

CITY OF PALO ALTO

About the Tree Ordinance

Tree Preservation and Management Regulations

The Tree Preservation Ordinance is the City's primary regulatory tool to provide for orderly protection of specified trees, to protect property values and to avoid significant negative impacts on adjacent properties. The Tree Preservation Ordinance outlines:

- Coast Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) and Valley Oak (*Quercus lobata*) 11.5" diameter (36" circumference) or more when measured 54 inches above natural grade to definitions of protected tree.
- Coast Redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*) 18" diameter (57" circumference) or more when measured 54 inches above natural grade to definitions of protected tree.
- Heritage Trees are individual trees on private property designated by the City Council with the consent of the property owner.

The ordinance requires certain information about existing trees to be submitted with applications for building and other permits:

- Site plans must show the trunk diameter and accurate dripline of oaks and redwoods.
- If there is disturbance within a protected tree dripline, an arborist's assessment and protection measures must be provided with the application.

Removal of the trees in the "protected trees" category would be prohibited unless one of the following circumstances exist:

- The tree is dead, hazardous, is a detriment to or crowding an adjacent protected tree, or constitutes a public nuisance under Section 8.04.050 (2).
- The tree trunk or basal flare is touching or within the existing building footprint or permitted building area if no structure exists (without variances) for single family home construction or expansion.

For projects other than single family residences, retention of the tree would reduce the otherwise allowed building area by more than 25%.

The City requires written permission to protected tree removal. Applications may be obtained at the Development Center, 285 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto, 94301, (650) 617-3118 and will be responded to in about 10 working days unless an emergency.

Replacement of removed protected trees is required in most development circumstances.

Owners of protected trees are required to follow certain standards for maintenance and protection during construction activity:

- Pruning of more than 25% of the crown within one calendar year or unbalancing the tree is prohibited.

Under certain development circumstances, a single family homeowner may be allowed to deviate from setback or other development standards if necessary to protect a tree.

Development and Trees

Tree Preservation and Management Regulations

The Tree Preservation Ordinance is the City's primary regulatory tool to provide for orderly protection of specified trees, to protect property values and to avoid significant negative impacts on adjacent properties.

The Regulated Trees of Palo Alto refer to all those trees or groups of trees included in the following three (3) categories: 1) Protected Trees; 2) Street Trees; and 3) Designated Trees. There are city regulations regarding maintaining the health of or removal of these trees required by Palo Alto Municipal Code, Title 8, Trees and Vegetation.

1. Protected Trees are identified as:

- **Category 1 - Protected Trees Tree Program_Protected Trees**
All Coast Live Oak, *Quercus agrifolia*, Valley Oak, *Quercus lobata* trees that are 11.5-inches or greater in diameter (36-inches in circumference measured at 54-inches above natural grade) and Coast Redwood, *Sequoia sempervirens* trees that are 18-inches or greater in diameter (57-inches in circumference measured at 54-inches above natural grade) and Heritage Trees, individual trees of any size or species designated as such by City Council. Property owners may nominate a tree that has distinctive characteristics such as being of great age or size, unique form or other historical significance. A list of designated heritage trees is kept at the Planning Division offices or can be accessed at: Tree Program_Heritage Trees.
- **Category 2 - Street Trees**
All trees growing within the street right-of-way (publicly-owned), outside of private property. In some cases, property lines lie several feet behind the sidewalks (see Image 2.20-3). A permit from the Public Works Department is required prior to any work on or within the dripline of any 'street tree'. See City-owned trees reference at Tree Program_City-Owned Trees.
- **Category 3 - Designated Trees**
All trees, when associated with a development project, that are specifically designated by the City to be saved and protected on a public or private property which is subject to a discretionary development review (such as a variance, home improvement exception, architectural review, site and design, subdivision, etc.). Tree removal is considered a minor change to the existing site plan -- and requires review approval from the Planning Division. For example, a tree planted or growing in a commercial zone landscape or parking lot tree. See Zoning Code reference: PAMC 18.83.100, Design Standards-Required Landscape Areas Landscaping & Shade Trees

Land Development Applications

Requires certain information about existing trees be provided for building and other permits:

- Site plans must show the trunk diameter and accurate dripline of oaks, redwoods and street trees.
- If there is disturbance within a protected tree dripline, an arborist's assessment and protection measures are required to process the application.

- Under certain development circumstances, a single family homeowner may be allowed to deviate from setback or other development standards if necessary to protect a tree
- Removal of the trees in the "protected tree" category would be prohibited unless one of the following circumstances exist:
 - The tree is dead, hazardous, is a detriment to or crowding an adjacent protected tree, or constitutes a public nuisance under Section 8.04.050 (2).
 - The tree trunk or basal flare is touching or within the existing building footprint or permitted building area if no structure exists (without variances) for single family home construction or expansion.
 - For projects other than single family residences, if retention of the tree would reduce the otherwise allowed building area by more than 25%.
- A 3-step process applies to obtain a Protected Tree Removal Permit. The request will be responded to in about 10 working days unless an emergency. Please refer to the Tree Technical Manual, Section 3.00 for more specific information.
- Replacement of removed protected trees is required in most development circumstances
- Removal of Designated Trees also requires City review such as on commercial properties

Maintenance Standards

Owners of protected trees are required to follow certain standards for maintenance and protection during construction activity

Pruning of more than 25% of the crown within one calendar year or unbalancing the tree is prohibited