



City of Tukwila

Department of Community Development

Jim Haggerton, Mayor

Jack Pace, Director

April 5, 2013

TO: Members of the Tukwila Natural Environment and Tree Advisory Committee

FM: Sandra Whiting, Urban Environmentalist *sw*
Carol Lumb, Senior Planner *cl*

RE: Tree Removal on Undeveloped Lots

At the March 13th Advisory Committee meeting, the Committee discussed the pros and cons of regulating the removal of trees from undeveloped parcels prior to approval of a development permit. The Committee asked staff to develop a “middle course” option for consideration by the Committee. Below you will find a number of options for the Committee to consider for discussion at our meeting on April 10th.

The draft policy language reviewed on March 13th reads as follows:

“Goal 2, Policy 1: Promote tree retention throughout the City by:

c. Prohibiting tree removal on all undeveloped property without an approved development permit”

Since the meeting, we have researched the number of undeveloped residential properties in the City. We used the following criteria to narrow the search:

- Lot area of 13,000 or more (this is the minimum lot area needed to create two parcels)
- Appraised improvements of \$15,000 or less
- Not within a wetland or watercourse buffer
- Zoned residential (LDR, MDR, HDR)
- No parks, railroads, schools, utility properties

The parcel search identified 150 undeveloped parcels that meet the above criteria. Of these parcels, 69 (46%) are partially or fully constrained by slopes that are 15% or greater.

Staff has identified a range of policy options for the Committee’s consideration:

1. **March 13 proposed option with clarifications:** keep existing proposed language that prohibits any tree removal (except for identified exceptions) on all undeveloped properties, until a development permit or other land-use permit is approved.

Properties Not Undergoing Development

Exceptions could be allowed for certain situations, such as: installing small gardens which don’t require a clearing and grading permit; clearing in order to do a topographical survey;

installing a path through the property; or removal of trees that are hazardous to adjacent developed property or public right of way.

Properties Proposed for Development

The landscape code currently requires that as many trees as possible be retained on sites that can be subdivided (more than four lots) for residential development. Currently there are no criteria for making this determination.

If this policy were adopted, staff would develop criteria to govern the number of trees to be retained during development, to include such criteria as:

- ensuring no loss of allowed site density;
- taking into account new hazards that might be created by retaining trees such as creating wind throw problems or compromising tree roots by proximity to development;
- identifying where trees would be retained (when possible) based on where site utilities, access roads or driveways and house footprints are located.

In addition, the City would identify incentives for tree retention that could include a reduction of lot sizes and yard setbacks, similar to those permitted in the Planned Residential Development District (PRD).¹

2. “Middle Course” option:

- a. Prohibit removal of trees on undeveloped lots greater than 19,500 sq. feet without an approved development permit (or land use application). A 19,500 sq. foot lot could potentially be short platted into three lots. Some exceptions, such as those noted above, could be provided.

OR

- b. Permit the removal of a certain percentage of tree canopy of an undeveloped site’s trees without an approved development permit;

Along with either 2.a. or 2.b., staff would reach out to developers to assess the policy’s impact and provide an annual report to the City Council.

3. **Collaborative option:** No additional regulation of tree removal beyond current regulations except efforts would include contacting owners of undeveloped property to educate them on the value of the trees on their property and to establish a collaborative working relationship aimed at retaining as many trees as possible while maximizing the site’s development potential.
4. **Status quo option:** no additional regulation of tree removal unless property is located in the shoreline, or has sensitive areas (including steep slopes) or a landscape/street tree requirement.

¹ The PRD district permits a 15% reduction in lot size and yard setbacks for sites constrained by wetland or watercourses and their buffers. The district requires open space to be set aside as part of the residential development.

If the Committee does not reach a consensus on this particular issue, the differing viewpoints would be identified for the Planning Commission to consider. In the meantime staff would do the following to provide additional information to the Planning Commission to assist in its deliberations:

- a. Reach out to developers currently active in Tukwila to discuss tree retention issues and the potential impact on residential development; and
- b. Talk with jurisdictions that regulate tree removal on undeveloped parcels to discuss issues they have encountered with this approach.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

