

# CITY OF EDMONDS, WA TREE CODE AMENDMENT PROJECT FOCUS GROUP #2 SUMMARY AND ASSESSMENT TREE BOARD

## OVERVIEW

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Edmonds' Tree Code was formally adopted in 2021, and City staff is now in the process of gathering public input on potential tree code amendments with the following objectives:

- A. Clarify the current tree code related to development (minor amendments)
- B. Consider regulations on private property tree removals

As a part of the Tree Code Amendment Project's Community Engagement Strategy, a series of focus group sessions are scheduled to hear perspectives and ideas from various interest groups about changes to the tree code. City staff sent out invitations with the following stakeholder groups in mind:

- Developers
- Arborists
- Environmental sciences
- Tree preservation advocacy
- Climate action
- Underserved and underrepresented

This Tree Board special meeting was organized in a hybrid format so that attendees could join virtually via Zoom, or in person at the Edmonds City Hall, 121 5th Avenue N, on the 2nd floor in the Kerr Room. The meeting results analysis and summary are included in this document as a progress report.

### *Tree Code Amendment Focus Group #2: Tree Board*

Date: May 3, 2023 Special Meeting  
Time: 6:00 – 7:30pm  
Location: Edmonds City Hall, 2nd floor in the Kerr Room  
121 5th Ave. N., Edmonds, WA 98020  
Virtual Option: Zoom link provided via email  
Zoom recording available at request  
Attendees: 6 Tree Board Members in person, no virtual attendees

## AGENDA

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- A. INTRODUCTIONS
- B. CONTEXT/BACKGROUND
  1. ECDC 23.10 Review/Facilitated Discussion
- C. SUMMARY: HOW THE CURRENT CODE WORKS
  1. Property Owner Tree Removals
  2. Tree Retention With Development
- D. FACILITATED FEEDBACK
  1. What's wrong with Edmonds tree code? Problems, issues, gaps
  2. How could it work better?
- E. CONCLUSION
- F. TREE BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS
- G. ADJOURNMENT

### TREE BOARD COMMENTARY FOLLOWING INTRO/PROJECT BACKGROUND

- Tree Board: The City should include history farther back than 2018 and look at public feedback from 2015.  
*Staff response - code amendments are a legislative process with public engagement efforts tied to the specific code issues at that time.*
- Tree Board: It is very likely the same comments from 2015 will arise again because of the opposition to private property tree codes. The City should include public testimony from 2015 in the current process.  
*Staff response -. we know it's a polarizing topic here, and in any city considering new tree codes in the past or now. That is why we hired a consultant to assist with a robust public engagement.*
- Tree Board: The tree code process may go a little better this time, but the City should still consider including prior public comments.

## FACILITATED Q&A

### FACILITATED Q&A: PROPERTY OWNER TREE REMOVALS (NO DEVELOPMENT)

#### Should property owner-related tree removals be limited to help slow the loss of canopy?

- Tree Board question/discussion: what are all the reasons why people remove trees?

The Board discussed they never got an answer from Davey on this; the Board had asked Davey to include this question in their survey related to the Urban Forest Management Plan. The Board needs to understand the full picture of why people remove trees to answer the question. The Board's general assumption was that trees were being removed due to people moving into Edmonds from other cities and having a fear of trees from natural disasters such as fires...

*Staff response - there is no real data as to why people remove trees from their property. That information is not being tracked in Edmonds, which is one of the reasons for the proposed notification process. Anecdotally, removals are due to many reasons. The question is just to understand the Board's view on property owner tree removals.*

- Tree Board question/discussion: Are we experiencing canopy loss under the current code? It seems we don't need to add new codes if there are increases to canopy.

*Staff response – Edmonds canopy had a slight gain overall. When we look at individual land uses is where the differences can be seen where the greatest losses were. In some areas, gains were due to tree growth, which was greater than losses in those areas.*

YES: most of the group. There should be a limit to how many trees you can cut down, but we will experience pushback.

NO: need more information

#### Should property owners be allowed to remove x number of trees (within a certain timeframe)?

- Tree Board: without requiring a permit, a notification process for tree removal may generally be supported by the community. The concept seems straightforward. Those that did not respond did not clearly state opposition or support.

YES: some of the group

NO: Unclear

#### Is 12 months adequate between allowed removals?

NOT ANSWERED /UNCLEAR

#### Should “Landmark” tree be defined as minimum 24” DBH?

- Tree Board discussion: originally agreed yes, but further discussion supports varying tree size thresholds.

NOT ANSWERED/UNCLEAR

**Should “Landmark” tree removals be prohibited (except hazard or nuisance trees)? Or, if a tree removal allowance (“2-per” notification) was enacted, should Landmark tree removals fall under the same allowance?**

- Tree Board discussion: there should be a good reason for large tree removals, not just because of leaves or pollen. The Board discussed further the many good or unsupported reasons why people remove trees from their property, and some expressed a desire to have data on that. There were some assumptions on how people would work around the rules and the difference between prohibiting Landmark tree removals or allowing a limited number of removals.

*Staff response: regardless of the reason why people remove trees, allowing a certain number of removals still slows canopy loss over time. Code can allow hazard/nuisance tree removal without identifying every reason justifying tree removal. The question is whether larger trees should have a higher level of protection than smaller trees.*

YES: Landmark tree removals should be limited, with higher replacement requirements. Only Landmark trees that are hazardous should be allowed to be removed.

**Should the time between “Landmark” tree removals be longer than what’s allowed for smaller trees?**

NOT ANSWERED

**Should the same tree removal allowances apply in critical areas?**

NO: trees in critical areas should be regulated more strictly than other trees.

**Should a permit be required for tree removals in critical areas?**

YES: permits should be required for tree removal in critical areas.

**What are appropriate tree replacement requirements for property owner tree removals in Edmonds?**

- Tree Board discussion: there was a difference of opinion on replacement requirements, such as whether conifers or certain species should be required to be planted, what the site conditions may be, and other policies related to replanting removed trees/

UNCLEAR

**FACILITATED Q&A: CHANGES TO THE EXISTING CODE RELATED TO DEVELOPMENT**

**Should the code be reorganized using charts and graphics?**

- Tree Board discussion: the Board inquired as to who primarily uses the code and whether graphs and charts can be added to the existing code. There was some confusion about the question relating to code content versus formatting and whether this is a question for the Tree Board at all.

*Staff response: The code is mainly used by developers, arborists, and property owners. Getting their feedback was the purpose of the first stakeholder meeting. There’s an assumption that the Tree Board is familiar enough with the code that they are asked the same stakeholder questions as the Planning Board and other focus groups.*

YES: most of the group

**Should the code use one method/calculation to determine the minimum number of trees required to be retained/replanted?**

- Tree Board discussion: the specific formula would have to be “reasonable” but there was no consensus on what that would look like.

*Staff response: This would simplify the current development code by using a formula instead of all the multiple layers of retention, tree replacement and fee in lieu requirements in the existing code. It’s based on the desired outcome of trees retained and planted on a lot. The “quota” considers a unit of trees per lot area. Board Member Lyon (Certified Arborist) advocated for this system. The question relates to the general concept, not necessarily the specific requirement.*

YES: most of the group

NO: the calculation must be “reasonable”, but no parameters were provided

**Should the code prioritize replanting over requiring fees in lieu? Currently, there are no replanting requirements for healthy trees removed on development sites >24” DBH.**

- The Tree Board discussed how/when fees are collected, the current balance of the Tree Fund (where fees in lieu are deposited) and asked how to initiate a Tree Fund reporting process.

*Staff response: the question relates to planting and fees: what is the higher priority?*

YES: the priority for Landmark trees is retain, then replant and pay fees as a last resort.

UNCLEAR: planting or fee priorities for smaller trees

**Should the \$2 per square foot “cap” be eliminated from the code?**

- Tree Board discussion: it depends on changes to the existing tree retention requirements. If it pencils out, then it may not be necessary.

UNCLEAR

**Should the 25% tree retention threshold that applies to multifamily development be removed from the code?**

- Tree Board discussion: Tree Fund should support land acquisition rather than maintaining parks. (City budgets) should fund staff positions, inspections and education and promote better tree maintenance.

UNCLEAR

**Should the Conservation Subdivision code specify a numerical tree retention threshold?**

YES: there should be a specific threshold, possibly the same calculation formula but increased.

*Note that the Tree Board communicated responses to the previous questions informally rather than by quorum vote. For reporting purposes and to gain greater clarity on questions that were not answered, unclear or divided in response, PlanIT Geo emailed a Follow-Up Survey to Tree Board members the week following the focus group meeting. Results from the Follow-Up Survey are shown at the end of this report.*

## **WHITEBOARD EXERCISE**

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**What’s the one thing you would change about the existing code?**

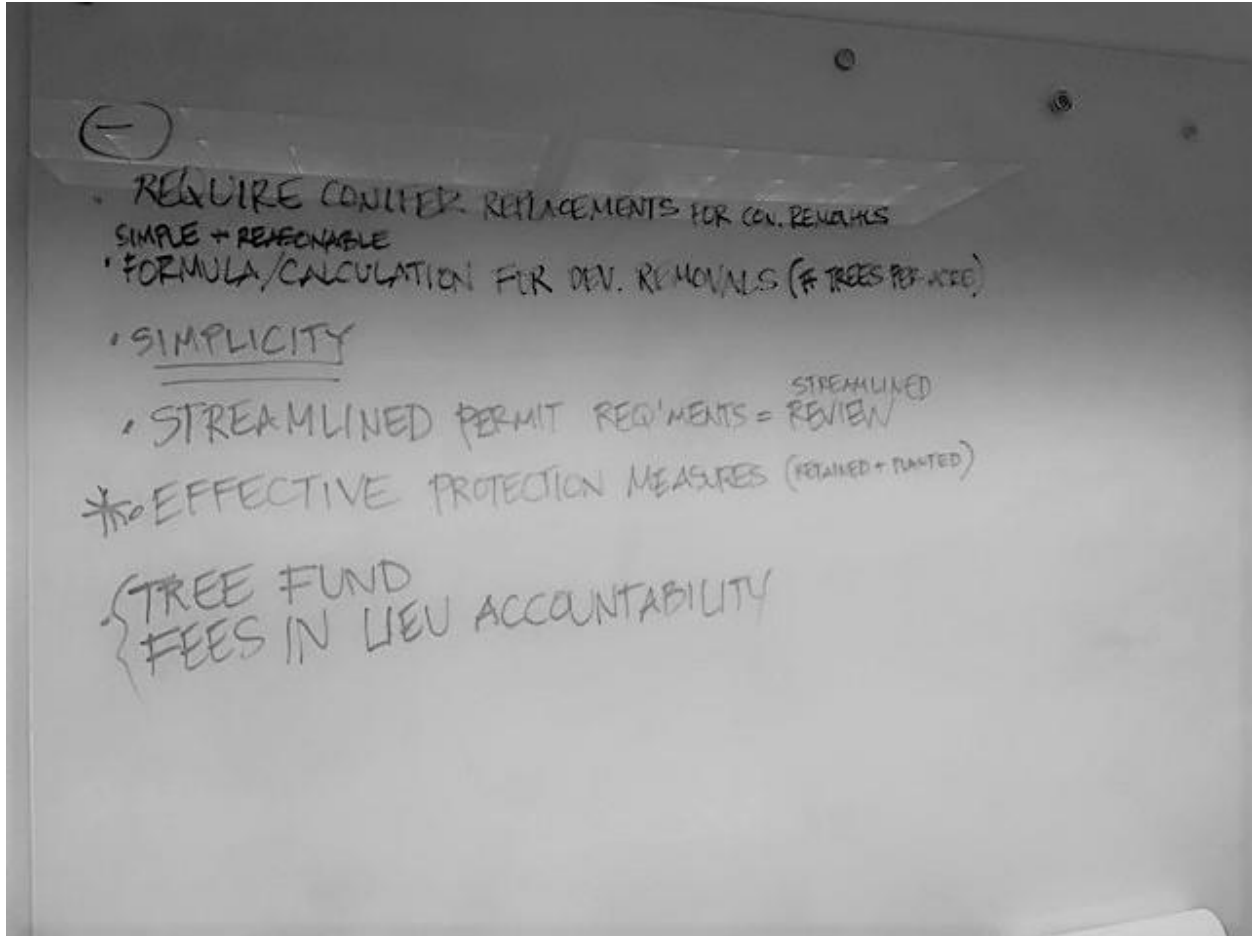
Tree Board responses:

- Require conifer replacements for conifer removals (like for like)
- Use a calculation/formula approach for tree retention/replanting requirements that’s “reasonable and fair”
- Simplify the existing code
- Streamline the current permit review process
- Replace the current Protected Tree Notice on title with a 3 to 5-year Maintenance Agreement, so that new property owners know to care for trees that were protected.
- Restructure the Tree Fund so the Planning Board and/or Tree Board have some input on expenditures. Require regular reports for greater Tree Fund accountability.

**What are some ways Edmonds tree code could be improved?**

NOT ANSWERED DUE TO TIME

*See Follow-Up Survey shown at the end of this report.*



## ATTENDEES

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### *CITY OF EDMONDS:*

Deb Powers

### *PLANIT GEO:*

Alex Hancock  
Mike Martini

### *TREE BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:*

Janelle Cass  
Bill Phipps  
Wendy Kliment  
Crane Stavig  
Kevin Fagerstrom  
Ross Dimmick

### *TREE BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:*

Andy Lyon  
Chris Eck

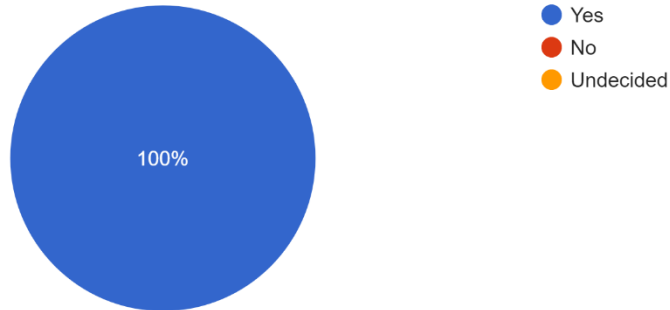
## FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

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In an effort to clarify responses from Tree Board Members regarding the key questions asked during the meeting, a survey was distributed. Three members responded, with the following responses recorded:

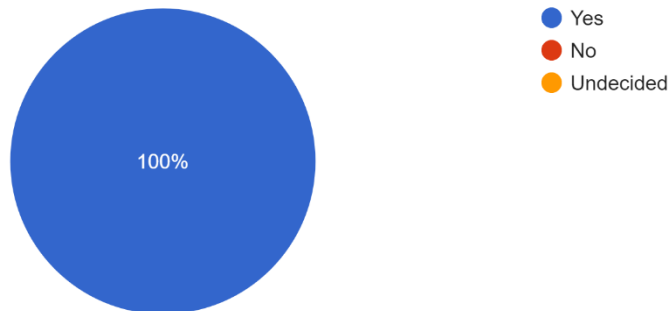
1. Should property owner tree removals be limited\* to help slow the loss of canopy? \*Reasonable exceptions: hazard and nuisance trees

3 responses



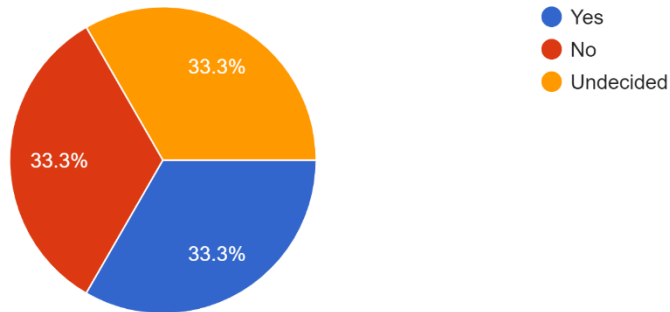
2. Should property owners be allowed to remove x number of trees\* within a certain timeframe (no permit)? \*Reasonable exceptions: hazard and nuisance trees

3 responses



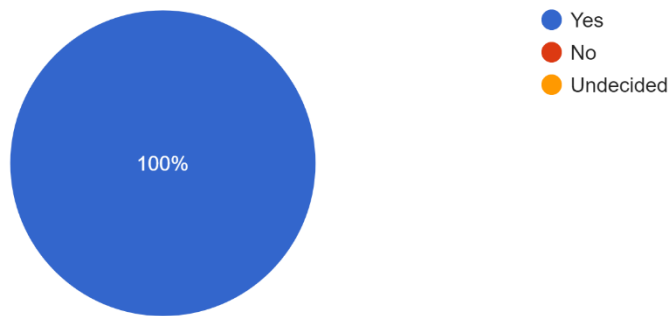
3. Is 12 months adequate between allowed removals?

3 responses



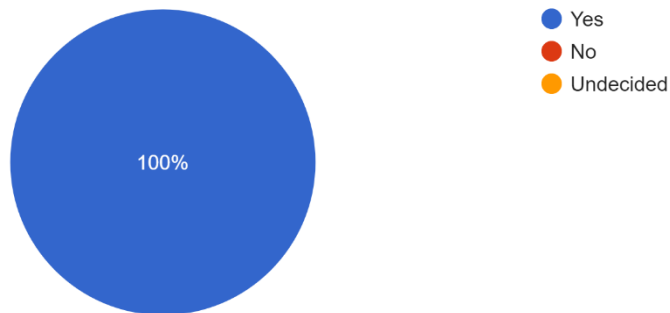
4. Should "Landmark" tree be defined as minimum 24" DBH?

3 responses



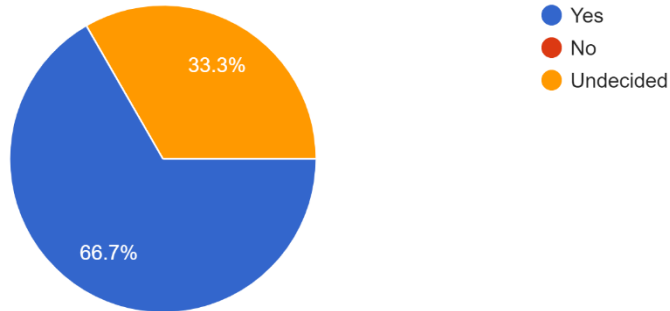
5. Should "Landmark" tree removals be limited?\* \*Except hazard or nuisance trees

3 responses



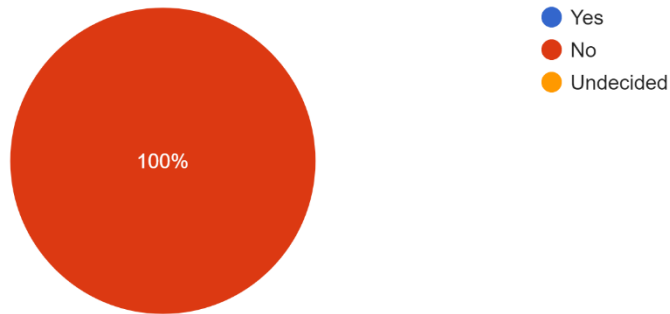
6. Should the time between “Landmark” tree removals be longer than what’s allowed for smaller trees?

3 responses



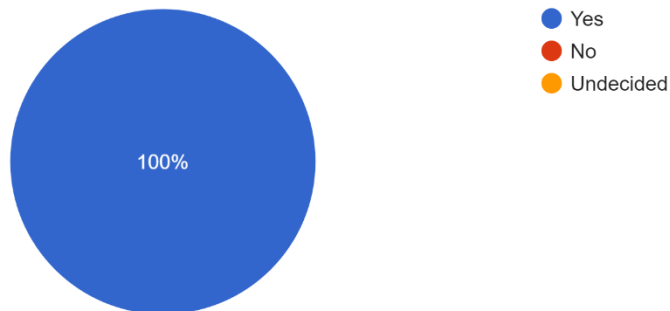
7. Should the same tree removal allowances apply in critical areas (compared with tree removals not in critical areas)?

3 responses



8. Should a permit be required for tree removals in critical areas?

3 responses



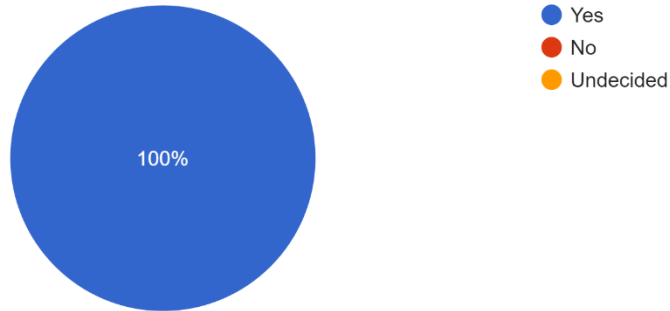
9. What are appropriate tree replacement requirements for property owner tree removals in Edmonds? 3 responses



I like the idea of a percentage rather than a specific number of trees per our discussion  
Owners choose from an approved tree list. Base on canopy coverage, not # of trees.  
depends on size of tree...3 replacements for large conifers. And the replacements should be conifers.

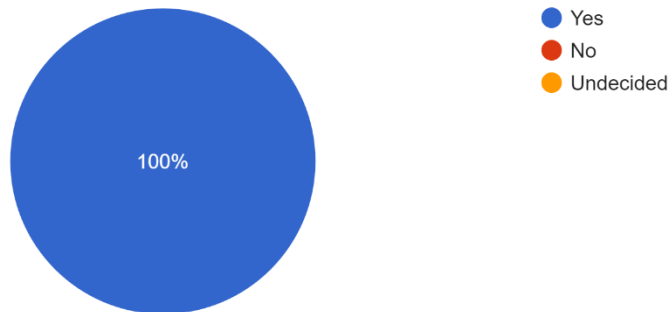
10. Should the code be reorganized using charts and graphics?

3 responses



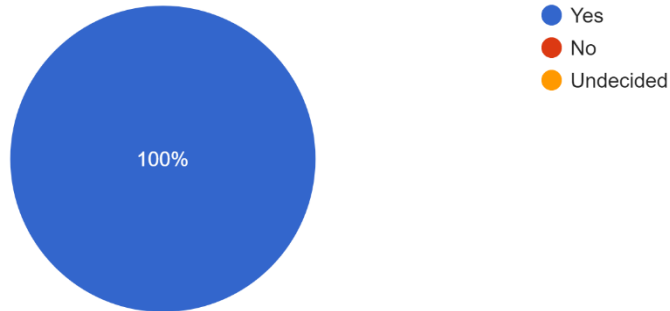
11. Should the code use one method/calculation to determine the minimum number of trees required to be retained/replanted?

3 responses



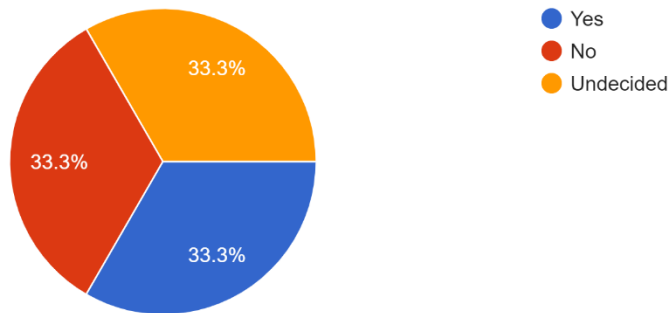
12. Should the code prioritize replanting over requiring fees in lieu, such as with Landmark tree replacements?

3 responses



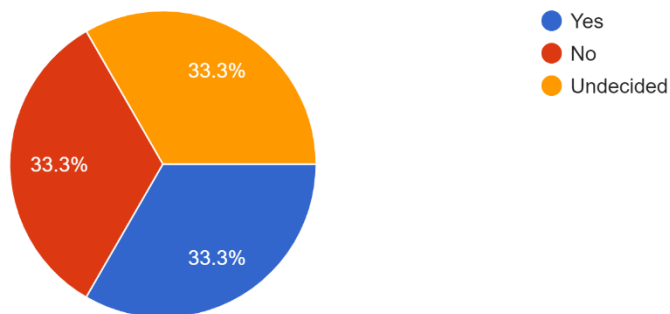
13. Should the \$2 per square foot "cap" be eliminated from the code?

3 responses



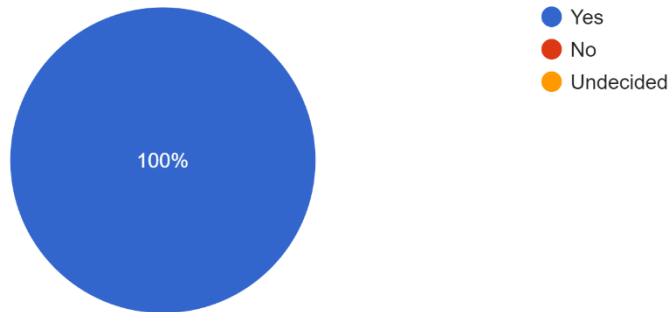
14. Should the 25% tree retention threshold that applies to multifamily development be removed from the code?

3 responses



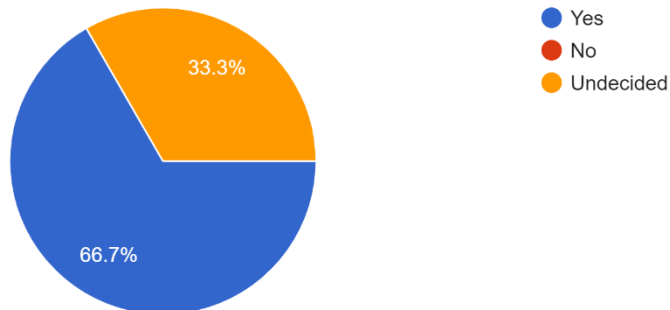
15. Should the Conservation Subdivision code section specify a quantity for "greater tree retention"?

3 responses



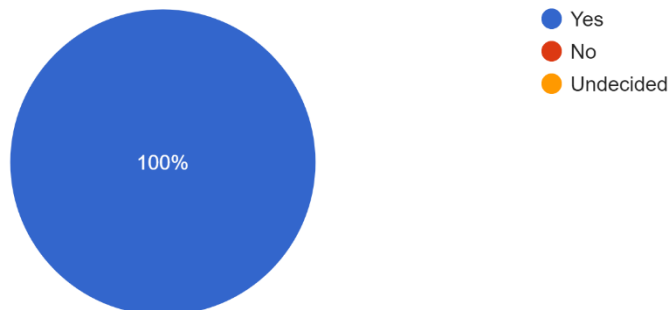
16. Should the "priorities and procedures" section include specific qualitative retention criteria vs quantitative "quotas"?

3 responses



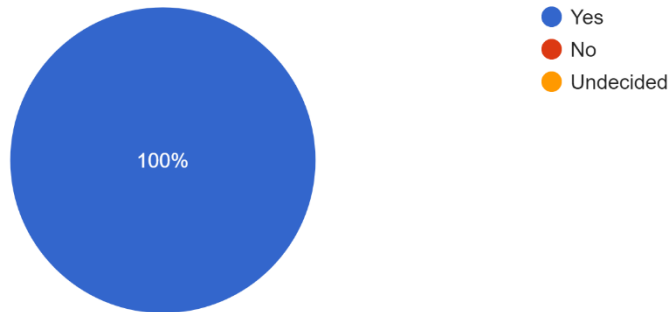
17. Should Landmark trees have a higher degree of protection requirements than other trees?

3 responses



18. Should groves have a higher degree of protection requirements than other trees?

3 responses



19. What's the one thing you would change with the existing code? 3 responses

- Going to a percentage rather than number of trees
- Strengthen tree RETENTION for developers.
- Replacement trees for conifers lost should also be conifers We need to find a mechanism to plant conifers in nearby tree preserves as a sort of ecological offsets.

20. What are some ways that Edmonds' tree code could be improved? 3 responses

- See answer above
- Add transparency to "fees in lieu". Use funds for tree replacement.
- Every tree cut down, for whatever reason anywhere in Edmonds should have replacement trees planted in its place