



# Tree and Vegetation Protection and Removal

PERMITTING & DEVELOPMENT  
**PLANNING**  
 DIVISION  
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The City of Edmonds encourages the retention of healthy trees and so regulates trees and vegetation in several ways. This handout is intended to inform property owners and the development community about the general requirements for tree and vegetation maintenance and removal on private property. Separate requirements apply if a tree is located within the right-of-way (contact the Engineering Division for further guidance). The information referenced in this handout is summarized from Chapters 23.10 and 23.40 - 23.90 of the Edmonds Community Development Code (ECDC).

## TREE REMOVAL AND RETENTION ACTION TABLE

Property or Development	Permit/Documentation Required?	Applicable Code
Developed Single-family property <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No critical areas</li> <li>Not subdividable</li> </ul>	No	ECDC 23.10.040.A
Developed Single-family property <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Subdividable</li> <li>Critical areas present</li> <li><b>Not</b> hazard or nuisance tree</li> </ul>	Yes - Permit	Chapter 23.10 ECDC
Developed Single-family property <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Subdividable</li> <li>Critical areas present</li> <li>Hazard or Nuisance tree</li> </ul>	Yes – Documentation of hazard or nuisance required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ECDC 23.10.040.F</li> <li>ECDC 23.40.220.C.8.b (Tree in critical area or critical area buffer)</li> </ul>
Unimproved Lot (Single-family, multi-family or commercial) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Not</b> hazard or nuisance tree</li> </ul>	Yes - Permit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chapter 23.10 ECDC</li> <li>Critical Code Chapters 23.40 through 23.90 if critical area present</li> </ul>
Vacant Lot (Single-family, multi-family or commercial) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hazard or nuisance tree</li> </ul>	Yes – Documentation of hazard or nuisance required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ECDC 23.10.040.F</li> <li>ECDC 23.40.220.C.8.b (Tree in critical area or critical area buffer)</li> </ul>
Developed Commercial or Multi-family property	Yes – Permit	Chapter 20.13 ECDC Landscaping Requirements
New Development/Additions	No – Tree removal reviewed with development application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chapter 23.10 ECDC</li> <li>ECDC 20.75.048</li> </ul>
Tree in Right-of-way	Yes – Right-of-way Permit	Contact Engineering Division at 425-771-0220

**Contact the Planning Division at 425-771-0220 with questions.**

## **IN CRITICAL AREAS OR BUFFERS**

If a tree or other vegetation is located near a wetland, stream or steep slope, it is likely in a critical area or buffer. If located in an area like this, a permit is required to alter trees or vegetation unless the activity is exempt or allowed by code. "Alteration" means any human activity which changes the existing condition of a critical area or its buffer including cutting, pruning, limbing, topping, clearing, relocating or removing trees and vegetation.

Normal maintenance of vegetation is an exempt activity in critical areas. Normal maintenance is limited to the removal of shrubs and nonwoody vegetation and trees less than 4" diameter at breast height (dbh) that occurs at least every other year. This also includes tree topping that has been previously approved by the City within the past 5 years.

## **INVASIVE SPECIES REMOVAL IN CRITICAL AREAS OR BUFFERS**

The removal of less than 1,500 sq ft per year of the following vegetation is an allowed activity: invasive and noxious weeds; English ivy; Himalayan & Evergreen blackberry; Scot's broom; and hedge and field bindweed. Removal may only occur using hand labor and hand-held equipment.

## **HAZARD TREE REMOVAL**

If a certified arborist determines that a tree is hazardous, poses a threat to public safety, or is an imminent risk of damage to private property, a permit for removal is not required. However, the City still must review the documentation hazard to ensure the work complies with the City's tree regulation and critical area code. The following information must be submitted to the City for review and approval prior to any such work:

- A site plan showing existing structures, the critical area and/or buffer, the location(s) of the tree(s) to be removed, and location(s) of required replacement tree(s).
- Tree Risk Assessment Form completed by an ISA Certified Arborist/Tree Risk Assessor for each tree.
- Photos of the tree(s).
- Cover letter describing the project and the selected native replacement tree(s).
- Reports from professionals such as a geotechnical engineer or biologist, as applicable.

Tree cutting is limited to pruning and crown thinning unless the arborist determines that the creation of a wildlife snag or removal is needed to cure the defect.

In critical areas, all cut vegetation must be left in place unless removal is warranted due to potential disease or pest transmittal or to improve slope stability. Any trees removed from must be replaced on-site at a 2:1 ratio with native species. Replacements must be at least 1 – 2" dbh for deciduous trees or a minimum of 6 feet in height from the top of the root ball for evergreens.

## **NUISANCE TREE REMOVALS**

A nuisance tree is a tree that is causing significant physical damage to a private or public structure and/or infrastructure, including but not limited to: sidewalk, curb, road, water or sewer or stormwater utilities, driveway, parking lot, building foundation, or roof. A nuisance tree may be removed with documentation of the damage and any tree work that has been attempted to rectify the nuisance, and/or a statement

from the applicant’s qualified tree professional explaining why no arboricultural practices can safely rectify the nuisance. The nuisance tree provisions do not apply to trees within a critical area or critical area buffer.

**IN SINGLE FAMILY ZONES**

If no critical areas are present on or adjacent to the subject site and the property is not subdividable (based on lot area), no permit is required for tree and vegetation removal on developed single family parcels.

**IN ALL OTHER ZONES**

A permit is required for tree and vegetation removal on all developed multifamily, business and commercial parcels whether critical areas are present or not. Alterations on such sites must not only meet the requirements of the critical areas code, but also those found in Chapter 20.13 ECDC – Landscaping Requirements.

**EMERGENCIES**

Pre-approval permits are not required in emergency situations involving imminent danger to life or property or substantial fire hazard. However, any emergency removal must be done in compliance with applicable codes, and post-event review is required when a permit would have otherwise been required to conduct the work. Before and after photographs are very helpful to document emergency situations.

**VIOLATIONS AND PENALTIES**

Violations are misdemeanors. Fines for tree cutting violations . Are \$1,500 per tree less than 12 inches in diameter and bases on appraised value for trees 12 inches and larger.

**TREE RETENTION AND REPLANTING REQUIREMENTS**

When sites are development, a percentage of trees must be retained and replanting or a fee-in-lieu payment may also be required. For developing properties the following tree retention requirements apply:

<b>Development</b>	<b>Retention Required</b>
New single-family, short subdivision, or subdivision	30% of all significant trees in the developable site
Multifamily development, unit lot short subdivision, or unit lot subdivision	25% of all significant trees in the developable site

Replacement tree may be required even if the retention standard is met and/or fee-in-lieu payment required for trees not replanted. A fee-in-lieu based on the assessed value of the tree is required for all trees with a 24 diameter removed. The fee-in-lieu provisions may be waved if at least 50% of the significant trees are retained during development.

## PROTECTED TREES

Protected trees are those trees that have been identified for retention and protection on an approved tree retention and protection plan, replacement in relation to a permit or plan, and/or permanently protected by easement, tract, or covenant restriction. The owner of any property that includes protected trees must record a notice on title of the existence of such protected trees against the property with the Snohomish County auditor's office. Removal of protected trees is prohibited unless they are deemed to be hazard or nuisance trees, or through an approved modification of a landscape plan.

## TREE PROTECTION STANDARDS

Protection measures are required for all trees which are to be retained on-site during the development process. See ECDC 23.10.070 for tree protection measures during development

## APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

All tree cutting application must be submitted through the [My Building Permit](#) website. The application must include the following materials:

- Cover letter describing the project.
- A tree inventory containing the following information:
  - A number system of all existing significant trees on the subject property (with corresponding tags on trees);
  - Size (DBH) and estimated tree crown diameter;
  - Proposed tree status (trees to be removed or retained);
  - Brief general health or condition rating of trees (i.e., poor, fair, good, excellent, etc.);
  - Tree type or species.
- A site plan depicting the following information:
  - Location of all proposed improvements, including building footprint, access, utilities, applicable setbacks, critical areas, buffers, and required landscaped areas clearly identified. If a short subdivision or subdivision is being proposed and the location of all proposed improvements has not yet been established, a phased tree retention and protection plan review is required as described in subsection (3)(a) of this section;
  - Accurate location of significant trees on the subject property and adjacent properties where the canopy and/or critical root zone of adjacent significant trees extend onto the subject property (surveyed locations may be required);
  - Trees labeled corresponding to the tree inventory numbering system;
  - Location of tree protection measures;
  - Indicate limits of disturbance drawn to scale around all trees potentially impacted by site disturbances resulting from grading, demolition, or construction activities;
  - Proposed tree status (trees to be removed or retained) noted by an "X" or by ghosting out;
  - Proposed locations of any required replacement trees as outlined in ECDC 23.10.080 and trees required to be planted in accordance with subsection (C)(5) of this section. Where replacement trees are proposed to be planted at a different location than the project site, a description of the alternate site and written approval from the property owner must be provided.
- An arborist report containing the following information:

- A complete description of each tree's health, condition, and viability;
  - A description of the method(s) used to determine the limits of disturbance (i.e., critical root zone, root plate diameter, or a case-by-case basis description for individual trees);
  - Any special instructions specifically outlining any work proposed within the limits of the disturbance protection area (i.e., hand-digging, tunneling, root pruning, any grade changes, clearing, monitoring, and aftercare);
  - For trees not viable for retention, a description of the reason(s) for removal based on poor health, high risk of failure due to structure, defects, unavoidable isolation (windfirmness), or unsuitability of species, etc., and for which no reasonable alternative action is possible must be given (pruning, cabling, etc.);
  - Description of the impact of necessary tree removal to the remaining trees, including those in a grove;
- Reports from professionals such as a geotechnical engineer or biologist, as applicable.

**Note: This information should not be used as a substitute for City codes and regulations. The Edmonds Community Development Code (ECDC) may be viewed at <https://www.codepublishing.com/WA/Edmonds>. The applicant is responsible for ensuring compliance with the fees and regulations that are applicable at the time of submittal. If you have a specific question about a certain aspect of your project, please contact the Planning Division at 121 Fifth Avenue North, (425) 771-0220. Please note that other local, state, and/or federal permits or approvals may be required.**