

Trees4Livability
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BELLEVUE CITY COUNCIL APPROVES TREE CODES – FIRST MAJOR UPDATE IN 40 YEARS

[Bellevue, WA, July 2024] The Bellevue City Council voted unanimously at their July 9th meeting to approve Bellevue’s new tree codes. The codes represent the first major update in over 40 years. These changes come after two years of lobbying by citizens and community groups across the city. The codes go into effect in phases from mid-July through August.

“The passage of these codes represents a huge victory for the City of Bellevue,” says Khaiersta English, Founder of Trees4Livability, a community group that has been working to improve tree codes since 2022. We are pleased with the work of city staff and the City Council to complete this monumental effort. We hope to see ongoing protection and growth of our tree canopy over time.”

Bellevue’s new tree codes significantly improve the city’s land use code, which includes the rules governing construction projects, and the Bellevue City Code, which covers enforcement and non-development tree removals. The codes employ minimum tree density rules, a tree credit system, fines, and incentives to retain trees.

Bellevue City Council initiated the project in November 2022 after a year of lobbying led by Trees4Livability and ten other civic, environmental, and advocacy organizations.

The Planning Commission took up the cause and, under the direction of Kristina Gallant, Acting Assistant Director of the Development Services Department, undertook nearly two years of careful research and draft updates to the tree codes. The city hired a third-party research firm to conduct study sessions with stakeholders, including architects, builders, city leaders, civic and environmental interest groups, and leaders of other municipalities. The Planning Commission also referenced the [Trees4Livability Tree Code Study](#), which compared Bellevue’s tree codes with other regional cities and recommended updates. Many of the themes that ended up in Bellevue’s new tree codes are present in the Tree Code Study, including requiring a permit for

every significant or landmark tree removal, minimum tree density requirements, maintaining a history of protections and removals, defining significant trees as 6” in diameter, defining the need for replacement trees and improving public reporting.

After the tree codes go into effect, the public will have time to observe how things go and revisit regulations as needed in Spring 2025. It is important to remain vigilant as these new laws go into effect to ensure that things operate as they should. Trees4Livability and other community organizations will continue to work with the city to educate the public about the codes, improve understanding of how to monitor and manage trees, and provide resources to improve outcomes.

“Thank you to city staff who took direction from community leaders, city council members, and community groups across the city to spearhead this effort,” said Mayor Lynne Robinson. “We are pleased with the results.”

For information on the history of the tree code project, visit <https://bellevuewa.gov/tree-code-update>. Keep an eye out for updates from the City of Bellevue this summer as new tree codes go into effect.

In 2022, volunteers created the Bellevue Tree Code Study with findings from other cities in the region and recommendations to strengthen the current tree code. Trees4Livability collected petition signatures in support of the recommendations in the Tree Code Study. Over the course of 18 months, the group collected over 1700 signatures, presented to the City Council every month, took reports about tree removals, and collaborated with staff from Development Services and the Planning Commission to move the project forward.

Trees4Livability comprises a group of concerned citizens from many backgrounds and neighborhoods across the city. Their volunteer Tree Code Working Group, which was headed by Khaiersta English and Ruth Lipscomb, collaborated to produce a research study comparing regional city tree codes and offering detailed recommendations. The report was endorsed by more than ten civic, environmental, and advocacy organizations, including 300 Trees, People for Climate Action, SOS Bellevue, Bellevue Green & Clean, Brentwood Lane Property Owners Association, East Shore Unitarian Church, 350 Eastside, TreePAC, Cascadia Climate Action and Save Coal Creek. The Trees4Livability Board includes Khaiersta English, Lee Sargent, Ruth Lipscomb, Jane Gershovich, Don Marsh, and Melinda Carbon. For more information visit www.trees4livability.org.