

# Tree Regulations for Private Property

---

The following information is intended to educate property owners and contractors of the general requirements regarding tree removal on private property. Please contact Planning & Community Development (206) 801-2500 for specific regulations or see the Development Code Section SMC 20.50.290-370 at <http://www.codepublishing.com/wa/shoreline/>.

## **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 buffer. City review is required to determine whether these trees may be removed or pruned through a Clearing and Grading Permit. To find out if your tree is in or near a Critical Area contact the City's Planning & Community Development office at (206) 801- 2500. See Development Code Section 20.80 for specific regulations.

To remove hazardous trees in the Critical Areas, they must be hazardous to life or property as determined by a qualified 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 *active threat* may be removed after submitting a Tree Evaluation Form for approval. This form must be completed by a certified arborist. See Development Code Section SMC 20.80.030.

## **Significant-Sized Trees**

The City's tree regulations, SMC 20.50.290-370, only apply to significant-sized trees on private property, except in critical areas. Significant-sized trees include conifer trees eight inches or more and deciduous trees 12 inches or more in diameter measured 4.5 feet from the ground, called diameter at breast height (dbh). Eight inches diameter and 12 inches diameter translates to 25 inches and 28 inches in circumference respectively.

## **Exempt from Permit**

### **Non-significant Sized Trees**

Trees that are smaller in diameter than significant tree size may be removed without a permit unless they are in a Critical Area and its buffer or the area cleared exceeds 1,500 square feet.

### **Commercial Zones**

Trees removed on properties zoned Community Business, Mixed Business, Neighborhood Business, or Town Center are exempt from tree regulations, unless existing trees were included as required landscaping within the previous three years.

**Business Hours: M – F 8:00 a.m. to 5 p.m. ♦ Permit Processing Hours: M – F 8 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.**

## First Three to Six Trees

Up to six significant trees may be removed during a 3-year period based on the parcel sizes below. Trees over 30 inches in diameter (94.2” in circumference) are not exempt and will need a permit to remove.

**Table 20.50.310(B)(1) – Exempt Trees Table**

Parcel size in square feet	Number of trees
Up to 7,200	3
7,201 to 14,400	4
14,401 to 21,780	5
21,781 and above	6

## Pruning

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.

## Hazardous Trees

A tree that is an *active threat* to life or property (falling or about to fall) is allowed to be removed immediately without permit. However, documentation of the hazardous condition prior to removal, such as photos, an arborist evaluation or similar documentation is required. After removal of the tree, submit documentation to the Planning & Community Development Department for review to determine whether a Clearing and Grading Permit and possibly replacement trees are required. See Development Code Section SMC 20.50.310(A)(1)(c).

## Permit Required

A Clearing and Grading – Tree Removal Permit is required if your trees are not listed under “Exempt from Permit”. If your tree is a hazard but not active then they are regulated like a healthy tree through this permit. If the removal is a part of a larger construction or development project, then trees will be reviewed as a part of that permit. You will need to provide a site map showing the location and size of all significant trees and those proposed to be removed with replacement trees. Pick up an application and checklist from the Planning & Community Development Department permitting desk or download it from the City’s website at [www.shorelinewa.gov](http://www.shorelinewa.gov).

## Tree Retention

Tree removal requires the retention of a percentage of the total number of significant trees on a parcel under SMC 20.50.350.

## Tree Replacement

Trees that are removed beyond the exempt “First Three to Six Trees” (above) will require replacement trees under SMC 20.50.360. Except for single family lots, replacement trees must have a three-year maintenance bond and agreement with the City.

## Rights-of-Way

Trees located in the City rights-of-way are classified as street trees and are subject to different regulations than trees on private property. Please contact the City at (206) 801-2700 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.

NOTE: Please contact the City at (206) 801-2500 or [pcd@shorelinewa.gov](mailto:pcd@shorelinewa.gov) prior to any tree removal or pruning activity to verify code requirements.