

# LANDSCAPING & TREES IN URBAN RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

## TACOMA'S URBAN CANOPY GOALS

The City of Tacoma has set a goal to increase the citywide tree canopy cover from approximately 20 percent (based on a 2018 analysis) to 30 percent by 2030. 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.

## INTRODUCTION

Landscaping and Tree standards facilitate the successful planning, design, installation and maintenance of trees and landscaping required for new development and redevelopment. These standards are intended to support development in UR Districts as well as urban tree canopy. They address on-site and right-of-way landscaping, ensuring that benefits from increased urban tree canopy and overall landscaping are felt by the whole community.

## ZONING REQUIREMENTS

Landscaping and tree standards are regulated by four primary sections in the Tacoma Municipal Code, as well as a standalone Manual:

1. **District Development Standards (TMC 13.06.020.F)** control the tree canopy percentage for each zoning district. Development bonuses and flexibilities are also found in this section.
2. **Site Development Standards (TMC 13.06.090)** include Landscaping & tree standards.
3. **Urban Forestry (TMC 9.20)** regulates tree planting, pruning, and removal on public lands, including the right-of-way and public property
4. **Critical Areas Preservation (TMC 13.11)** sets tree and landscaping requirements within regulated Critical Areas
5. **Urban Forest Manual (UFM)** provides additional guidance on how to meet the landscaping requirements listed in the zoning sections above.

## TREE CREDIT REQUIREMENTS | TMC 13.06.020.F

Planting new trees, retaining existing trees, or some combination, is required for all development to meet minimum "Tree Credits" (or Tree Canopy Credits). These credits quantify the value of a tree's canopy for the purposes of determining how many trees are required on a site. Tree Credit requirements for any given site are calculated as a percentage of the site's total area and vary by zoning district. The minimum, or "floor," for Tree Credits on a site is 10% in all UR zones, regardless of bonuses, flexibilities, or fees applied. See "Calculating Tree Credits" below for more information.

| Tree Credit Requirements         | UR-1                                       | UR-2                                       | UR-3                                       |
|----------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Tree Credits, minimum            | 30 percent                                 | 25 percent                                 | 20 percent                                 |
| Tree Credits, minimum with Bonus | Bonus 1: 25 percent<br>Bonus 2: 20 percent | Bonus 1: 20 percent<br>Bonus 2: 15 percent | Bonus 1: 15 percent<br>Bonus 2: 10 percent |



**NOTE: This Tip Sheet does not substitute for codes and regulations.**

**The applicant is responsible for compliance with all codes and regulations, whether or not described in this document.**

**More information: City of Tacoma, Planning and Development Services | [www.tacomapermits.org](http://www.tacomapermits.org) | 253-591-5030**

To request this information in an alternative format or a reasonable accommodation, please call 253-591-5030 (voice). TTY or STS users please dial 711 to connect to Washington Relay Services.

# LANDSCAPING & TREES IN URBAN RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

A **Tree Credit Fee** may be utilized in-lieu of planting or retaining trees to meet applicable Tree Credit requirements, for all but 10% of a lot's area ("floor"). The fee amount will be assessed per Tree Credit and equals 1.5 times the cost to purchase, plant and maintain the required landscaping. Fee amounts are published in the Urban Forest Manual and support the City's Urban Forestry Program.

Tree Credit requirements can be reduced for sites utilizing **development bonuses for providing affordable housing or retaining an existing building** (TMC 13.06.020.F.2). They can also be reduced to a 10% "floor" for developments creating new homeownership opportunities or building owner-occupied Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)—both for households earning no more than 150 percent of the Pierce County family median. (TMC 13.06.020.F.4&5)

## TREE RETENTION | TMC 13.06.090.B.3.e.(3)

Trees retained through development must be protected according to the standards in the Urban Forest Manual. If properly protected, retained trees offer more immediate benefits to the urban forest than newly transplanted trees. Therefore, tree retention is a priority and all trees over 6" DBH are regulated in UR Districts. Trees 6-24" DBH may be removed but are subject to a Canopy Loss Fee. Trees over 24" DBH may not be removed *unless* they significantly limit reasonable development of a site, in which case a **Canopy Loss Fee** is assessed per inch DBH lost, according to the rate listed in the UFM.

| Retained Tree Size  | Retention Requirement   |
|---------------------|---|
| Trees ≥ 24" DBH     | May <u>not</u> be removed unless significantly limits reasonable development; subject to Canopy Loss Fee regardless of compliance with on-site Tree Credits |
| Trees 18" - 24" DBH | May be removed; subject to Canopy Loss Fee regardless of compliance with on-site Tree Credits   |
| Trees 6" - 18" DBH  | May be removed; any removal that brings on-site Tree Credits below required amount is subject to Canopy Loss Fee  |
| Trees < 6" DBH      | Not regulated   |

## DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS FLEXIBILITY FOR TREE RETENTION | TMC 13.06.020.F.3

More flexible and generous development standards are available in exchange for providing the public benefit of retaining trees and tree groves. Relaxed setbacks, increased building height, and reduced parking ratios are offered for retaining trees over 12" DBH.

| Flexible Development Standard      | UR-1   | UR-2 | UR-3  |
|------------------------------------|--|------|---|
| Height Flexibility                 | 35 feet tall maximum in rear yard  |      | 45 feet maximum   |
| Front and Rear Setback Flexibility | 10 feet minimum for retention of at least 1 tree<br>5 feet minimum for retention of a tree grove   |      | 7.5 feet for retention of at least 1 tree<br>5 feet minimum for retention of a tree grove |
| Side Setback Flexibility           | 5 feet minimum, provided that permanent obstructions do not reduce usable width below 4 feet   |      |   |
| Parking Ratio Flexibility          | Waived or reduced off-street parking requirement if maximum FAR cannot be attained while also meeting required Tree Credits and tree retention requirements. 13.06.090.B.3.g.(8) |      |   |



**NOTE: This Tip Sheet does not substitute for codes and regulations.**

**The applicant is responsible for compliance with all codes and regulations, whether or not described in this document.**

**More information: City of Tacoma, Planning and Development Services | [www.tacomapermits.org](http://www.tacomapermits.org) | 253-591-5030**

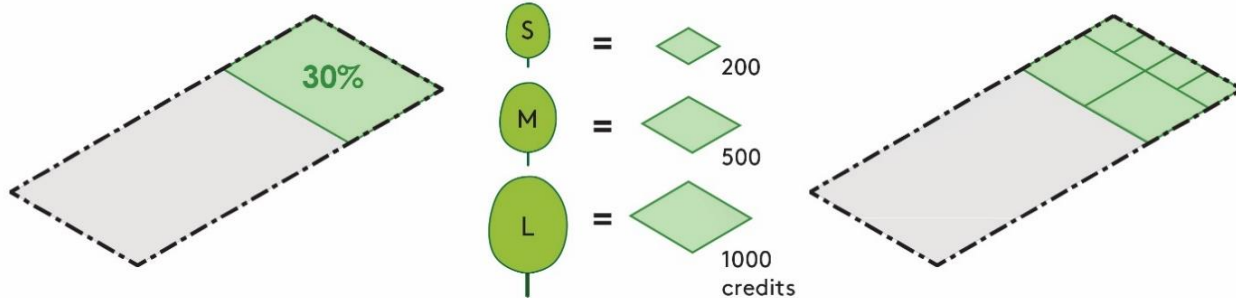
To request this information in an alternative format or a reasonable accommodation, please call 253-591-5030 (voice). TTY or STS users please dial 711 to connect to Washington Relay Services.

# LANDSCAPING & TREES IN URBAN RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

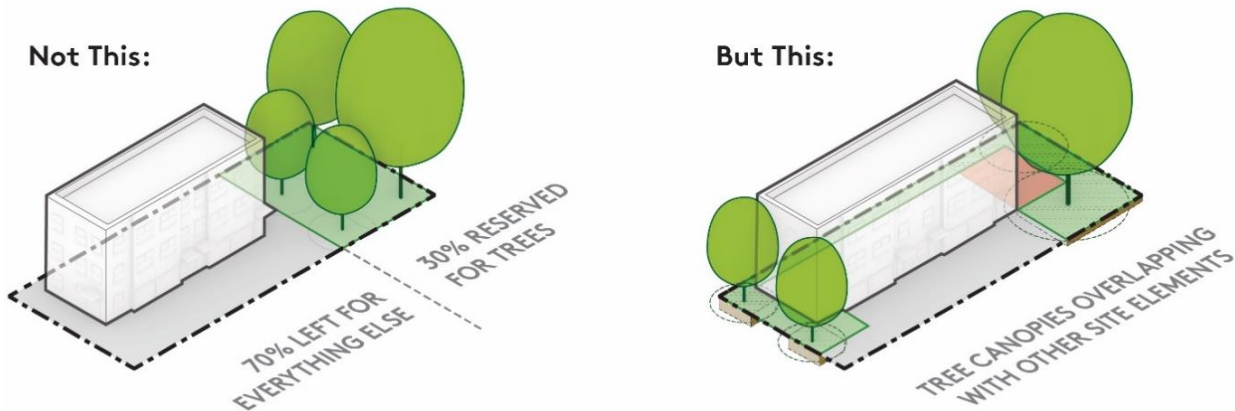
## CALCULATING TREE CREDITS | TMC 13.06.090.B.3.e.(2)

District Standards define the percentage of lot area that is used to determine how many trees or "tree credits" are required on a site.

Both existing trees and new small, medium, and large trees are each worth a certain amount of credit toward this target area.



Together, these tree credit requirements work toward a Citywide tree canopy goal of 30%. However, 30% tree canopy coverage does not mean 30% of a lot is reserved for trees.



For new trees, credits are allocated based on the estimated "small", "medium" or "large" size of the species at maturity. To determine a tree's size category, refer to the Tree Lists located in the Urban Forest Manual.

| Credits for New Trees                    | Small Trees | Medium Trees | Large Trees  |
|--|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Tree Canopy Credits for New Trees</b> | 200 credits | 500 credits  | 1000 credits |

For existing trees, credits are determined using the current diameter of the tree's trunk, measured at four and a half feet above ground level, also known as "diameter at breast height" (DBH). Tree Credits for existing trees are contingent on tree health and require a Certified Arborist's Report confirming the tree(s) is healthy and can be saved through construction activities.

| Credits for Retained Trees                                   | Trees < 6" DBH | Trees 6" ≤ 12" DBH | Trees 12" ≤ 24" DBH | Trees > 24" DBH |
|--|----------------|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Tree Canopy Credits for Retained Trees (per inch DBH)</b> | 50 credits     | 75 credits         | 100 credits         | 125 credits     |



**NOTE: This Tip Sheet does not substitute for codes and regulations.**

**The applicant is responsible for compliance with all codes and regulations, whether or not described in this document.**

**More information: City of Tacoma, Planning and Development Services | [www.tacomapermits.org](http://www.tacomapermits.org) | 253-591-5030**

To request this information in an alternative format or a reasonable accommodation, please call 253-591-5030 (voice). TTY or STS users please dial 711 to connect to Washington Relay Services.

# LANDSCAPING & TREES IN URBAN RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

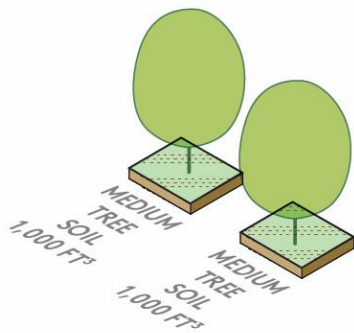
## STREET TREES | TMC 13.06.090.B.4.f.(3)

Street trees are calculated using a site's total linear street frontage. For every 100 linear feet of frontage, either four small trees, three medium trees, or two large trees are required. (In other words, one small tree accounts for 25 linear feet, one medium tree accounts for 33.3 linear feet, and one large tree accounts for 50 linear feet.) Small, medium and large trees can be used in any combination, as long as the entirety of the site's street frontage is accounted for.

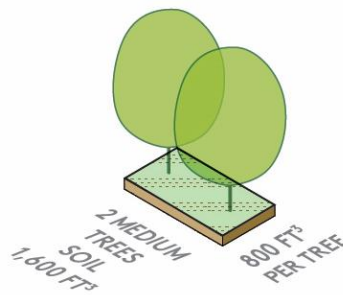
Street trees planted in excess of the required amount may count toward Tree Credits required on site. Refer to the UFM for eligibility.

## SOIL DEPTH & UNPAVED PLANTING AREAS | TMC 13.06.090.B.3.f

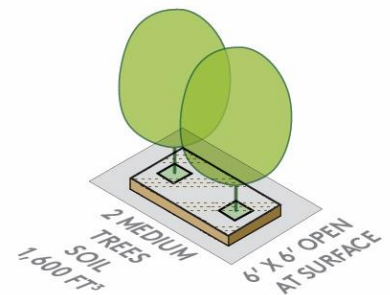
A minimum 3 foot depth of amended existing native soil or new topsoil must be provided for all newly transplanted trees, except when the tree is planted within the drip line of existing mature trees. In the case of street trees, the finished soil level including mulch (finished grade) shall be flush with the adjacent pavement surface or curb. Suspended pavement systems are encouraged to provide soil for trees in the same place as driveways, parking and paths.



Each tree needs a minimum amount of soil to survive into maturity.



But shared soil volumes allow a lower volume to be used per tree.



And with suspended pavement systems, paving can extend over soil, provided the minimum opening is maintained at the surface.

Minimum tree trunk setbacks, surface planting diameter, soil volumes, and spacing requirements shall be provided for healthy tree growth, as follows:

| Per Tree Minimum  | Small Trees | Medium Trees | Large Trees |
|---|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Unpaved planting area, assuming 3 ft soil depth:          | 167 sq ft   | 334 sq ft    | 400 sq ft   |
| Soil Volume <sup>1</sup>                                  | 500 cu ft   | 1,000 cu ft  | 1,200 cu ft |
| Soil volume per tree, if soil is shared by multiple trees | 500 cu ft   | 800 cu ft    | 1,000 cu ft |
| Unpaved Surface Planting Diameter <sup>2</sup>            | 5 ft        | 6 ft         | 7 ft        |

<sup>1</sup> Minimum soil volume shall be achieved with soil depths of 3 feet where possible, but in no case less than 24 inches. Soil depth provided to meet this cubic foot minimum can increase to 4 feet depths only where a soil depth of 3 feet would not allow Tree Canopy Credits to be met on-site.

<sup>2</sup> This is the minimum unpaved dimension of planting area in any direction, often referred to as a "tree pit opening". Provided that suspended pavement systems are used to meet required soil volume underground, this diameter can be reduced to 4 feet if compliance with ADA accessible sidewalk width standards is otherwise infeasible.



**NOTE: This Tip Sheet does not substitute for codes and regulations.**

**The applicant is responsible for compliance with all codes and regulations, whether or not described in this document.**

More information: [City of Tacoma, Planning and Development Services | www.tacomapermits.org](http://www.tacomapermits.org) | 253-591-5030

To request this information in an alternative format or a reasonable accommodation, please call 253-591-5030 (voice). TTY or STS users please dial 711 to connect to Washington Relay Services.

# LANDSCAPING & TREES IN URBAN RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

## TREE SELECTION AND SPECIES DIVERSITY | TMC 13.06.090.B.3.e

Diversification of plant species lessens the impact and likelihood of disease and pest infestation, and provides diverse habitat to better meet the needs of wildlife within a healthy urban forest. To ensure tree species diversity, different genera and mixtures of tree types (evergreen and deciduous) are required based on the total number of trees required. See the UFM for more information.

## OVERALL SITE LANDSCAPING | TMC 13.06.090.B.4.d

Overall site landscaping is intended to ensure that a minimum amount of landscaping is provided on a given site to enhance livability, improve community health, provide habitat, and help to soften the impacts of development. Overall site landscaping can be provided anywhere on the site and may be satisfied by landscaping provided to meet other requirements.

In UR Districts, **landscaping is required for 5% of the site** that is not covered with structures. Neither Site Perimeter Landscaping nor Landscaping Buffers are required in UR Districts.

## PARKING LOT LANDSCAPING | TMC 13.06.090.B.4.g.(3)

Parking Lot Landscaping standards apply to all parking lots, including Tree Minimums, Interior Planting (for lots with more than 16 stalls), and Tree Distribution. Perimeter Landscaping is required only between parking lots and streets.

## CLIMATE ADAPTED AND NATIVE PLANT SELECTION | TMC 13.06.090.B.3.d

All plants required to meet landscaping standards must be climate-adapted. Fifty percent of all plants, aside from trees, must be native to western Washington and/or western Oregon. Invasive species, as identified in the UFM, shall not count toward required plantings.

## LANDSCAPE PLANS AND LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PLANS | TMC 13.06.090.B.3.c

**Landscape Plans** are scaled plan drawings that show existing trees, tree protection, proposed plant locations and schedules, irrigation, and other existing and proposed site conditions to demonstrate compliance with landscaping standards and planting requirements. **Landscape Management Plans** list the entity responsible for maintenance within the 3-year establishment period, and provide a schedule of maintenance activities.

When required, both plans must be prepared by a Registered Landscape Architect, Certified Landscape Technician, Certified Arborist, or Certified Professional Horticulturalist. Developments with less than 500 square feet of required landscaped area may submit a Landscape Plan prepared by someone other than these listed professionals, and are not required to submit a Landscape Management Plan.

## PERMITTING

Reference the Urban Forest Manual for additional information on landscaping requirements and standards, as well as for resources to support permit applications, including calculation worksheets and a plan submittal checklist.



**NOTE: This Tip Sheet does not substitute for codes and regulations.**

**The applicant is responsible for compliance with all codes and regulations, whether or not described in this document.**

**More information: City of Tacoma, Planning and Development Services | [www.tacomapermits.org](http://www.tacomapermits.org) | 253-591-5030**

To request this information in an alternative format or a reasonable accommodation, please call 253-591-5030 (voice). TTY or STS users please dial 711 to connect to Washington Relay Services.