



Photo: Zac Gudakov



CITY OF BELLEVUE

Tree Removal User Guide

2024



Photo: Brian White

Tree Removal User Guide

Bellevue's urban forest is home to an estimated 1.4 million trees. These urban trees provide health and economic benefits, increase property values, remove air pollution, mitigate climate change impacts, reduce stormwater runoff, and improve water quality. The City is committed to growing a sustainable urban forest canopy to foster a healthy livable city in the future. Strategies in Bellevue's Environmental Stewardship Plan 2021-2025 include updates to existing codes to achieve a 40 percent citywide tree canopy cover goal. Completed in 2024, the tree code updates apply to development scenarios under Bellevue's Land Use Code (LUC) and non-development scenarios under Bellevue City Code (BCC). This Tree Removal User Guide provides residents and professionals an overview of the updated tree retention and protection regulations for trees on privately owned property <https://bellevuewa.gov/city-government/departments/development/zoning-and-land-use/zoning-requirements/trees/tree-removal>.

Do I need a permit to prune or remove a tree?

It depends on the location of the tree and the activity.

A permit is not required for...

- Pruning less than 25% of live branches and leaves of any significant or landmark tree on private property per [BCC 23.76.035.A.7](#) (Permit requirements).

A permit is required for tree removals located in...

Right-of-way / Street Trees

Tree removals within the public right-of-way (ROW) require a permit. Trees growing within or overhanging the ROW are regulated by:

- BCC [14.06](#) (Utility clearance pruning/removal/enforcement)
- BCC 14.30 (ROW use/permits)
- BCC14.60.120 (ROW tree preservation/removal/replacement associated with frontage improvements)
- BCC [5.30.590](#) (Pruning)
- Street trees and other landscaping requirements are also found in LUC [20.20.520](#).

Note: A permit is required if the removal of trees on private property involves the use of the ROW.



Photo: Freepik

Critical Areas

Tree removals within critical areas and associated buffers are regulated by: LUC [20.25H Critical Areas Overlay District](#).

Shorelines

Tree removals located within the Shoreline Overlay District are regulated by: LUC [20.25E Shoreline Overlay District](#).

Private Property With No Development Activity

If no structural or other changes to the natural landscape are involved under LUC 20.20.900 and Parts 20.25E and H, the removal of any significant or landmark trees requires a Clearing and Grading permit under Bellevue City Code (BCC) [23.76.035](#).

Where no development activity is involved, a permit is required to:

- Exceed the Annual Removal Allowances for Residential Land Use Districts (BCC [23.76.035](#)) shown below.
- Remove a Significant or Landmark Tree (BCC [23.76.060](#)).
- Remove Hazard Trees that meet criteria in LUC [20.20.900.C.3](#), as assessed by a qualified tree professional. No replacements are required for hazard tree removals.

On private property, a certain number of significant or landmark trees are allowed to be removed during any continuous twelve-month period, depending on the property size, without replacement trees. If the total number of significant or landmark tree removals exceeds the annual tree removal allowance or if the remaining trees fall below the minimums, replacement trees are required as follows (BCC [23.76.060](#)):

Annual Tree Removal Allowances

Property Size	Annual Replanting Threshold	Significant or Landmark Trees Remaining on the Site
Up to 10,000 square feet	Removal of 1 landmark tree or 2 significant trees	2
10,001 to 20,000 square feet	Removal of 1 landmark tree or 3 significant trees	3
20,001 to 40,000 square feet	Removal of 1 landmark tree or 4 significant trees	4
40,001 square feet or greater	Removal of 1 landmark tree or 4 significant trees	8

Private Property With Development

Development Activity generally includes structural or other modifications of the natural landscape above or below ground or water on a particular site where subject to the Bellevue City Code (BCC) and/or Bellevue Land Use Code (LUC). Under LUC [20.20.900](#), Tree retention and replacement requirements apply any time a lot undergoes development activity that requires a clearing and grading permit, including the following:

- Subdivision
- Short subdivision
- Planned unit development
- Changes in lot coverage
- Changes in the area devoted to parking and circulation
- Additions to impervious surfaces that exceed 20%
- If trees are located within the Shoreline Overlay District (LUC [20.25E](#))
- If trees are located in a critical area/associated buffers (LUC [20.25H](#))

Please contact Development Services for assistance if you are unsure if your tree removal is associated with development activity. These regulations do not apply in certain neighborhoods, including but not limited to Downtown, East Main, or BelRed.

What are “significant” and “landmark” trees?

In Bellevue, the tree codes apply to significant and landmark trees, trees retained by prior approval, as well as trees planted as mitigation in prior permit approvals.

Significant Tree: A significant tree is a viable tree at least 6” in trunk diameter when measured at 4.5 feet above grade (DBH).

Landmark Tree: A landmark tree is a viable tree at least 24” DBH or a viable tree meeting or exceeding the alternate diameter criteria for its species listed in Table 20.50.032.1 as follows:

Common Name	Scientific Name	Diameter at Breast Height (DBH)
Alder	<i>Alnus rubra</i>	Not Landmark Trees
Pacific madrone	<i>Arbutus menziesii</i>	8 inches
Cascara	<i>Frangula purshiana</i>	8 inches
Lodgepole or shore pine	<i>Pinus contorta</i>	12 inches
Black cottonwood	<i>Populus trichocarpa</i>	Not Landmark Trees
Oak	<i>Quercus spp.</i>	12 inches
Pacific yew	<i>Taxus brevifolia</i>	8 inches

How to measure a tree

Trees are measured by their trunk diameter at 4.5 feet, or 54 inches, above the ground. This is also known as **diameter at breast height (DBH)**.

Arborists use logging tapes with diameter measurements, but trees can be measured using a standard soft measuring tape as well.

Wrap the soft tape measure around the tree trunk **4.5 feet above the ground**. Take the value in inches and convert it to diameter by dividing the circumference by pi (3.14).

Example: A tree measuring 82 inches in circumference has a 26-inch diameter.

$$82'' / 3.14 = 26''$$

For a tree with more than one stem (or trunk), the DBH for the tree is the square root of the sum of the DBH for each stem squared, unless a qualified tree professional determines an alternative method described in the current edition of the Guide for Plant Appraisal is acceptable .

Example: $DBH = \text{square root of } (\text{stem } 1)^2 + (\text{stem } 2)^2$

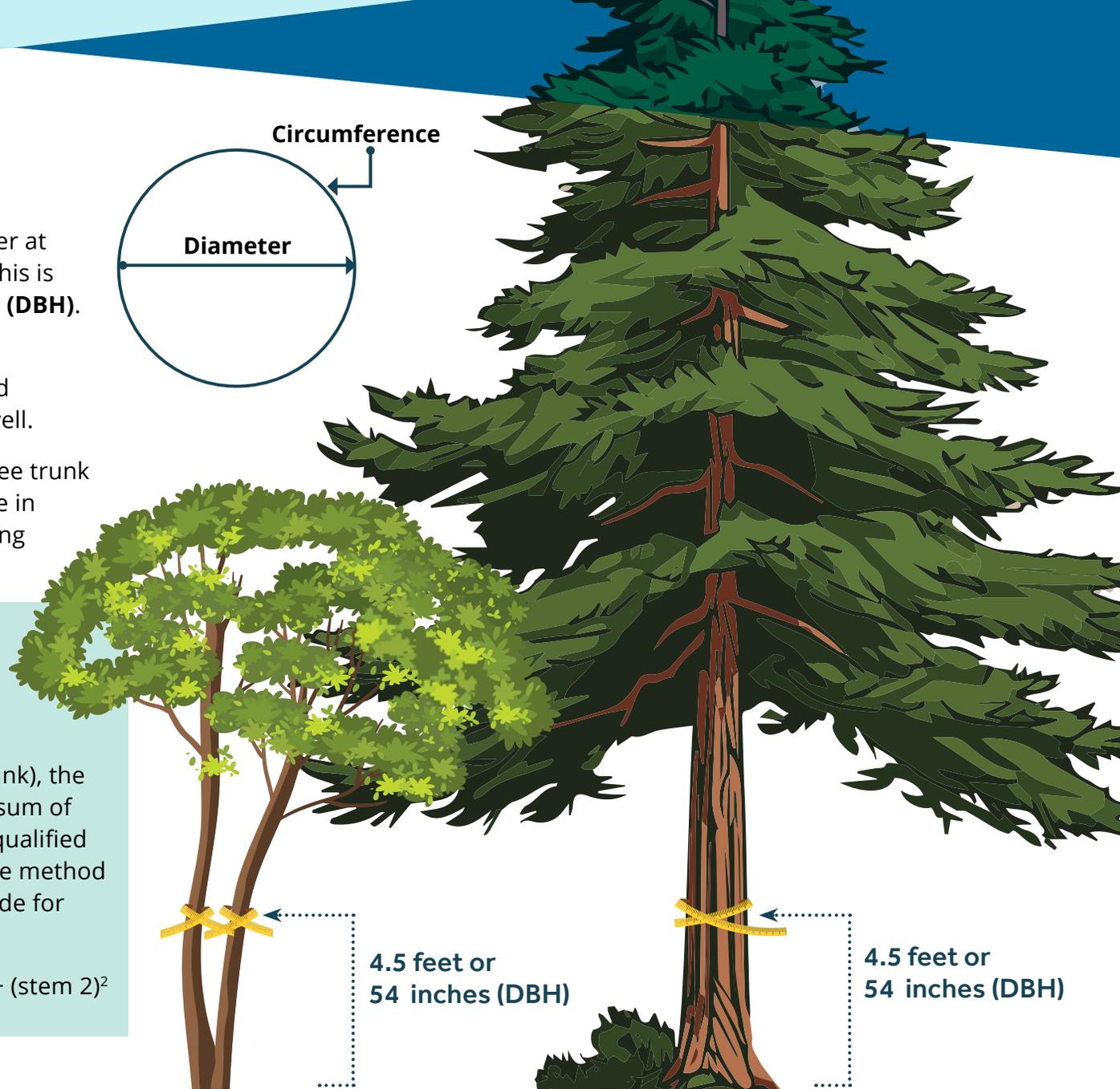




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Tree Retention Requirements for Development Projects

To help preserve the city's tree canopy, the City of Bellevue requires properties under development to maintain a minimum tree density (LUC 20.20.900.E). Minimum tree density requirements are measured using a tree density credit system, a commonly used method to measure tree retention requirements across varying lot sizes and development types within the same land use district. Tree density consists of existing trees, newly planted trees, or a combination of both.

To calculate the required tree density, you must first determine the Tree Canopy Site Area. This is done by taking the gross site area and if applicable, subtracting the square footage of any critical areas and buffers, shoreline vegetation conservation areas, public rights-of-way, private roads in separate tracts, and submerged lands (See example on page 8).

To determine the minimum required tree density, take the Tree Canopy Site Area and divide the square footage by 1,000, then multiply by the applicable rate using the land use district and development type in the table below.

Property Size	One Dwelling Unit per Lot	Two or More Dwelling Units per Lot	Commercial, Office, Light Industrial, and All Other Nonresidential Land Uses
R-1/R-1.8/R-2.5	5	5	1
R-3.5/ R-4/ R-5	2	1.5	0.75
All Other Land Use Districts	1	0.75	0.5

Example: Calculating Tree Canopy Site Area

- Gross lot size is 29,850 square feet (SF)
- A steep slope is located on site and it has a 75 square foot slope buffer. There is also a 50 square foot wetland buffer on the site. The combined square footage of critical areas and buffers is $1,300 \text{ SF} + 75 \text{ SF} + 50 \text{ SF} = 1,425 \text{ SF}$
- Tree Canopy Site Area = $29,850 \text{ SF} - 1,425 \text{ SF} = 28,425 \text{ SF}$



Calculating Existing Tree Credits

Existing tree credits can be calculated by measuring trees on-site or reviewing the arborist report and site plan. The number of tree credits assigned to an individual tree is based on its DBH as shown in the following table.

DBH	Tree Credits
6"-10"	2
Larger than 10" and up to 12"	3
Larger than 12" and up to 14"	4
Larger than 14" and up to 16"	5
Larger than 16" and up to 18"	6
Larger than 18" and up to 20"	7
Larger than 20" and up to 22"	8
Larger than 22" and less than 24"	9
24" or greater and all Landmark Trees	10

Tree credits are not awarded to invasive or noxious species, trees located outside of the Tree Canopy Site Area, or trees in areas devoted to access and sight areas. Tree credits for alder and cottonwood trees are reduced by 50%.

Example: A cottonwood tree with a 22" DBH would have received 4 tree credits, rather than 8.

If a site has fewer existing tree credits than the minimum required tree density, existing significant and landmark trees may only be removed under limited conditions. Refer to LUC 20.20.900.E.3 for a list of such conditions.

Modifications To Development Standards

To address challenging development situations, the following dimensional standard modifications are offered:

- Reduced parking requirements
- Front and rear yard encroachments
- Increased building height

The dimensional standard modifications can be found in LUC 20.20.900.E.5. Please contact your Land Use Planner.

Tree Protection Plans

Tree protection during construction is required for retained trees and must be shown on a site plan as part of the clearing and grading drawings. The tree protection plan must be prepared by a Qualified Tree Professional. [Tree protection requirements are outlined in the City's Best Management Practices for Tree Protection.](#)

Planted Trees

- Each planted tree that meets the minimum size requirements is worth one tree credit.
- Replacement trees must be planted within the Tree Canopy Site Area.
- Alder and cottonwood tree species may be planted but do not count toward tree credits.
- Replacement trees may not be planted to form a hedge.
- Replacement trees may not be invasive or noxious species.

Calculating Tree Density Credits

Example: Single Family R-2.5 Land Use District

- 17,000 SF single family residential property
- 1 tree credit required per 1,000 SF of developable area
- 17,000 SF / 1,000 SF = 17 multiplied by 5 = **85 tree credits required**
- Total tree credits on site:
2 + 2 + 7 + 5 + 6 + 2 = 24 tree credits

Priorities for retention include landmark trees, trees located in groves, and significant trees located in required perimeter landscaping areas.



Recommended Tree List

To ensure trees are planted in spaces that ensure long-term health and protect infrastructure, the City has developed a Recommended Tree List for trees installed on your property. This list is meant to assist in selecting tree species that are appropriate for a site and guide applicants to selecting the 'right tree for the right place'.

Site constraints to be considered include:

- Overhead power lines
- Underground utilities
- Utility easements
- Proximity to existing and proposed improvements
- Sightlines
- Water availability
- Existing vegetation
- Amount of sunlight
- Soil type and compaction

Post Construction Monitoring

Watch for signs and symptoms of decline such as yellowing leaves or groups of leaves turning color all at once that is not associated with seasonal changes.

Additional Development & Design Resources

- [Environmental Best Management Practices and Design Standards Manual](#)

Finding a Qualified Tree Professional

The City of Bellevue requires anyone evaluating potentially hazardous trees, conducting tree inventories or preparing tree retention and protection plans to be a Qualified Tree Professional. A Qualified Tree Professional has relevant education and training in arboriculture or urban forestry and meets the definition provided in LUC 20.50.042. The following resources can be used to find a Qualified Tree Professional.

- [ISA Find an Arborist Tool](#)
- [Plant Amnesty for arborists in King County](#)
- [American Society of Consulting Arborists \(ASCA\)](#)

Questions about the City's Tree Regulations?

Please contact Land Use at: landusereview@bellevuewa.gov or (425) 452-4188.



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