

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT TREE RETENTION AND REMOVAL

The City of Burien recognizes the significant role that the natural environment plays in creating a healthy and attractive community. Trees, landscaping, and open space all contribute to a positive community image. Five sections of the Burien Municipal Code (BMC) apply to tree and vegetation retention and removal. Chapter 12.38 regulates street trees and trees on city property. Chapter 19.25 contains requirements for landscaping on private property. Chapter 19.26 contains requirements for tree retention on private property. Chapter 19.40 applies to all properties containing a “critical area” (landslide hazard area, seismic hazard area, erosion hazard area, stream, or wetland). Section 20.30.040 applies to vegetation in the shoreline management area. The following are frequently asked questions about tree retention in Burien.

### General Questions

Q. WHAT IS A TREE?

A. A woody plant, that has one or several dominant trunks, each with a diameter at standard height of three (3) inches or greater, that reaches a mature height greater than fifteen (15) feet (BMC 19.10.545(1)).

Q. WHAT IS A SIGNIFICANT TREE?

A. An existing tree which is six (6) inches diameter at standard height or greater and is not an exceptional tree. Hedges consisting of Leyland cypress (*Cuprocyparis leylandii*), arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis*), laurel (*Prunus lusitanica* and *Prunus laurocerasus*), or holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) are not considered to be significant trees and may be trimmed or removed. Any tree on the prohibited plants and trees list (BMC 19.10.408) is not considered a significant tree (BMC 19.10.545.1(5)).

Q. WHAT IS AN EXCEPTIONAL TREE?

A. An exceptional tree is one that is any tree thirty (30) inches diameter at standard height or greater, any tree identified in Table 19.26.040-1, or a tree designated as a Heritage Tree (BMC 19.10.545.1(1)).

Q. HOW DO I FIND AN ARBORIST?

A. A list of consulting arborists can be found on the Pacific Northwest Chapter [www.pnwisa.org](http://www.pnwisa.org), International Society of Arboriculture website at <https://www.treesaregood.org/findanarborist> Or from the [American Society of Consulting Arborists](#)

Q. HOW DO I SELECT SUITABLE PLANTS?

A. A Qualified Professional such as a landscape architect or consulting arborist can assist you. Additional resources are available from [King County](#) and [Great Plant Picks](#).

## Tree Retention in Non-Critical Areas

Q. DO I NEED A PERMIT TO REMOVE A TREE IN A NON-CRITICAL AREA?

A. For removal of trees on private property, not associated with development a permit is required for:

- Tree removal exceeding the allowed limit of significant tree removal per year(s), see table 19.26.060-1;
- Any exceptional tree removal; or
- Removal of trees that would result in a lot going below the required minimum tree credits.

A Permit is **NOT** required for:

- Removal of trees below 6 inches diameter at standard height; or
- Removal of significant trees within the annual allowance (see table 19.26.060-1), provided the lot does not go below the required minimum tree credits.

For undeveloped/vacant lots, tree removal is not permitted until time of development. When developing your lot, you will need to submit a major tree permit to the Department of Community Development for review.

For removal and pruning of ANY trees in the right-of-way, a right-of-way permit is required (BMC 12.38).

Q: HOW MANY SIGNIFICANT AND EXCEPTIONAL TREES DO I NEED TO SAVE WHEN DEVELOPING MY PROPERTY?

A: The number of significant and exceptional trees required to be retained depends on the type of development, lot size, and the zoning of the property (BMC 19.26).

Q. WHAT IS A TREE RETENTION PLAN?

A. A tree retention plan (BMC 19.26.080) includes a tree map that identifies the location, size (diameter at standard height), and species of all significant and exceptional trees on a site. It also includes a report prepared by a Qualified Tree Professional documenting the current health and structural condition of all significant and exceptional trees on and overhanging the site, including a description of tree protection measures found in BMC 19.26.090.

Q. WHAT IS A TREE REPLACEMENT PLAN?

A. A tree replacement plan (BMC 19.26.100) shows the size, location, and species of trees to be planted. These must meet standards in 19.26.100 and demonstrate how the project meets the minimum tree credits.

Q. HOW DO I SHOW THE LOCATION OF TREES ON MY PLANS?

A. The location and species of each significant and/or exceptional tree: With an engineered professional survey location when a survey is required; or with an accuracy of five (5) feet or less – or measurements from the property line and to the proposed disturbance – when a survey is not required for the application. The diameter at standard height (DSH), or 4.5 feet above grade shall be shown, as well as tree species.

Q. HOW DO I PROTECT TREES DURING CONSTRUCTION?

A. A temporary but immovable six-foot high chain-link fence must be installed around the critical root zone of all significant trees to be saved. Due to potential damage to the tree, no construction, fill, excavation, or storage of construction materials is allowed inside of the dripline. (BMC 19.26.090)

## Tree Retention in Shoreline Management Areas, Critical Areas, and their Buffers

- Q. DO I NEED A PERMIT TO REMOVE OR PRUNE A TREE IN A SHORELINE MANAGEMENT AREA, CRITICAL AREA OR ITS BUFFER?
- A. Yes. If your property is within 200 feet of a shoreline, or contains a “critical area” (such as steep slopes, streams, or wetlands), permits are required to remove or prune a tree in a shoreline area, critical area or its buffer. (Right-of-way permits are required to remove or prune any tree located in the right-of-way.) To remove a tree, you will need to submit a vegetation management plan and permit application to the Department of Community Development for review. We require contracting with a certified arborist or experienced tree service when pruning trees to ensure the tree’s long-term health.
- A. A separate pruning permit can be found online. If you are proposing to remove more than 25% of the live foliage a vegetation management plan is required.
- Q. WHAT IS A VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PLAN?
- A. A vegetation management plan addresses no net loss in BMC 20.30.040 for Shoreline Management Areas. Or it addresses vegetation mitigation and restoration outlined in 19.40.180 for Critical Areas and their buffers. It identifies the proposed clearing limits for the project and any areas where vegetation in a critical area or its buffer is proposed to be disturbed. The plan should describe the methods of any work to be completed. The plan should also address any alternative methods of attaining your goal and explain how the proposed activity will not be detrimental to surrounding properties and to the functions and values of the associated critical area. The plan must also show the vegetation proposed to restore the area and mitigate the removal.
- Q. DO I NEED A PERMIT TO ALTER THE VEGETATION IN A SHORELINE, CRITICAL AREA OR ITS BUFFER (e.g., REMOVE GROUND COVER, PRUNE OR REMOVE TREES OR SHRUBS)?
- A. Generally, yes. Significant alterations that may affect the shoreline or critical area require permits. Please contact a planner at [planning@burienwa.gov](mailto:planning@burienwa.gov) for additional questions.
- Q. CAN I REMOVE DEAD, DISEASED OR DANGEROUS TREES?
- A. Yes, although a permit and vegetation management plan are required to remove a dead, diseased, or dangerous tree(s). The City requires a report from a Qualified Professional attesting to the health of the tree. Dead trees provide valuable wildlife habitat, soil stabilization, and build soils as they decay. Provided that the tree is not a risk to property or people it can be beneficial to retain these in Shorelines and Critical Areas.