



TO: Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability Committee Members
FROM: Council Member Kristina Walker and Christina Caan, Policy Analyst
COPY: Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager; Ramiro Chavez, Executive Liaison
PRESENTER: Council Member Kristina Walker
SUBJECT: Draft suggestions for IPS discussion on expanding the City's Urban Forestry Program and further implementation of the Urban Forestry Management Plan
DATE: February 26, 2025

PRESENTATION TYPE:

Request for Action

SUMMARY:

This memo proposes that the Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability (IPS) Committee discuss advancing a Council Consideration Request (CCR) to the full Council for Study Session on March 25 that could direct the City Manager and the Planning Commission to take a set of actions aimed at helping Tacoma improve its tree canopy.

- A robust urban tree canopy is a fundamental component of healthy, resilient, and livable communities. Trees contribute to the aesthetic environment of the City and provide an attractive urban setting to enhance livability and foster economic development. Tree cover and urban landscaping also play a major role in supporting urban wildlife, reducing stormwater runoff, filtering pollution, and reducing the urban heat island effect.

BACKGROUND:

In November 2024, the City Council adopted an amendment to the Home in Tacoma Zoning and Standards Package to:

- Remove all proposed Tree Preservation regulations which are intended to apply to property outside the land use permitting process and refer those proposed regulations to the Council's Infrastructure, Planning and Sustainability Committee to immediately initiate a separate, broader policy discussion about expanding the City's Urban Forestry Program and further implementation of the Urban Forestry Management Plan, including examination of:
 - Tree preservation standards citywide (beyond just the UR zones);
 - Appropriate City resources for tree planting and maintenance; and,
 - Regulatory and non-regulatory tools for tree preservation.

On February 12, the IPS Committee received an informational briefing about the Urban Forest Management Plan and the current programs and services the City offers for urban forest management. This presentation provided a baseline review of tree planting and maintenance programs, Urban Forestry staffing and funding, and other relevant information to help guide opportunities to adjust City regulations, financial incentives, and City responsibilities to help improve the tree canopy.



ISSUE:

Enacting new tree preservation regulations, incentives, and City programs is a pathway for helping to improve Tacoma's tree canopy. I suggest that IPS consider and discuss five potential categories of actions related to improving our tree canopy. Pending our IPS discussion, these actions—or a configuration of these actions—could be incorporated into a Council Consideration Request (CCR) to advance to the full Council for Study Session on March 25.

1. Tree Preservation Regulations for Development Sites Citywide

- *Directing the Planning Commission:* Study and make recommendations for an ordinance to be considered by the City Council that establishes requirements for tree preservation and tree credits for development sites citywide. The Planning Commission should include consideration of the possibility of applying the established tree preservation and tree credits for development sites under Home in Tacoma to all additional zones beyond UR.
 - If included in the CCR, this item would have a fiscal impact note for staff time and legal analysis to assist the Planning Commission with this work. Council would also need to decide whether to prioritize this action in the Planning Commission's 2025 workplan, which would delay work on other items in the 2025 workplan, or decide to incorporate this action into the Planning Commission workplan without delaying items in the 2025 workplan. If Council decides not to delay other items on the Planning Commission's 2025 workplan, then Planning Commission action on this item would be delayed until at least 2026.

2. Tree Preservation Regulations for Non-Development Sites Citywide

- *Directing the Planning Commission:* Study and make recommendations for an ordinance to be considered by the City Council that creates a new permit structure for a Canopy Loss Fee regarding significant tree removals on non-development sites in all zones.
 - The permit structure should offer exemptions for any tree if it is a hazardous tree, nuisance tree, prohibited tree, tree damaging the sidewalk, or significantly damaged tree, as well as penalties for removing a tree without a permit. No tree greater than ≥ 24 " DBH should be permitted for removal, unless it meets exemption requirements. In addition, potential incentives for participating in wood waste diversion should be considered. The Planning Commission should also consider the appropriate amount of time before a development permit is applied for and after a development project is completed for when permit regulations apply.
 - If included in the CCR, this item would have a fiscal impact note for staff time and legal analysis to assist the Planning Commission with this work. The fiscal impact note would also include an overview of the estimated costs of implementing a new permit structure. Council would also need to decide whether to prioritize this action in the Planning Commission's 2025 workplan, which would delay work on other items in the 2025 workplan, or decide to incorporate this action into the Planning Commission workplan without delaying items in the 2025 workplan. If Council decides not to delay other items on the Planning



Commission's 2025 workplan, then Planning Commission action on this item would be delayed until at least 2026.

3.a. Tree Canopy Requirements for Parking Lots

- *Directing the Planning Commission:* Study and make recommendations for an ordinance to be considered by the City Council that increases tree canopy requirements for parking lots that are currently exempt (e.g. small parking lots) and also increases the tree canopy requirement for all parking lots.
 - If included in the CCR, this item would have a fiscal impact note for staff time and legal analysis to assist the Planning Commission with this work. Council would also need to decide whether to prioritize this action in the Planning Commission's 2025 workplan, which would delay work on other items in the 2025 workplan, or decide to incorporate this action into the Planning Commission workplan without delaying items in the 2025 workplan. If Council decides not to delay other items on the Planning Commission's 2025 workplan, then Planning Commission action on this item would be delayed until at least 2026.

3.b. Tree Canopy Incentives for Parking Lots

- *Directing the City Manager:* Pending the outcome of the Planning Commission action on tree canopy requirements for parking lots, create an ordinance establishing a B&O tax incentive for new development of a parking lot with a greater tree canopy than required and retrofitting an existing parking lot to meet tree canopy requirements.
 - If included in the CCR, this item would have a fiscal impact note for Council consideration on the cost of establishing a B&O tax incentive. Fiscal impact note would include options for one-year, five-year, and ten-year incentives at a range of percentages, as well as staff time to establish and implement the incentive.

4.a. Tree Canopy Requirements for Commercial, Manufacturing, and Industrial Zones in Very Low Equity Areas

- *Directing the Planning Commission:* Study and make recommendations for an ordinance to be considered by the City Council that determines and requires appropriate tree canopy requirements for commercial, manufacturing and industrial uses in very low equity areas.
 - If included in the CCR, this item would have a fiscal impact note for staff time and legal analysis to assist the Planning Commission with this work. Council would also need to decide whether to prioritize this action in the Planning Commission's 2025 workplan, which would delay work on other items in the 2025 workplan, or decide to incorporate this action into the Planning Commission workplan without delaying items in the 2025 workplan. If Council decides not to delay other items on the Planning Commission's 2025 workplan, then Planning Commission action on this item would be delayed until at least 2026.



4.b. Tree Canopy Incentives for Commercial, Manufacturing, and Industrial Zones in Very Low Equity Areas

- *Directing the City Manager:* Pending the outcome of the Planning Commission action on appropriate tree canopy requirements for commercial, manufacturing and industrial uses in very low equity areas, create an ordinance establishing a B&O tax incentive for new development in a commercial, manufacturing or industrial zone in a very low equity area that exceeds tree canopy requirements and retrofitting an existing property in a commercial, manufacturing or industrial zone in a very low equity area to meet tree canopy requirements.
 - If included in the CCR, this item would have a fiscal impact note for Council consideration on the cost of establishing a B&O tax incentive. Fiscal impact note would include options for one-year, five-year, and ten-year incentives at a range of percentages, as well as staff time to establish and implement the incentive.

5. City Actions to Partially Expand ROW Tree Maintenance

- *Directing the City Manager:* Create a fiscal impact note and legal analysis for Council consideration to create a program that offers business districts the option to pay the City to provide services to maintain trees within the business district. Fiscal impact note should outline three potential service level options that range in cost, as well as the costs for staff and administration of the program.
- *Directing the City Manager:* Create a fiscal impact note and legal analysis for Council consideration on options to fund partially expanded City management of tree maintenance in ROW. Options could include a wastewater excise tax, stormwater utility rate enhancement, shared tree crew with other agency, or other recommendations.

ALTERNATIVES:

The IPS Committee could choose not to advance any suggestions to Study Session or narrow the scope of the suggestions. Doing so may limit the City's ability to increase the tree canopy but would also decrease the need to adjust the workplan for the Planning Commission and City staff, as well as minimize financial costs.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact to advancing a CCR to Study Session beyond staff time. Some research and background for the recommended fiscal notes has already been completed and general estimates could likely be created for the March 25 Study Session without robust staff time.

RECOMMENDATION:

Discuss advancing a CCR to Study Session on March 25 for full Council consideration.