Tree Regulations for Private Property

Planning & Community Development
17500 Midvale Ave N
Shoreline, WA 98133
206-801-2500
pcd@shorelinewa.gov

The following information is intended to inform residents and applicants of the general requirements regarding tree removal. Please contact Planning & Community Development (PCD) for more information about specific property conditions or regulations.

Environmentally Critical Areas

If a tree of any size is in or near an area such as a stream, wetland, or steep slope, then the tree may be in a Critical Area or its protective buffer (distance from the area intended to remain undisturbed). Review by the City is required to determine whether these trees may be removed through a permit. To find out if your tree is in or near a Critical Area, contact PCD and request to speak to a **Planner**. Tree requirements in critical areas are subject to SMC 20.80 and will involve additional reviews. Sites containing Critical Areas and their buffers must retain at least 30% of all significant trees instead of the typical 35%.

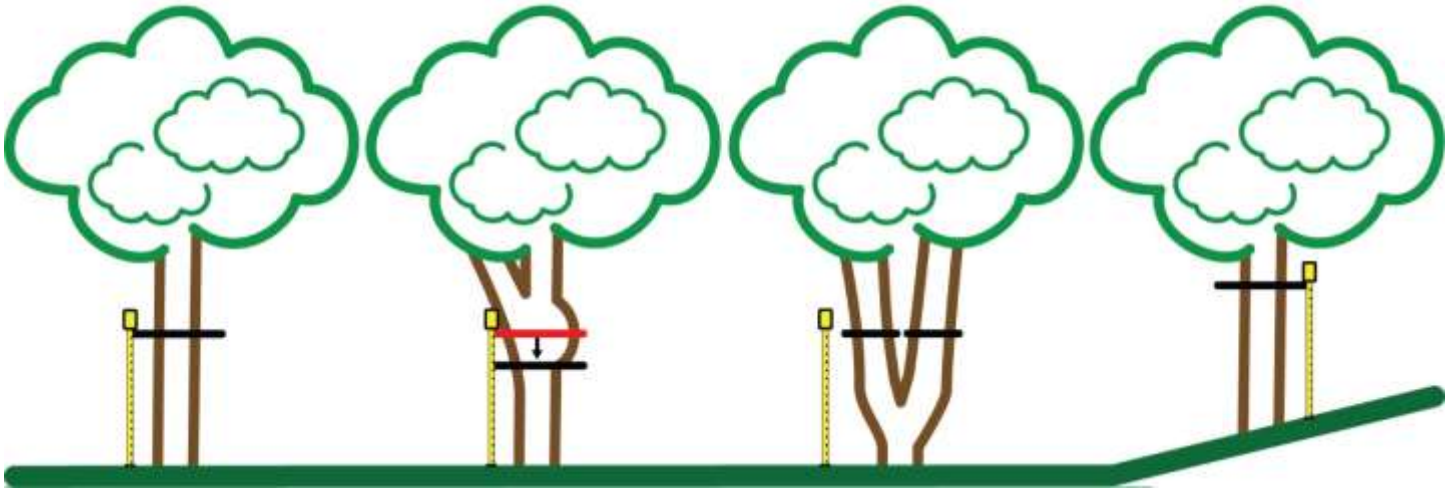
Significant Trees

The City's tree regulations can be found in SMC 20.50 Subchapter 5. The City generally regulates significant trees, although smaller trees may be protected if in a Critical Area or if the property was recently developed. Trees on properties zoned CB, MB, NB, MUR-70, or TC are exempt from the City's tree codes unless trees were planted as a part of required landscaping. To find your property's zone district, use the City's online map, or contact a **Planner**.

Divide the circumference by 3.14 to get the diameter

Significant trees are all trees at least six (6) inches in diameter at breast height (DBH), which is measured four and a half feet off the ground. If measuring around the trunk of the tree (the circumference) then divide by 3.14 to get the diameter.

At least 35% of all significant trees must be retained on a property. A permit is required for the removal of a significant tree. Significant trees that are removed must be replaced. The number of replacement trees depends on the size of the tree removed. Replacement trees must be at least six feet tall if coniferous, or 1.5" caliper (diameter at base) for all other trees.



Measure 4.5' (4' 6") off the ground.

If there are branches or large bumps, measure below them.

For multi-stem trees, measure each stem, then see below.

On slopes, measure on the uphill side.

Trees less than 6” DBH may be removed without a permit unless they are in an environmentally critical area or its buffer, or if the tree removal is associated with other clearing activities which exceed an area of 1,500 square feet.

Multi-Stemmed Trees

The DBH of trees that are typically multi-stemmed trees, such as Vine Maples, is determined by taking the average of the diameter of each stem. For example, if a Vine Maple has three stems with D_1 = 6”, D_2 = 8”, and D_3 = 10”, you would add those three together (6 + 8 + 10) = 24, then divide it by the number of stems, so 24 / 3 = 8. The Vine Maple has a DBH of 8”.

The DBH of trees that are NOT typically multi-stemmed, such as Douglas Firs, can be determined by a qualified professional arborist. At this time, staff has typically seen arborists use quadratic means to make this determination. For example, if a Douglas Fir has two stems with D_1 = 20” and D_2 = 10”, you would square each of those and add them together ($20^2 + 10^2$), then take the square root of that sum (400 + 100 = 500). So, $\sqrt{500}$ = 22.4. The Douglas Fir has a DBH of 22.4”.

This is a lot of math, so please contact a planner or an arborist if you need help calculating the DBH of your multi-stemmed tree.

Exemptions (Tree Removal Allowance)

There are allowances in some instances for significant trees 24” DBH or less to be removed in a 36-month period without being subject to permit review, retention, or replacement requirements as outlined below. This allowance does not include trees in critical areas. SMC 20.50.310(B) outlines the details of this allowance. The City must be informed about tree removals using this allowance in order to: (a) track the number of removals in a 36-month period, (b) ensure compliance with City regulations, and (c) avoid code enforcement action.

This regulation allows the removal of up to three significant trees 24” DBH or less on lots up to 7,200 square feet and one additional significant tree for every additional 7,200 square feet of lot area in a 36-month period.

Permit Requirements

A Tree Removal Permit is required to remove a significant tree. If your tree is a hazard, but is not an active threat, then it is regulated as a healthy tree and its removal is reviewed through this permit. If the removal is a part of a larger construction or development project, then the removal should be evaluated through the permits associated with that development.

Size of Tree Being Removed	Replacements Required
6.0” – 8.9” DBH	1 Replacement Tree
9.0” – 11.9” DBH	2 Replacement Trees
12.0” DBH and larger	3 Replacement Trees

Submittal requirements are outlined in the Tree Removal Permit Submittal Checklist. You will need to provide a site plan of the property showing all property lines, improvements (house, garage, sheds, etc.) and the location of all trees on the property.

Tree Removal Fees

There is a per tree fee for removing significant trees 24” DBH and greater. Refer to the City’s Fee Schedule for the latest rates.

Tree growing into a power line.

Maintenance and Pruning

Normal and routine maintenance, including pruning of trees, is allowed when consistent with best management practices in the field of arboriculture, such as the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA) ANSI A300 Standards. Pruning less than 25% of the canopy is allowed without a permit. Tree pruning does NOT include coppicing, topping, or damaging the health of the tree.

For trees encroaching on power lines, please contact Seattle City Light, the City's electric utility provider. If you are concerned that a tree may be interfering or putting electrical lines at risk, contact SCL at (206) 386-1733 or sclvegetation@seattle.gov.

Tree with a cracked trunk.

Hazardous Trees

Trees that pose an immediate danger to life or property, or are substantial fire hazards, may be removed without a permit. If possible, the property owner should document the size of the tree and the hazard situation. Examples of emergency situations include tree trunks or limbs that are demonstrably cracked, leaning on power lines, uprooted by flooding, or were damaged in heavy winds or storm events. The City retains the right to dispute the emergency and require the property owner obtain a Tree Removal Permit.

To remove hazardous trees within Critical Areas, they must be hazardous to life or property as determined by a qualified professional arborist. Hazardous trees that are an active threat (falling or about to fall) to life or property may be removed as described under Exemptions, below.

Hazardous trees that are not an imminent threat may be exempt from permitting and replacement requirements if they are dead, dying, or otherwise unhealthy. Staff may request documentation from an ISA certified arborist. Please note that barren trees in the wintertime may not be dead, just dormant. Please follow up with a **Planner** on any tree removal projects for guidance in permitting and exemptions, it's the best way to avoid code enforcement action.

Street Trees

Trees located in the right-of-way (typically near the street) are classified as street trees and are subject to different regulations than trees on private property. Please contact the City's Public Works department at 206-801-2700 or pubwrks@shorelinewa.gov regarding tree removal in the City rights-of-way, or if you are unsure whether the tree is on City or private property. A permit is required for removal of trees in the rights of way.

Code Enforcement

It is your responsibility to obtain the necessary permits or approvals before tree removal takes place. Tree removals without the requisite permits or approvals may be subject to code enforcement action, including fines.

	Penalties City Wide	Additional Fines in Critical Areas
Non Significant Trees	N/A	$3,000
Significant Trees	$9,000	$9,000
Significant Trees 24" DBH and larger	$15,000	N/A

If you suspect trees have been removed without required permits, please contact the City's Code Enforcement and Customer Response Team at 206-801-2700 or submit a request online.

Please contact the City of Shoreline at (206) 801-2500 or **pcd@shorelinewa.gov** prior to any tree removal or pruning activity to verify code requirements.

Interim Regulations

Ordinance 1031 adopted temporary restrictions on removing trees that are 60 inches or greater in the TC-3 and TC-4 zones. These interim regulations are in place through July 2025 but may be extended.