

# Friends of Urban Forests

*Protecting trees and our urban forest infrastructure*



## Action Needed Now to Protect Seattle's Trees and Urban Forest

Dear Mayor Durkan and Seattle City Council Members,

**We urge you to provide strong leadership now to significantly strengthen Seattle's tree ordinance to protect our trees and urban forest.**

Seattle's urban forest is an integral and vital part of our city. It provides many benefits and amenities to those living in our city. Trees help clean our air and enhance public health, reduce stormwater runoff, mitigate climate change, decrease the impacts of heat and wind, provide habitat for birds and wildlife and give us a connection with nature in our neighborhoods.

Seattle's rapid growth is reducing these beneficial impacts as trees are removed, particularly during development across our city. It is urgent that you act now to stop the loss of trees, particularly exceptional trees and tree groves, and to promote environmental equity as we increase our tree canopy.

**We urge you to act now by updating our current tree ordinance and regulations as follows:**

- 1. Adopt a policy of a net increase of Seattle's tree canopy each year to reach the city's current goal of 30% tree canopy.** This requires maintaining and strengthening current protections for both significant and exceptional trees, tree groves, Heritage trees, environmentally critical areas and natural areas.
- 2. Require the replacement of all trees removed that are 6" DBH and larger with equivalent sized trees (e.g. small, medium or large) – either on site: or pay the replacement and maintenance mitigation costs into a City Tree Replacement and Maintenance Fund.** Allow the Fund to accept fines, donations, grants and for acquiring land and setting easements and Tree Protection Trusts.
- 3. Expand the existing tree removal and replacement permit, 2-week notice and posting system used by SDOT – to cover all public and private trees 6" DBH and larger on both public and private property in all land use zones.** Allow removal of no more than 1 significant non-exceptional tree per lot per year.

4. **Establish one citywide database when applying for tree removal and replacement permits and to track changes in the tree canopy.** Post online all permit requests and permit approvals for public viewing. Expand SDOT's existing tree map to include all the trees in the city that are removed and replaced.
5. **Require a detailed Urban Forest Canopy Assessment for all development projects** prior to any development beginning. This detailed tree inventory should be entered into a public database. Replacement trees should be based on equivalent tree size at maturity.
6. **Expand SDOT's existing tree service provider's registration and certification to include all tree service providers working on trees in Seattle.**
7. **Consolidate tree oversight into one city entity: The Office of Sustainability and Environment, as was recommended by the Seattle City Auditor in 2009.** Give OSE the additional authority needed to ensure that trees have an independent advocate for their protection to avoid conflicting goals in other city departments.
8. **Emphasize native trees and vegetation, particularly conifers, to maximize sustainability and environmental services.** Require the removal of invasive plants during development. Increase incentives for protecting trees and provide public assistance for property owners who need help complying with the city ordinance. To increase compliance increase penalties, fines and enforcement. Ensure environmental equity in maintaining and increasing our tree canopy across the city.

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**Note:** Above is the final version of the Letter to the Mayor and City Council by the Coalition for a Stronger Tree Ordinance as part of a citywide coordinated effort to show strong support for updating Seattle's existing Tree Protection legislation. In the current proposal by Council Staff, Councilmember Rob Johnson is not proposing to require developers to replace most trees lost during development, while requiring homeowners to replace all trees greater than 12" DBH. Yet development is where most trees are being lost. Everyone needs to be treated the same. Developers should not be able to evade mitigation for trees lost. Also, the threshold needs to be 6" DBH, not 12" DBH, which would only cover 18% of the trees on single family lots. A 6" DBH would cover 45% of the trees on single family lots.

The City Council and the Mayor need to hear from you that you want a stronger tree ordinance. Be sure to express your concern that developers should not be largely exempt from the provisions homeowners would have to comply with in the current proposed ordinance update and that permits need to start at 6 inches DBH which would cover 45% of the trees in single family zones.

Send to [jenny.durkan@Seattle.gov](mailto:jenny.durkan@Seattle.gov) and [council@Seattle.gov](mailto:council@Seattle.gov)

Coalition for a Stronger Tree Ordinance – for more information visit: [www.friends.urbanforests.org](http://www.friends.urbanforests.org) or contact Steve Zemke - Chair [steve@friends.urbanforests.org](mailto:steve@friends.urbanforests.org)