



Tree Code Update

City of Tacoma | Planning and Development Services

Infrastructure, Planning & Sustainability Committee Meeting
March 25, 2026



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Agenda



Purpose:

- Early input on code paths
- Identify any options or assessment you want considered

Presentation outline:

- Project Background
- Scope Review
- Existing Canopy
- Benchmarking & Scope Options

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Discussion Questions



- **Discussion Questions** *(will return to this at the end of the presentation)*
 - **Tree Credits:** Should focus be on gap areas rather than revisiting recent decisions?
 - **Tree Retention:**
 - Should focus be on extending current approach to other zones, or considering alternative approaches?
 - Current retention is focused on tree size – should other factors, like species, be considered?
 - **Low Canopy Management Strategies:** What areas are a priority for investment?
 - **Parking Lots:** Should we shift to broader performance-based standards (like %-shading) or retain some prescriptive standards?
 - **Potential impacts to consider:** Positive and negative

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Project Background

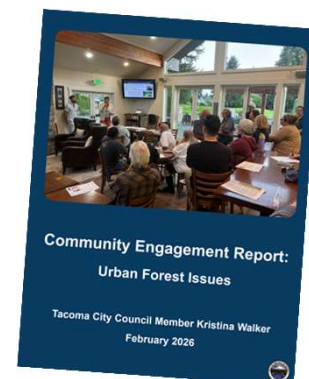


Background

- May 2025: City Council adopted the Urban Forest Priority Action Plan (Resolution No. 41682)

Urban Forest Priority Action Plan – 4 Phases


- ✓ Phase 1: Engagement to better understand public demand for expanding Urban Forestry Program and advancing implementation of Urban Forestry Management Plan
- Phase 2: Consideration of level of service options for expanding City tree maintenance in the right-of-way (2027-2028 biennial budget)
- **Phase 3: Launch Planning Commission process to develop new regulations regarding tree canopy management and preservation**
- **Phase 4: Planning Commission recommendation for new land use and development regulations advanced to City Council**




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Scope & Schedule






Develop Initial Code Options – Key Components:

- Tree Credit System for development sites in all zones
- Tree Retention and Canopy Loss Fee System
- Tree canopy requirements for parking lots
- Low-Canopy Management Strategies

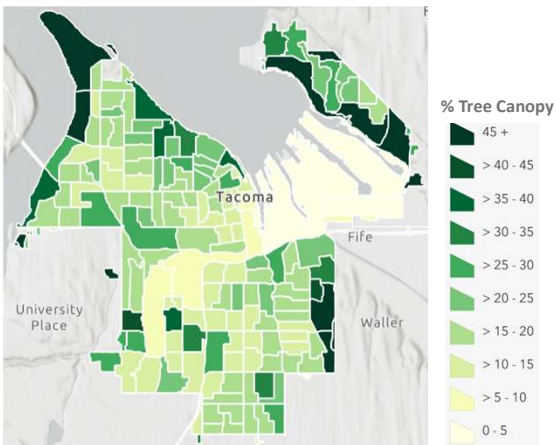
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Existing Tree Canopy



2024 Tree Canopy by Census Block Groups



City of Tacoma Tree Canopy (Overall):

- 2009: 19%
- 2017: 20%
- 2024: 21%

Key Adopted Goals: (*One Tacoma, Policy EN-3.2*)

- Increase citywide tree canopy cover to 30% by 2050
- Aim for all Tacoma neighborhoods to have a minimum tree canopy cover of 30% by 2050

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Peer Jurisdictions Reviewed

King County Tree Code Study (2024)

- Bellevue
- Issaquah
- Kirkland
- Renton
- Seattle

Other Regional Studies

- Eugene, OR
- Lakewood, WA
- Portland, OR
- Spokane, WA
- WA State Legislature

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Tree Credit System – Existing

ZONE	EXISTING CANOPY	RESIDENTIAL CANOPY REQ'T	NON-RESIDENTIAL CANOPY REQ'T
UR1	37.96%	30%	30%
UR2	19.53%	25%	25%
UR3	20.88%	20%	20%
R4	22.16%	20%	20%
R5	21.33%	15%	15%
T	20.72%	30%	None
C1	11.30%	30%	None
C2	8.15%	20%	None
PDB	13.42%	20%	None
M1	8.96%	20%	15%
M2	6.91%	20%	15%
Port Districts	2.55%	SCP: 10% SCM: 15% SCS: 15% ST: 15% STT: 10% SC: 30%	
DR	14.08%	None	None
DMU	6.02%	None	None
WR	6.30%	None	None
DCC	5.60%	None	None
X Districts	11.62%	None	None

CODE OBJECTIVE:

- Extend Tree Credit System for development sites in all zones

Current Scope:

- Focus on gaps rather than revisit recent decisions
- Identify appropriate canopy requirement for gap areas

Lesson from Peer jurisdictions:

- Canopy percentages for comparable land use is around 15%

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Tree Protection and Canopy Loss Fees – Existing Tacoma Regulations

Tree Retention - Current Standards:

Only Applies to Urban Residential Districts Only Applies in Cases of Development

- Scale of Tree protection based on size
- Canopy Loss Fee for tree removal
- Limited exceptions
- Incentives/development flexibilities for tree retention

GAP: The rest of the city's zoning districts do not have tree retention standards (*unless there is a critical area on the site*)

CODE OBJECTIVE:

- Extend Tree Retention Code

Key Scope Choices:

- Expand the existing tree retention standards to all the city's zoning districts?
- In expanding tree retention standards to include non-development related tree loss, what are some important considerations?
- Should other factors also be considered for retention - tree species, etc.?

Lesson from Peer Jurisdictions:

- Current approach is within the realm of peer jurisdictions

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Tree Canopy Requirements for Parking Lots – Existing Tacoma Regulations

Parking Lot Landscaping - Current Standards:

- Landscaping requirements for all zones
- Prescriptive standards (interior, perimeter, general distribution requirements, etc.)
- Some exemptions for parking lots of 16 stalls or less

Additional Considerations:

- Separate Parking Code Update project, and possible removal of minimum parking requirements
- Key Policy: Require new and existing parking lots to offset their contribution to Urban Heat Island through tree-planting requirements that shade at least 50% of the parking lot.
(*One Tacoma, Policy EN-5.19*)

CODE OBJECTIVE:

- Increase tree canopy requirements for all parking lots

Scope Choices:

- Consider shifting to (*or mix of*) performance-based approaches to add flexibility in meeting tree canopy requirements, rather than prescriptive standards?
- Reduce or eliminate exemptions for lots with 16 stalls or less?

Lesson from Peer jurisdictions:

- Peer jurisdictions incorporate a mix of prescriptive and performance-based approaches

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Low Canopy Management Strategies

Existing Low-Canopy Strategies and Programs	
Grit City Trees	Offers residents trees, supplies, and support to help grow healthier neighborhoods. Prioritizes equity by focusing on areas with low tree canopy.
Green Blocks	Offers residents trees, supplies, and support in one priority neighborhood per year. Prioritizes equity by focusing on areas with low tree canopy.
Community Tree Program	Partnership with Tacoma Tree Foundation to foster community engagement, education, and training to support the long-term stewardship of Tacoma's urban forest.
Tree Coupon Program	Provides discounts at participating nurseries to help homeowners select and plant the right tree in the right conditions

CODE OBJECTIVE:

- Increase tree canopy, particularly in **low-canopy areas**

Existing code structure contributes to this objective:

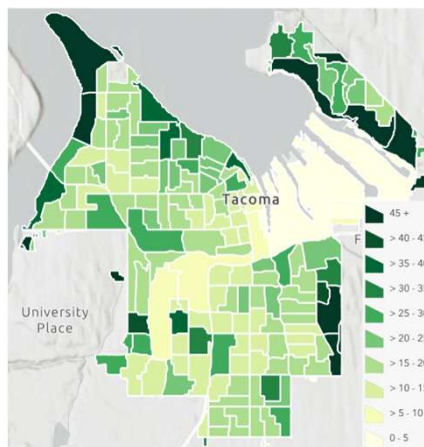
- Expanding tree credits and retention will support this objective *(as many of the lower canopy areas have more commercial & mixed-use zoning)*

Low-Canopy Management Strategies – Priority Areas

Zoning Districts with Lowest Tree Canopy

Zone		Existing Canopy Coverage below 10%
Industrial	PMI	2.55%
	M1	8.96%
	M2	6.91%
Mixed-Use	CIX	4.99%
	NCX	6.16%
	HMX	8.52%
	UCX	8.74%
Downtown	DCC	5.60%
	DMU	6.02%
	WR	6.30%
Commercial	C2	8.15%

2024 Tree Canopy by Census Block Groups



Scope Question:

- How to determine focus areas?

Discussion & Next Steps



Discussion:

- **Tree Credits:** Should focus be on gap areas rather than revisiting recent decisions?
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 - Current retention focuses on tree size – should other factors be considered (like species)?
- **Low Canopy Management Strategies:** What areas are a priority for investment?
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Next Steps

- Develop two Initial Code Options for each Objective
- Review draft Code Update with IPS Committee in June 2026
- Planning Commission Public Hearing in September

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