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PRESENTER: Adam Nolan, Planning and Development Services Department
SUBJECT: Tree and Landscape Code Update
DATE: March 25, 2026

PRESENTATION TYPE:
Informational Briefing

SUMMARY:

Planning and Development Services staff will provide an update on the City of Tacoma’s tree and landscaping code regulations. This project is Phase 3 of the [Urban Forest Action Plan](#) and the scope of work includes studying and making recommendations for ordinance options to be considered by the City Council to support tree canopy management and tree preservation for development sites citywide, including:

- Tree Credit system for development sites in all zones, including fee-in-lieu options
- Canopy Loss Fee system (new permit structure) for sites with and without active development in all zones
- Tree canopy requirements for parking lots, including parking lots that are currently exempt
- Low-Canopy Management Strategies for sites in industrial, manufacturing, commercial, and otherwise low-canopy and low equity areas

This briefing summarizes the project background, current data on existing tree canopy, inventory of current standards related to the scope of work, benchmarking from other jurisdictions, consideration of a few potential code option approaches for updating Tacoma’s tree and landscaping code, and presents the proposed project schedule and milestones leading to a target adoption in mid-2027. The intent is to provide early visibility into the scope and policy considerations of the update and to inform future Council deliberations.

BACKGROUND:

In response to overwhelming community support for enhancing Tacoma’s tree canopy, the Tacoma City Council adopted the Urban Forest Priority Action Plan ([Resolution No. 41682](#)) in May 2025. The plan outlines a set of phased actions to expand the City’s work planting and maintaining trees, as well as regulatory and non-regulatory tools for tree preservation citywide. The four phases of this plan are designed to steer public engagement, policy options, and budget proposals for City Council consideration:

- Phase 1: Deepen the City’s understanding of the public demand for expanding the City’s Urban Forestry Program and advancing implementation of the Urban Forestry Management Plan.
- Phase 2: Preparation of level of service options to be considered, which would enable the expansion of City tree maintenance in the right-of-way. This range of options will be accompanied by revenue alternatives to fund program enhancements in preparation of the 2027-2028 biennial budget.
- Phase 3: Launch the Planning Commission process for developing new land use and development regulations regarding tree canopy management and preservation.

- Phase 4: Recommendation from the Planning Commission for new land use and development regulations to be provided to the City Council to consider for adoption

This briefing will be focused on Phase 3 of the [Urban Forest Action Plan](#) as described above.

ISSUE:

It is widely understood that tree canopy is a vital resource that provides environmental, social, and health benefits across the city. However, the City of Tacoma’s current tree canopy coverage is lacking in overall amount and in equitable geographic distribution. With the adoption of the Urban Forest Priority Action Plan, the City Council has set a path to analyze options and move to adopt regulations that will advance goals of managing, expanding, and preserving tree canopy, and to further support the City’s climate and equity goals. The following is a description of the proposed schedule and engagement to complete the update in compliance with City and State law.

Tentative Schedule

Step	Timeline	Key Activities
Step 1: Project Kick-off and Analysis	Jan – Feb 2026	Onboard Mithun team (project consultant) Develop engagement strategy Establish internal partners team Launch project webpage & FAQs Introduce project to Planning Commission Analyze existing code and identify gaps Study existing canopy coverage Study precedents and best practices
Step 2: Initial Code Options & Early Engagement	Feb – Apr 2026	Develop initial code options IPS Committee briefing Planning Commission direction on code option Engagement
Step 3: Phase 3: Draft Code	May – Aug 2026	Develop Draft 1 Code Draft case studies IPS Committee briefing Planning Commission direction on code refinement Engagement, public outreach & informational meeting
Step 4: Final Code	Aug 2026 – May 2027	Release draft code & 30-day comment period (mid-Sept) Planning Commission public hearing Planning Commission recommendation (Dec 2026) IPS Review (Jan 2027) City Council review & public hearing (Mar/Apr 2027) Adoption (Mid-2027) Engagement, public outreach & informational meeting
Post Adoption	Mid-2027	Internal staff trainings & tip sheets Update Urban Forest Manual

Outreach & Engagement

Staff will conduct a coordinated outreach and engagement process to ensure the Tree and Landscape Code update is informed by technical expertise, interagency coordination, and community input. Engagement activities will be scaled to the scope of the update and will occur throughout the process.

Internal Engagement

Staff will coordinate with City departments and key boards and commissions to gather technical input, ensure policy alignment, and address operational considerations. This includes engagement with:

- Climate & Sustainability Commission
- Parking Technical Advisory Group
- Mayor's Youth Commission
- Tacoma Permit Advisory Group

External Government Coordination

Staff will engage with external agencies and partners to gather their input. This includes engagement with:

- Puyallup Tribe of Indians
- Parks Tacoma
- Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department
- Tacoma Public Schools
- Pierce Conservation District
- Port of Tacoma

Public Outreach

Public engagement will utilize a unified engagement approach and will include a mix of virtual and in-person strategies. Outreach activities are anticipated to include:

- Virtual informational meeting
- Project webpage and social media outreach
- Engagement with Business Districts
- Engagement with Neighborhood Councils
- Online survey
- Translated materials
- Cultural ambassador support

Other Stakeholder Outreach

Staff will reach out to organizations and stakeholder groups with interest in environmental concerns (e.g., trees/tree canopy, health impacts, conservation, built environment), economic development organizations and agencies, businesses, environmental groups, and other community groups.

This engagement approach is intended to ensure broad participation, equitable access to information, and meaningful opportunities for feedback prior to code adoption.

ALTERNATIVES:

No action is requested from the Committee at this time, this briefing is informational only.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This is an information briefing only. There is no fiscal impact.

RECOMMENDATION:

This is an information briefing only. There is no recommendation.