s) – target audience all SDCI customers; First email similar content and cadence as July “Building Connections” blog post; Second email similar content as August blog post 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes interdepartmental coordination with OSE and DON
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SDCI short survey published on Trees & Codes website; survey questions about where people are getting their information, what further questions they have on the new ordinance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short survey answers will help SDCI learn more about how we can improve our outreach to property owners, tree service providers and others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps reach more people who may not use other types of communication (i.e. – email, city webpages)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SDCI’s ZenDesk – real-time chat conversations including on-demand video coaching services (i.e. - for permit questions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Real-time chat with on-demand video coaching (includes Spanish and Chinese languages both available in real-time online chat for non-English speakers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SDCI initially used Zendesk products to create a knowledge center in 2018. In late 2021, the SDCI team expanded their Zendesk to make it easier to connect with SDCI coaching staff and technical experts. The service center is made up of 163 experts across 20 groups. Support requests range from simple questions, like how to submit a public comment, to connecting architects with city planners about reviewing site plans for tree protections
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SDCI October Home Fair (audience aimed at property owners) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In person and virtual online meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-person home fair (October 21, 2023) will allow for face-to-face interactions with SDCI tree experts for home projects, like additions and D/ADUS Online meeting will be recorded and posted on SDCI’s website for wider access

Proposal for Future Outreach

The table below summarizes outreach work in response to Task 4 that SDCI intends to complete in the next few months and into 2024. This outreach is estimated to cost \$20,000 and can be completed by SDCI using existing resources.

Work Activity – Remaining	Outreach Type	Community Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Translation (top-tier languages) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Translation and printed handouts/educational materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Helps reach more people who are non-English speakers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ On-demand Video (will be content from Home Fair) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ On-demand video 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In-person home fair (October 21, 2023) will be recorded and dubbed into the top-tier languages to allow for wider audience distribution to non-English speakers including reaching tribal community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ethnic media stories (audience aimed at BIPOC, immigrants, refugees, non-English speakers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Direct outreach to existing media services used by diverse communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allows for multi-pronged approach to help SDCI reach wider audiences by making use of several ethnic media groups popularly used by diverse communities

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