

## #D-109 TREE REMOVAL

### General Description

Staff has observed that the current regulations related to tree removal and land clearing is insufficient and has allowed individual property owners to remove numerous trees without City oversight, and neither provides sufficient disincentives for landowners to not violate the standards nor to prevent developers from clearing an entire site and planting replacement trees instead of retaining existing trees.

The following summarized key revisions to RMC 4-11-200, Definitions T, and RMC 4-4-130, Tree Retention and Land Clearing Regulations, are proposed:

- Added the definition of “significant tree”
- Added the definition of “landmark tree”
- Revised the definition of “tree removal” to be broader by including actions that result in an unhealthy or dead tree.
- Added the definition of “tree topping” and revised the definition of “tree trimming” by specifying that trimming more than 40% of live crown (existing metric of tree trimming definition) qualifies as tree topping.
- Revised the allowed quantity and frequency of tree removal from property and specified that the removal of trees is contingent upon not having an active development application, maintaining the required minimum tree density (proposed new standard), and that landmark trees are excluded from the provision.
- Added a minimum tree density standard for developed properties based on the land use.
- Included tree topping and the removal of landmark trees, without a Routine Vegetation Management Permit that explicitly allows the removal of the landmark tree, to the list of prohibited activities.
- Revised the performance standards for land development / building permits by:
  - Establishing priorities for retention of certain trees;
  - Increasing the percentage of trees to retain on-site for residential zoning districts with a density greater than R-8 and for all other zones;
  - Specified that replacement trees do not contribute to required landscaping; and
  - Established a provision to pay a fee in lieu of replacing trees when it is determined by the Administrator that site constraints preclude the planting of replacement trees. Fees would go to the City’s Urban Forestry Program.
- Increased the tree replacement ratio for trees that are removed in violation of the Section (different from the replacement ratio for a tree retention plan approved as part of a land development permit).

### Impact Analysis

#### Effect on rate of growth, development, and conversion of land as envisioned in the Plan

The proposed revisions will likely have an insignificant effect on the rate of growth, development or the conversion of land as envisioned in the Plan.

Effect on the City's capacity to provide adequate public facilities

Not applicable

Effect on the rate of population and employment growth

None

Whether Plan objectives are being met as specified or remain valid and desirable

Several Plan objectives are being met or furthered by the proposed revisions, specifically the following:

**Objective CD-A:** The City's unique natural features, including land form, vegetation, lakeshore, river, creeks and streams, and wetlands should be protected and enhanced as opportunities arise.

**Objective EN-J:** Create a sustainable urban forest that enhances the livability of the community.

**Objective EN-K:** Protect, restore and enhance environmental quality through land use plans and patterns, surface water management programs, park master programs, urban forestry programs, transportation planning, development reviews, incentive programs and work with citizens, land owners, and public and private agencies.

Effect on general land values or housing costs

The University of Washington's College of the Environment prepared an article that compiled a wealth of research conducted by economists and social scientists to value natural assets in cities and towns. The article provides a significant amount of information, however, this excerpt is the most concise and relevant:

"Market price studies of treed versus untreed lots show a range of value enhancements:

<b>Price Increase</b>	<b>Condition</b>
18%	building lots with substantial mature tree cover
22%	tree-covered undeveloped acreage
19-35%	lots bordering suburban wooded preserves
37%	open land that is two-thirds wooded

Generally, trees and forest cover in development growth areas add value to parcels. One study found that development costs were 5.5% greater for lots where trees were conserved.<sup>20</sup> Given increased lot and home valuations, builders have reported that they were able to recover the extra costs of preserving trees through a higher sales price for a house, and that homes on wooded lots sell sooner than homes on unwooded lots."

*Wolf, K.L. 2010. Community Economics - A Literature Review. In: Green Cities: Good Health (www.greenhealth.washington.edu). College of the Environment, University of Washington.*

Whether capital improvements or expenditures are being made or completed as expected  
Not applicable

Consistency with GMA, the Plan, and Countywide Planning Policies

The proposed revisions are consistent with the GMA and multi-county planning policies of Vision 2040, specifically:

**MPP-En-3:** Maintain and, where possible, improve air and water quality, soils, and natural systems to ensure the health and well-being of people, animals, and plants. Reduce the impacts of transportation on air and water quality, and climate change.

**MPP-En-5:** Locate development in a manner that minimizes impacts to natural features. Promote the use of innovative environmentally sensitive development practices, including design, materials, construction, and on-going maintenance.

**MPP-En-9:** Designate, protect, and enhance significant open spaces, natural resources, and critical areas through mechanisms, such as the review and comment of countywide planning policies and local plans and provisions.

The proposed revisions are also consistent with the Countywide Planning Policies and the Comprehensive Plan, specifically:

**Policy EN-26.** Promote the return of precipitation to the soil at natural rates near where it falls through development design which minimizes impermeable surface coverage and maximizing infiltration through the exposure of natural surfaces through the use of grassy swales, trees, landscaping, where feasible.

**Policy EN-27.** Promote development of Renton's urban forest through tree planting programs, tree maintenance programs that favor the use of large healthy trees along streets, in parks, in residential, commercial, and industrial areas, and through the protection and restoration of forest ecosystems.

**Policy EN- 38.** Develop the urban forestry program to maintain and expand vegetation on public and private property in order to minimize the impact of development on natural systems such as forests and individual trees and increase canopy cover to increase the ecosystem services that trees and other vegetation provide.

**Policy CD-1.** Integrate development into natural areas by clustering development and/or adjusting site plans to preserve wetlands, steep slopes, and notable stands of trees or other vegetation. Natural features should function as site amenities. Use

incentives such as flexible lot size and configuration to encourage preservation and add amenity value.

**Policy CD-7.** Interpret development standards to support projects incorporating site features such as distinctive stands of trees and natural slopes that can be retained to enhance neighborhood character and preserve property values where possible. Replanting should occur where trees are not retained due to safety concerns. Retention of unique site features should be balanced with the objective of investing in neighborhoods within the overall context of the Vision Statement of this Comprehensive Plan.

**Policy CD-8.** During development, significant trees, either individually or in stands, should be preserved, replaced, or as a last option, relocated.

**Policy CD-79.** Existing mature vegetation and distinctive trees should be retained and protected in developments.

#### Effect on critical areas and natural resource lands

The proposed amendments specify that significant trees adjacent to critical areas and their buffers are designated as a top priority for tree retention requirements. Retaining trees adjacent to critical areas will help protect these environmentally sensitive areas by creating a greater buffer and helping to shield the trees within critical areas from strong winds.

#### Effect on other considerations

None

#### **Staff Recommendation**

Amend RMC 4-4-130 and 4-11-200 as described to ensure more trees within the City are retained and properly maintained.

#### **Implementation Requirements**

Adopt an ordinance amending RMC 4-4-130: Tree Retention and Land Clearing Regulations and RMC 4-11-200: Definitions T.