

# REGULATIONS FOR RESIDENTIAL TREE CUTTING AND REMOVAL

## Planning Division

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This handout addresses the most commonly asked questions and provides general information regarding tree cutting, removal, and vegetation management. Please see RMC 4-4-130 for more detailed information.

**What types of tree cutting and clearing activities are prohibited in the City of Renton?** The following tree cutting, removal, land clearing, and ground cover management activities are prohibited:

- Cutting or removal of “Landmark Trees” without a Routine Vegetation Management Permit. Landmark Trees have trunks greater than 30” at 4.5’ above ground.
- Cutting or removal of “Protected Trees.” Protected Trees are any trees required to be retained as a condition of approval for a Land Development Permit.
- Removal of any landscaping required as part of a Land Development Permit.
- There shall be no tree cutting, removal, or land clearing on any site for the sake of preparing that site for future development unless a land development permit for the site has been approved by the City.
- Unless exempted by City Code Section [4-3-050](#), no tree cutting, removal, land clearing, or groundcover management is permitted:
  - On portions of property with protected critical habitats, streams and lakes, shorelines of the State, wetlands, and their associated buffers
  - On protected slopes (**40% or more**)
  - In areas classified as very high landslide hazards
  - In “[Native Growth Protection Easements](#)”, areas, or tracts
- Tree topping unless the tree has been approved for removal.
- Removal of trees beyond the maximums allowed without an approved Routine Vegetation Management Permit.

**Are there a minimum number of trees I am required to have on my residentially zoned property?**

Yes, a minimum number of trees are required on each residentially zoned lot. The following formulas can be used to determine the required minimum number of trees. *(Note: If the number of trees results in a fraction of 0.5 or greater, the applicant shall round up to the next whole number. If the calculation of the number of trees results in a fraction of 0.4 or less, the applicant shall round down to the next whole number.)*

- Detached single-family development<sup>1</sup>: Two (2) significant trees<sup>2</sup> for every five thousand (5,000) sq. ft. of lot area<sup>3</sup>. *For example, a lot with 9,600 square feet and a detached single-family house is required to have four (4) significant trees or their equivalent in caliper inches (one or more trees with a combined diameter of 24"). This is determined with the following formula:*

$$\left( \frac{\text{Lot Area}}{5,000 \text{ sq.ft.}} \right) \times 2 = \text{Minimum Number of Trees}$$

- Multi-family development (attached dwellings): Four (4) significant trees<sup>2</sup> for every five thousand (5,000) sq. ft. of lot area<sup>3</sup>.

$$\left( \frac{\text{Lot Area}}{5,000 \text{ sq.ft.}} \right) \times 4 = \text{Minimum Number of Trees}$$

<sup>1</sup> Lots developed with detached dwellings in the R-10 and R-14 zoned are exempt from maintaining a minimum number of significant trees onsite, however they are not exempt from the annual tree removal limits.

<sup>2</sup> Or the gross equivalent of caliper inches provided by one (1) or more trees.

<sup>3</sup> Lot area = Lot area less any critical areas square footage

**Is a permit needed to cut or remove trees on my property?** A Routine Vegetation Management Permit is probably required, although there are a few exceptions. Depending on your *lot's size* and provided your property would maintain the minimum number of trees required; you do **not** need a permit to remove the following numbers of trees if your property is:

- **10,000 sq. ft. or less in area:** Up to two (2) trees\* may be removed in any twelve (12) month period. No more than four (4) trees\* may be removed in any five (5) year period from a property.
- **Between 10,001 and 20,000 sq. ft. in area:** Up to three (3) trees\* may be removed in any twelve (12) month period. No more than six (6) trees\* may be removed in any five (5) year period from a property.
- **20,001 square feet or more in area:** No more than six (6) trees\* may be removed in any twelve (12) month period. No more than twelve (12) trees\* may be removed in any five (5) year period from a property.

*\*Except landmark trees (greater than a thirty inch (30") caliper diameter) or protected trees (significant trees identified for retention as a condition of approval for a Land Development Permit) shall not be removed without a Routine Vegetation Management Permit.*

**Are there any activities that are exempt from all the requirements of the Land Clearing and Tree Cutting or Removal Regulations?** Yes, the following activities are entirely exempt from the regulations:

- You may remove trees that have been certified as dangerous by a registered landscape architect, certified arborist, or the City, and the City has accepted the dangerous determination.
- Site investigative work that does not directly or indirectly damage trees but is necessary for land use application submittals such as surveys, soil logs, percolations test, and other related activities. The work may include the use of mechanical equipment to perform site investigative work provided the work is conducted in accordance with the following:
  - Work shall not disturb any more the **five percent (5%)** of any protected sensitive area.
  - Disturbed areas shall be minimized and immediately restored.
  - A notice shall be posted on the site by the property owner or agent indicating that site investigative work is being conducted.
  - No investigative work shall commence without first notifying the Community and Economic Development Administrator.

**When is a Routine Vegetation Management Permit required?** You must obtain a Routine Vegetation Management Permit prior to:

- Trimming/topping trees, mowing/cutting of ground cover, or removal of vegetative debris on a vacant property.
- Use of mechanical equipment exceeding 27 horsepower.
- Removal of a landmark tree (unless a land development permit authorizing its removal has already been issued).
- Removal of trees beyond the minimum required to be retained. Replacement trees will be required.

**When is a Routine Vegetation Management Permit not required?** Land clearing in conformance with the above restrictions is permitted for purposes of landscaping (i.e. *installation* of lawns, trees, shrubs, flowers, and ground cover) provided that **no** mechanical equipment exceeding 27 horsepower is used and work does not affect a critical area or buffer.

**How do I apply for a Routine Vegetation Management Permit?** Applications are available online at [www.rentonwa.gov](http://www.rentonwa.gov) or from the Planning Division. You must submit a complete application package including the processing fee (see the City of Renton Fee Schedule). The application will be reviewed administratively and processing time will vary depending on the complexity of the project. If you disagree with the decision made regarding your permit application, you may appeal the decision to the City's Hearing Examiner. Approved permits are typically valid for one year.

**When is a *Land Development* permit required?** You must obtain a Land Development Permit (e.g., a preliminary or final plat, building permit or site plan approval) and/or a Routine Vegetation Management Permit from the Planning Division prior to land clearing, tree cutting, or tree removal, unless your project is specifically exempt by Section [4-4-130C](#) of the Renton Municipal Code.

**May I remove or prune the street tree next to the sidewalk in front of my property?** Permission from the City to remove or prune trees within the public street right-of-way is required. When requested, the City will conduct an evaluation of street trees. Tree removal may be authorized if the tree exhibits a risk to public safety. In order to remove a street tree, the abutting property must

provide proof of insurance coverage, a traffic control plan, and obtain a right-of-way use permit. As a condition of removal, replacement street trees may be required.

**My property is part of a Homeowners Association (HOA). Do I need their permission to remove or prune a tree on my property? What is the process to remove trees on land controlled by an HOA?**

You must comply with City of Renton regulations regarding tree removal and pruning (see above). Your property may be subject to HOA rules regarding tree removal. Check with the HOA before removing or pruning trees.

**May I remove or prune trees on land owned or controlled by the City? What if the tree grows over the property line and onto my property? Do I need permission?**

You must obtain permission from the City, as described above for street trees and for the removal or pruning of trees on any City-owned property.

**May I remove or prune trees on other privately owned property? Do I need permission? What if the tree grows over the property line and onto my property?**

You must obtain permission from private property owners before removing or pruning trees on private property that you do not own. Where trees grow on two properties, both owners must agree to the removal. You may prune trees up to your property line provided the work does not adversely impact the tree.

**There are “Natural Area Lands” next to my property. Can I remove any diseased or overgrown trees and vegetation from that area?**

If “natural areas” have been designated as critical areas or as a native growth protection area or easement, City critical areas regulations will also apply. In order to remove or prune trees in these areas, the tree must pose a safety risk and the City must authorize the removal or pruning in advance. If the City does approve tree removal, replacement trees may be required.

**May I remove trees that are an immediate danger?** Removal of dead, terminally diseased, damaged, or dangerous trees that have been certified by a qualified forester, registered landscape architect, or certified arborist, and approved by the City, may be allowed.

**What is an Arborist Report?** In some instances the City will require proof of tree condition prior to tree removal. An arborist report from a qualified International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborist provides information about each tree considered for removal, its overall condition, and its risk rating. When a removal request is received, the City will determine if an arborist report is necessary. The person requesting tree removal is responsible for all costs associated with the report.

**Are there other resources that provide general information about trees?** Yes. Please visit the Urban Forestry webpage at: <http://rentonwa.gov/living/default.aspx?id=16702>