DPD

Director's Rule 16-2008

Applicant:	Page	Supersedes:
City of Seattle Department of Planning & Development	1 of 6	DR 6-2001
	Publication: 10/16/08	**Effective:** 04/01/09
Subject: Designation of Exceptional Trees	**Code and Section Reference:** SMC 25.11 SMC 25.05.675N	
	Type of Rule: Code Interpretation	
	Ordinance Authority: SMC Section 3.06.040	
Index: SMC 25.11; SEPA Sec. 25.05.675	**Approved** (signature on file) Diane M. Sugimura, Director, DPD	**Date** 4/1/09

PURPOSE

The purpose of this rule is to clarify the definition of "exceptional tree" pursuant to Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) Chapter 25.11, Tree Protection. This rule also clarifies SEPA Plants and Animals Policy (SMC subsection 25.05.675.N.2.c) for the purpose of determining the value of "rare, uncommon, unique or exceptional" trees on sites undergoing environmental review, in order to establish appropriate tree protection mitigating measures.

BACKGROUND

Seattle Municipal Code Chapter 25.11, Tree Protection, provides means for protecting trees in Seattle. Under this chapter, exceptional trees are given particular protections and are broadly defined as follows:

> "Exceptional tree" means 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 the Department of Planning and Development.

This Director's Rule provides clarification for determining trees that should be considered for exceptional status as well as the standards and procedures for this determination.

RULE

An exceptional tree is a tree that:

1. Is designated as a heritage tree by the City of Seattle; or

2. Is rare or exceptional by virtue of its size, species, condition, cultural/historic importance, age, and/or contribution as part of grove of trees as determined by the method discussed below.

Size Thresholds

Trees with a diameter at breast height (dbh), defined in this rule, that is equal to or greater than the threshold diameters listed in Table 1 are considered exceptional unless they fail to meet the risk criteria discussed in the following section. For all species not listed in Table 1, the threshold diameter is 30" or 75% of the largest documented diameter for a tree of that species in Seattle, whichever is less, as noted in Trees of Seattle, 2nd edition by Arthur Lee Jacobson. If no tree diameter or circumference is listed in this source, the threshold diameter is 30" or 65% of the largest documented diameter for a tree of that species in Washington, whichever is less, as noted in Champion Trees of Washington State by Robert Van Pelt.

Tree Grove

A grove means a group of 8 or more trees 12" in diameter or greater that form a continuous canopy. Trees that are part of a grove shall also be considered exceptional unless they fail to meet the risk criteria discussed in the following section. Trees that are less than 12" in diameter that are part of a grove's continuous canopy cannot be removed if their removal may damage the health of the grove. Street trees shall not be included in determining whether a group of trees is a grove.

Measurement of Tree Diameter

Diameter at breast height (dbh), which means the diameter of a tree trunk measured at 4.5 feet above average grade, is used in determining the diameter of existing trees. Where a tree has a branch(es) or swelling that interferes with measurement at 4.5 feet above average grade or where a tree tapers below this point, the diameter is measured at the most narrow point below 4.5 feet. For trees located on a slope, the 4.5 feet is measured from the average of the highest and lowest ground points or, on very steep slopes where this is not possible, the lowest practical point on the uphill side. Where a tree splits into several trunks close to ground level, the dbh for the tree is the square root of the sum of the dbh for each individual stem squared (example with 3 stems: dbh = square root $[(stem1)^2+(stem2)^2+(stem3)^2]$).

Risk Assessment

Trees that meet the size threshold or grove definition discussed above shall be considered exceptional unless DPD finds that the tree or trees should be removed based on a risk assessment produced by a qualified professional. In making this determination, a qualified professional will consider crown size, structure, disease, past maintenance practice, potential damage to existing or future targets, risk mitigation options, and, when development is proposed, the likelihood of survival after construction. Red alders, black cottonwoods, and bitter cherries shall not be considered exceptional trees except as part of a grove.

To undertake tree risk assessment when no development is proposed, a qualified professional shall have a Tree Risk Assessor certification as established by the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) or equivalent experience and training.

To undertake tree risk assessment as part of a development application, a qualified professional 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; or
- 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.

SEPA Implications

The policy provided in SMC 25.05.675.N.2.c calls for protecting three categories of trees and/or vegetation where development would reduce or damage them:

1. Rare, uncommon, unique or exceptional plant or wildlife habitat; or
2. Wildlife travelways; or
3. Habitat diversity for species (plants or animals) of substantial aesthetic, educational, ecological or economic value.

Exceptional trees should be considered under the first and third categories listed above during environmental assessment of development applications. Other trees that have special wildlife habitat importance, such as those containing a bald eagle's nest or communal roost, also should be considered.

SOURCES

Trees of Seattle, 2nd edition, 2006, by Arthur Lee Jacobson.
Champion Trees of Washington State, 1996, by Robert Van Pelt.

Table 1: Size Thresholds for Common and Native Seattle Trees to be considered for exceptional status.

Species	**Threshold Diameter**
Native Species	
Red ALDER – *Alnus rubra*	Not Exceptional except in grove
Sitka ALDER – *Alnus sinuata*	6 in
Oregon ASH – *Fraxinus latifolia*	2 ft
Quaking ASPEN – *Populus tremuloides*	1 ft
Paper BIRCH – *Betula papyrifera*	1 ft 8 in
CASCARA – *Rhamnus purshiana*	8 in
Western Red CEDAR – *Thuja plicata*	2 ft 6 in
Bitter CHERRY – *Prunus emarginata* var. *mollis*	Not Exceptional except in grove
Black COTTONWOOD – *Populus balsamifera* ssp. trichocarpa (*P. trichocarpa*)	Not Exceptional except in grove
Pacific CRABAPPLE – *Malus fusca*	1 ft
Pacific DOGWOOD – *Cornus nuttallii*	6 in
Douglas FIR – *Pseudotsuga menziesii*	2'6 in
Grand FIR – *Abies grandis*	2 ft
Black HAWTHORN – *Crataegus douglasii*	6 in
Western HEMLOCK – *Tsuga heterophylla*	2 ft
MADRONA – *Arbutus menziesii*	6 in
Bigleaf MAPLE – *Acer macrophyllum*	2 ft 6 in
Dwarf or Rocky Mountain MAPLE – *Acer glabrum* var. *Douglasii*	6 in
Vine MAPLE – *Acer circinatum*	8 in
Oregon White or Garry OAK – *Quercus garryana*	6 in
Lodgepole PINE – *Pinus contorta*	6 in
Shore PINE – *Pinus contorta 'contorta'*	1 ft
Western White PINE – *Pinus monticola*	2 ft
Western SERVICEBERRY – *Amelanchier alnifolia*	6 in
Sitka SPRUCE – *Picea sitchensis*	6 in
WILLOW (All native species) – Salix sp. (Geyeriana ver meleina, eriocephala ssp. mackenzieana, Hookeriana, Piperi, Scouleriana, sitchensis)	8 in
Pacific YEW – *Taxus brevifolia*	6 in
Non-native Species	
Orchard (Common) APPLE – *Malus* sp.	1 ft 8 in
European ASH – *Fraxinus excelsior*	1 ft 10 in
Green ASH – *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*	2 ft 6 in
Raywood ASH – *Fraxinus oxycarpa*	2 ft
European BEECH – *Fagus sylvatica*	2 ft 6 in
European White BIRCH – *Betula pendula*	2 ft
Atlas CEDAR – *Cedrus atlantica*	2 ft 6 in

Deodor CEDAR – *Cedrus deodara*	2 ft 6 in
Incense CEDAR – *Calocedrus decurrens*	2 ft 6 in
Flowering CHERRY – *Prunus* sp. (*serrula, serrulata, sargentii, subhirtella, yedoensis)*	1 ft 11 in
Lawson CYPRESS – *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*	2 ft 6 in
Kousa DOGWOOD – *Cornus kousa*	1 ft
Eastern DOGWOOD – *Cornus florida*	1 ft
American ELM – *Ulmus americana*	2 ft 6 in
English ELM – *Ulmus procera*	2 ft 6 in
GINGKO – *Ginkgo biloba*	2 ft
Common HAWTHORN *Crataegus laevigata*	1 ft 4 in
Washington HAWTHORN – *Crataegus phaenopyrum*	9 in
European HORNBEAM – *Carpinus betulus*	1 ft 4 in
Common HORSE CHESTNUT – *Aesculus hippocastanum*	2 ft 6 in
Red HORSE CHESTNUT – *Aesculus x carnea*	2 ft 6 in
KATSURA – *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*	2 ft 6 in
Littleleaf LINDEN –*Tilia cordata*	2 ft 6 in
Honey LOCUST – *Gleditsia triancanthos*	1 ft 8 in
Southern MAGNOLIA – *Magnolia grandiflora*	1 ft 4 in
Paperbark MAPLE – *Acer griseum*	1 ft
Japanese MAPLE – *Acer palmatum*	1 ft
Norway MAPLE – *Acer platanoides*	2 ft 6 in
Red MAPLE – *Acer rubrum*	2 ft 1 in
Sugar MAPLE – *Acer saccharum*	2 ft 6 in
Sycamore MAPLE – *Acer pseudoplatanus*	2 ft
MONKEY PUZZLE TREE – *Araucaria araucana*	1 ft 10 in
MOUNTAIN-ASH – *Sorbus aucuparia*	2 ft 5 in
Pin OAK – *Quercus palustris*	2 ft 6 in
Red OAK – *Quercus rubra*	2 ft 6 in
Callery PEAR – *Pyrus calleryana*	1 ft 1 in
Austrian Black PINE – *Pinus nigra*	2 ft
Ponderosa PINE – *Pinus ponderosa*	2 ft 6 in
Scot's PINE – *Pinus sylvestris*	2 ft
London PLANE – *Platanus acerifolia*	2 ft 6 in
Flowering PLUM – *Prunus cerasifera*	1 ft 9 in
Coastal REDWOOD – *Sequoia sempervirens*	2 ft 6 in
Giant SEQUOIA – *Sequoiadendron giganteum*	2 ft 6 in
Japanese SNOWBELL – *Styrax japonica*	1 ft
American SWEETGUM – *Liquidambar styraciflua*	2 ft 3 in
TULIP TREE – *Liriodendron tulipifera*	2 ft 6 in
WILLOW (All non-native species)	2 ft