

Chapter 3 Incentives, Flexibility, and Fees

Use this chapter to determine when incentives and flexibility offered may apply to your project. Retaining trees and tree groves, planting evergreen species, and using low impact development techniques provide opportunities to reduce required landscaping and/or offer flexibility in building standards. If required trees do not fit on-site with these techniques, flexibility is offered to plant trees offsite through “Tree Banks” or by paying a Tree Canopy Credit Fee to support City tree planting elsewhere. In some instances when larger trees are removed, Canopy Loss Fees may be assessed, which also helps fund tree planting and maintenance throughout the City.

3.1 Incentives and Flexibility

3.1.1 Retaining Trees for Credit Using “Tree Quantity” System

In zones with tree requirements that do not use a Tree Canopy Credit system, or when trees are required to meet specific quantity standards, such as with Site Perimeter Landscaping, retained trees shall count according to their species as Small, Medium and Large Trees in the following amounts:

- One required tree for every retained tree of at least equal size;
- Two required trees for every retained tree that is 8 inches to 20 inches in DBH;
- Three required trees, for every retained tree 20 inches to 32 inches in DBH;
- Four required trees, for every retained tree over 32 inches in DBH.
- In order to facilitate and provide an incentive for the retention of substantial numbers of mature trees, additional flexibility is available on Parking Lot Distribution requirements.

3.1.2 Flexibility for Extra Street Trees (UR Zones)

Street trees do not count toward on-site Tree canopy credits, except those planted above the required amount, per TMC 13.06.090.B.3.g.(5).

In some instances within UR Zones, street trees provided that are above the requirements may be applied to onsite tree planting requirements. To determine whether planted trees exceed street tree requirements and are eligible for onsite tree canopy credits, use the table below. Subtract the total linear feet of all trees provided from the total required linear feet. Linear feet above the requirement can be translated to tree canopy credits using the values in Figure 3-2.

Figure 3-1: Calculating Linear Feet above Requirements

Required	Provided (from worksheet above)	Additional (Required – Provided)
Total Site Frontage in linear feet (LF): _____	_____ LF of all trees	_____ LF provided above the requirement

Then use the table below to calculate Tree Canopy Credits from extra street trees that can count toward required onsite Tree Canopy Credits.

Figure 3-2: Linear Feet and Tree Canopy Credit Equivalent

Linear Feet Above the Requirement	Tree Equivalent	Eligible Tree Canopy Credits
0-25 LF	Does not satisfy requirement for additional Tree Canopy Credit	Not eligible
25 – 32 LF	Small Tree	200 credits
33 – 49 LF	Medium Tree	500 credits
50 LF	Large Tree	1,000 credits

Reference Tacoma standard plans LS-01, LS-02, and LS-03 for required Street Tree planting details.

3.1.3 Flexibility for Retained Tree Groves

A tree grove is comprised of 8 or more existing trees, of 12” DBH or greater, that form a continuous canopy. It excludes trees listed in the Prohibited and Not Recommended tree list in Appendix 7D of this UFM. Additional flexibility is available per TMC 13.06.020.F.3 for retention of a tree grove, which includes retention of trees and/or understory vegetation that cannot be removed without damaging the health of the grove.

3.1.4 Evergreen Trees

Scientific research shows that evergreen trees provide more consistent stormwater benefit to the urban environment than deciduous trees, due in part to their persistent foliage year-round. Therefore, planting evergreens may be preferred over deciduous trees in appropriate situations. A credit is offered to incentivize evergreens above and beyond the minimum requirements for evergreens (refer to [Section 4.2.2 Tree Selection and Species Diversity](#) of this Manual) to reflect this benefit.

New evergreen trees, above and beyond those otherwise required, shall receive an additional 10% Tree Canopy Credit (a scale factor of 1.1).

Example:

A site with 2 Medium evergreen trees beyond the required number of evergreen trees would be calculated as: 500 credits x 2 trees x 1.1 = 1,100 Tree Canopy Credits.

If greater than two-thirds of required trees are evergreens, additional flexibility is available on Parking Lot Distribution requirements per TMC 13.06.090.B.4.g.(6).

3.1.5 Low Impact Development Techniques

Low Impact Development Best Management Practices (LID BMPs) that meet both stormwater management and tree requirements, like tree retention (BMP L615) and permeable pavement over planting soil (BMP L633 with suspended pavement systems), are encouraged. Vegetated LID BMPs may be used to meet all or a portion of the landscaping requirements. For sites utilizing LID BMPs as defined in the City of Tacoma Stormwater Management Manual as their primary stormwater management approach, additional flexibility is available on Parking Lot Distribution requirements per TMC 13.06.090.B.4.g.(6).

3.1.6 Tree Banks (UR Zones)

Required trees to satisfy On-Site Tree Canopy Credit requirements in UR Zones may also be planted on a separate property, such as a religious organization, or public property, such as a park or school, as long as it is within the same Watershed as the project and necessary agreements are in place to ensure the long-term maintenance and protection of the tree(s). To use this option, the project proponent is responsible for identifying the alternative location and securing a qualifying agreement that conforms to City requirements from the owner of the receiving property transferring the responsibility for the required tree(s). Additional inspections and monitoring may be required to ensure the trees become established and provide the required long-term benefits. Off-site Tree Banks shall not be double counted towards the requirements of the property on which they are planted.

3.1.7 Flexibility for Ownership Opportunities and Accessory Dwelling Units (UR Zones)

Flexibility to certain development standards is provided in Urban Residential Zones to encourage developments that create new homeownership opportunities to owner-occupant households earning no more than 150 percent of the Pierce County family median income for at least the first 5-years from certification of occupancy. To ensure compliance, a binding title restriction conforming to City requirements shall be recorded on the property to use this incentive.

For current owner-occupant households earning no more than 150 percent of the Pierce County family median income, flexibility is provided to encourage the development of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). For these instances, incentives would be available for those adding up to two ADUs on their property and adding a binding title restriction that one of the units will be owner-occupied for at least the first 5-years from certification of occupancy.

Included in these incentives is a reduction in on-site Tree Canopy Credit requirements for UR Zones to the minimum “floor” level of 10% without the need for Tree Canopy Credit Fees or Canopy Loss Fees.

3.1.8 Flexible Development Standards When Retaining Trees (UR Zones)

Developments retaining single trees or tree groves are granted flexibility on development standards in the form of increased building height, reduced building setbacks from property lines, and reductions in required parking ratios. See TMC 13.06.0202.F.3 for more information.

3.1.9 Prioritization of Tree Retention and Tree Canopy over Parking

If complying with both tree requirements and on-site vehicular parking requirements would result in it being infeasible to achieve the maximum FAR permitted in the zone, there is flexibility to reduce or waive parking requirements in order to meet Tree Canopy Credit and tree retention requirements, per TMC 13.06.090.B.3.g.(8), and as required by RCW 36.70A. To receive an exemption or reduction from residential off-street vehicle parking requirements, an applicant must demonstrate that without an exemption at least one of the following would be necessary:

- Removal of trees exceeding 6-inches DBH to create space for vehicle driveways, parking, or
- Non-compliant pedestrian access, despite exploring reasonable site layout alternatives;
- Removal of trees in the public right-of-way for driveway construction; or,
- Purchase of off-site tree canopy credits to meet tree canopy requirements.

3.2 Fees

3.2.1 Applicability

Canopy Loss Fees will be assessed when applicable in Urban Residential Zones. In-Lieu Fees will be assessed when 1) Tree Canopy Credit requirements are not met in zones that utilize Tree Canopy Credits or 2) Tree Planting requirements are not met for standards (or in zones) that do not utilize a Tree Canopy Credit system.

3.2.2 Canopy Loss Fee – Urban Residential Zones 1, 2, and 3

A canopy loss fee will be assessed in Urban Residential Zones for removal of trees 6” DBH or larger, unless exempt under TMC 13.06.090.B.3.e.(3)(c). The Canopy Loss Fee will be placed into an account established by the City to support the Urban Forestry Program in planting, maintenance, and replacement of trees on public property or the right-of-way. The City will utilize those fees to plant and maintain trees in the same Watershed as the project that generated those fees.

Canopy Loss Fees for Tree Removal 18” DBH or larger

For trees 18” DBH or larger, the Canopy Loss Fee is determined by a cost-per-inch of DBH removed:

Figure 3-3: Canopy Loss Fees for Removal of Trees 18” DBH or Larger

Inches of Trees Removed	Inches of Trees Planted	Canopy Loss (inches)	\$ per Inch	Canopy Loss Fee
_____	- _____	= _____	x \$130 per inch DBH	= _____

Canopy Loss Fees for Tree Removal 6” to 18” DBH

For trees between 6” and 18” DBH, the Canopy Loss Fee does not apply to trees removed that are above and beyond the site’s applicable Tree Canopy Credit requirement. However, for trees removed below the applicable Tree Canopy Credit requirement, a Canopy Loss Fee shall be assessed and is determined by a cost-per-inch DBH removed minus the total caliper inches of replacement trees planted:

Figure 3-4: Canopy Loss Fee for Removal of Trees 6” to 18” DBH

Inches of Trees Removed below required minimum	Inches of Trees Planted	Canopy Loss (inches)	\$ per Inch	Canopy Loss Fee
_____	- _____	= _____	x \$130 per inch DBH	= _____

Example:

On a 6,000 square foot lot in a UR-1 zone with a 30% Tree Canopy Credit requirement, the required Tree Canopy Credits are 1,800. If the UR-1 development site currently has an equivalent of 2,400 Tree Canopy Credits from existing trees on site, an 8” DBH tree would be eligible for removal without being assessed Canopy Loss Fees, as an existing 8” DBH tree is worth 75 credits per inch (per [Section 2.2.4](#) of this UFM).

[6,000 SF lot] x [30% Tree Canopy Credit requirement for UR-1] = 1,800 required Tree Canopy Credits

[2,400 existing Tree Canopy Credits] – [1,800 required Tree Canopy Credits] = 600 Tree Canopy Credits above requirement

[8” DBH tree] x [75 credits per inch] = 600 credits, and is eligible for removal without Fee

3.2.3 Tree Canopy Credit (In-Lieu) Fee

Tree Canopy Credit Fee In-Lieu of Required “Tree Canopy Credits”

As an alternative to planting or retaining trees on the site to meet applicable Tree Canopy Credit requirements for zones that require tree canopy credits, in-lieu funds may instead be placed into an account established by the City to support the Urban Forestry Program in planting, maintenance, and replacement of trees on public property or the right-of-way. The required amount will be assessed per Tree Canopy Credit as specified, and equal to 1.5 times the cost to purchase and plant the required landscaping and maintain it through establishment.

Tree Canopy Credit Fees can be utilized for all but 10% of a lot’s area in all UR zones. In other words, at least 10% of the lot's area must meet Tree Canopy Credit requirements on site, even if the Tree Canopy Credit Fee is utilized. The City will utilize these fees to plant and maintain trees in the same Watershed as the project that generated the fees.

Figure 3-5: Current Tree Canopy Credit Fee is \$15 per Tree Canopy Credit

Required Tree Canopy Credits per Section 2.2	Provided Tree Canopy Credits (10% min)	Credit Deficit	\$ per Tree Canopy Credit	Tree Canopy Credit Fee
_____	- _____	= _____	x \$15 per Credit	= _____

Example:

6,000 sf lot would still be required to meet Tree Canopy Credits for 10% of its lot area, or 600 credits. This could be met by retaining (1) 8” DBH tree. It could also be met by planting (3) small trees, (2) medium trees, or (1) large tree.

Fee In-Lieu of Required Tree Planting (Non-Tree Canopy Credit Standards)

In limited instances when specific site characteristics do not support the preservation or planting of trees for landscaping standards or in zones with tree requirements that do not use a Tree Canopy Credit system, in-lieu of tree planting funds may instead be paid into the City Urban Forestry Fund.

To utilize these in-lieu fees, applicants must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Director that specific site characteristics make the installation of landscaping on the site problematic to its reasonable use. Landscaping must still be installed to the maximum extent practicable. Landscaping buffer requirements may not be modified through this provision. Funds collected will be used by the City Urban Forestry Program to plant trees on other public or private property within the City. The required amount will be equal to 1.5 times the cost to purchase and plant the required landscaping and maintain it through establishment, or \$3,000 per tree.