



City of Tacoma
Planning and Development Services

**Agenda Item
D-2**

To: Planning Commission
From: Elliott Barnett, Planning Services Division
Subject: **Application #2014-10 – Urban Forestry Landscaping Code Update**
Meeting Date: December 18, 2013
Memo Date: December 11, 2013

At the Commission's next meeting on December 18th, staff will report on code development progress to date in response to the Planning Commission's direction and questions from the November 20th meeting, as well as on ongoing stakeholder outreach.

At the November meeting the Commission expressed general support for further refinement of the proposed update approach. The Commission also provided pertinent guidance on issues including enforcement, tree size, flexibility options, plant selection, canopy goals and outreach strategies, and asked for clarification and additional information on several issues including methods of determining tree size. Since then, staff have met with stakeholders including Metro Parks Tacoma and the Port of Tacoma. We have also consulted with other City departments including Code Enforcement, Traffic, and Environmental Services whose staff are providing technical input.

At the meeting, staff will present a summary of those issues, along with analysis and recommendations. We will also provide some example scenarios to illustrate how the proposed code would work. Our objective at this meeting will be to obtain guidance from the Commission in order to develop the draft policy and code and provide it at the next meeting, scheduled for January 22nd, 2014. Attached is a summary of the issues and analysis. If you have any questions please contact me at 591-5389 or elliott.barnett@cityoftacoma.org.

Attachment

c: Peter Huffman, Director

Urban Forestry Landscaping Code Amendments

Additional Analysis – Annual Amendments #2014-10

December 18, 2013

SUMMARY:

As part of the 2014 Annual Amendments, the Planning Commission will consider amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Regulatory Code to improve trees and landscaping related regulations, with a focus on achieving such policy intents as incentives, flexibility, quality, and tree health (right tree; right place; right caring).

Code update objectives

1. Encourage Planting More Trees (and other plants)
2. Plant Better Trees (variety, larger sizes, right tree right place)
3. Better Ensure the Health, Survival and Proper Maintenance of Trees
4. Encourage Tree Retention
5. Provide Flexibility while Still Achieving Goals of Requirements
6. Increase/Recognize Stormwater Benefits
7. Provide an Understandable and Predictable Approach

SEE THE NOVEMBER 20, 2013 PACKET FOR AN OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED CHANGES

Outreach and Collaboration

Staff will work with key stakeholders to refine this approach, including:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Metro Parks Tacoma | • Tacoma School District |
| • Port of Tacoma | • Chamber of Commerce |
| • Master Builders Association | • Business Districts |
| • Association of General Contractors | • Neighborhood Councils |
| • Green Tacoma Partnership | • Sustainability Commission |
| • City Code Enforcement | • Association of Realtors |
| • City Traffic Division | • Commenters from 2011-2012 |

The following is additional analysis of issues raised at the November 20th meeting, and through stakeholder consultation to date.

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SMALL, MEDIUM, LARGE TREES – DEFINITION

- At the 11/20 meeting the Commission expressed support for further analysis of the proposal to overlay tree planting requirements with a sliding scale based on tree size.
- The Commission discussed what approach is most appropriate to create the small, medium and large tree categories. Tree height, tree crown (width), or trunk Diameter at Breast Height (DBH) were all discussed, perhaps in combination.

ANALYSIS:

Both tree crown (plural is canopy) coverage and tree height are significant size measures. Canopy coverage has multiple benefits, as previously discussed, while tree height is also significant since it is more closely associated with tree growth rates for evergreen conifers, which provide year-round stormwater benefits. Many evergreen conifers are tall with a relatively narrow canopy spread. Staff recommend modifying the proposal to include both tree crown and tree height. Proposed Tree Size Categories:

1. Small trees – mature height and/or canopy width of 15-25 feet
2. Medium trees – mature height and/or canopy width of 26-40 feet
3. Large trees – mature height and/or canopy width of 41 feet or greater

This approach provides an incentive for both canopy and height, would be easy to implement and would provide flexibility. In addition, this approach would promote greater tree species diversity which promotes the overall health of the urban forest.

DBH is used in reference to measuring the size of existing mature trees, as typically used in forestry practices. In contrast, this proposal is based on an estimated tree size at maturity, as determined by the typical mature size of the tree species.

NOTE: The Landscaping Code currently has minimum tree size requirements at planting.

Small, Medium and Large Tree Lists will be provided in the Urban Forest Manual.

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SMALL, MEDIUM, LARGE TREES – SLIDING SCALE

- The proposal is to require about the same number of trees as are currently required by code, overlain with a sliding scale based on tree size. The same number of trees as are required under the current code would still be required if Medium Trees are planted; a larger number would be required if Small Trees are planted; or, a smaller number would be required if Large Trees are planted. The next step is to establish those ratios.

ANALYSIS:

Staff have developed these proposed ratios for discussion purposes, with the intent to continue to test them against hypothetical development scenarios. This additional “road testing” is necessary to ensure that, in application, the various objectives of the Landscaping Code will be met.

For example:

Street Trees (most zones):

- Current Requirement: 3 trees per 100 linear feet
- Proposal: 4 Small Tree per 100 linear feet; 3 Medium Tree per 100 linear feet; 2 Large Trees per 100 linear feet.

Parking Lot Interior Trees:

- Current Requirement: 1 tree per 1000 sf (distribution requirements also apply)
- Proposal: 1 Small Tree per 700 sf; 1 Medium Tree per 1000 sf; 1 Large Tree per 1400 sf.

Buffer/Perimeter Trees:

- Current Requirement: Type A (dense screen) – 1 tree per 150 sf;
Types B (moderate screen) and C (parking lot visual relief) – 1 tree per 300 sf
- Proposal:
 - Type A – 1 Small Tree per 125 sf; 1 Medium Tree per 150 sf; 1 Large Tree per 300 sf (must provide effective screening)
 - Types B and C – 1 Small Tree per 200 sf; 1 Medium Tree per 300 sf; 1 Large Tree per 450 sf.

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MINIMUM SPACING, SOIL VOLUMES AND UNPAVED AREAS

- To promote tree health and survival, it is important to provide adequate space and soil volumes as appropriate to Small, Medium and Large Trees.

ANALYSIS:

The following recommendations were developed in support of the initial proposal to utilize tree height at maturity as the method to create Small, Medium and Large Tree lists. If the Commission moves forward with the proposal to combine crown size and tree height, these numbers may be refined to reflect the appropriate standards.

Minimum Soil Volumes and Minimum Unpaved Planting Area per Tree			
	Small Trees *	Medium Trees *	Large Trees *
Minimum unpaved planting area (sq. ft.):	24	32	40
Standard tree pit size (ft.):	4 X 6	4 X 8	4 X 10
Minimum soil volume (cu. ft. / cu. yd.):	72 / 2.7	96 / 3.6	120 / 4.4

Minimum Spacing Requirements for Trees			
	Small Trees *	Medium Trees *	Large Trees *
Minimum spacing requirement in ft.:	10	25	40

* as defined in glossary under "Tree Class Sizes"

GENERAL LANDSCAPING

- Commission comments included the following:
 - Clarify what is meant by "required when feasible" in reference to trees.
Trees would be required unless site conditions (rather than cost) pose constraints.
 - Allow for smaller trees particularly when they would be better suited for survival.
Landscaping would be required to be climate-adapted; the code and UFM will provide enhanced guidance to promote health and survival; location and size flexibility will help promote "right tree-right place".
 - Clarify that native landscaping is not appropriate in every case.
Native landscaping would be encouraged, not required.

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SELF-MANAGED AGENCIES (aka, Landscape Master Plans)

- Metro Parks Tacoma and the Port of Tacoma have expressed interest in exploring options for additional landscaping flexibility for public agencies with their own Urban Forestry Program.
- The initial staff proposal included developing canopy coverage goals by land use category. However, based on Commission and stakeholder comments, there is no consensus around establishing these goals at this time.
- In the initial discussion, staff referred to this approach as “Landscape Master Plans”. However, in 2011-12 the term “Self-Managed Agencies” was used, and seems to have caught on.

ANALYSIS:

Staff propose adding language to the Urban Forest Policy Element in support of this approach, without the inclusion of new canopy coverage goals by land use category. The Element would establish that public agencies utilizing this option would need to demonstrate they have an Urban Forestry plan, including provision for ongoing maintenance, which promotes the City’s urban forestry and canopy coverage goals on a system-wide or larger site basis.

In addition, the Landscaping Code would include a provision allowing additional flexibility on a site by site basis. Some of the trees required on a given site could be planted elsewhere on the site or in the system, if the policy direction described above were met.

INDUSTRIAL DISTRICTS LANDSCAPING

- The November 20th proposal included extending Street Tree requirements to key corridors within Industrial Areas where they are currently not required.

ANALYSIS:

Staff have had initial consultation with Port of Tacoma staff and will continue to work with them to identify “key corridors” appropriate for street tree requirements.

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INCENTIVES/BONUSES

- The proposal includes an expanded menu of options for greater flexibility and/or reduced planting requirements in exchange for providing desired features (listed below).
- Following are refinements on the general discussion of incentives and bonuses for the provision of desired features above and beyond requirements.
- The Commission questioned including front and rear yard reductions as a bonus to encourage tree retention.

ANALYSIS:

Based on the Commission’s comments, staff removed the proposal to allow front and rear yard flexibility as an incentive for tree retention. Instead, the code variance process could be refined to allow limited setback relief in order to allow retention of mature trees.

The following further details desired features and potential incentives/bonuses (additional analysis underway to develop recommended bonuses):

Desired features (on a tree by tree basis)	Incentives/bonuses - <i>Bonuses count toward total # required on sliding scale of Small, Medium and Large Trees</i>
Larger trees (<i>SEE ABOVE</i>)	<i>Sliding scale for tree requirements based on small, medium, large tree list</i>
Tree retention (<i>EXISTING BONUS</i>)	<i>1 per retained of equal size 2 per 8-20 inch diameter 3 per 20-32 inch diameter 4 per 32+ diameter</i>
Evergreen conifers	<i>Additional credit toward # required (e.g., counts as 1.2 required trees)</i>
Additional Soil volume	“
Greater than 50% Evergreen conifers or Additional Soil Volume	<i>Additional distribution flexibility (e.g., parking lot trees may be further apart from each other)</i>

Desired features (on a site or system basis)	Incentives/bonuses -
LID approaches (e.g., permeable pavement, rain gardens, green roofs)	<i>Area infiltrated could count toward planting requirements (ratio to be developed); Additional distribution flexibility</i>
Self-managed agency plan (approved by the City)	<i>Some required landscaping may be located on another site (e.g., up to 50%); Additional distribution flexibility</i>