

ORDINANCE NO. 175, 2025
OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF FORT COLLINS
AMENDING ARTICLE 5, SECTION 10 OF THE LAND USE CODE OF THE CITY OF
FORT COLLINS AMENDING TREE PLANTING SPACING REQUIREMENTS AND
TREE MAINTENANCE

A. The Council adopted Rooted in Community, the Fort Collins Urban Forest Strategic Plan (“Plan”), in March of 2025. This Plan identifies seven future growth strategies to support and maximize the community benefits that arise from fostering a healthy, urban tree canopy. The Plan also addresses the current state of the urban forest, emphasizes why trees are an important component of our community’s infrastructure, and identifies key opportunities to continue improving the urban tree canopy.

B. Across the City, tree canopy has grown in most land use types over a 10-year period. The areas where canopy is growing include residential areas, mixed-use areas, open spaces, and industrial areas. However, canopy loss has occurred in commercial and “institutional” areas, which is the CSU campus. Commercial area losses often correspond to increased development intensity, including housing unit density, new and infill redevelopment where trees may have existed due to previous development and required tree planting at that time, as well as tree mortality related to tree health or other cumulative urban stressors.

C. Many of these commercial areas along College Avenue and adjacent arterial streets are also where some of the highest canopy density is within the community. Therefore, canopy loss through higher-intensity redevelopment can be a consequence or trade-off for higher density development along major transit corridors. Trees remain an important part of city infrastructure and green spaces in higher density development, too. As a result, the planting of new trees is crucial to the overall health and wellbeing of the City.

D. Established trees should also be a priority because these trees represent decades of investment of time, money and water and are impossible to immediately replace. A tree at 30 inches in diameter stores over 90 times more carbon, intercepts 10 times more air pollution and has 100 times more leaf area than a 6-inch diameter tree of the same species, among other great benefits such as positively supporting human physical and mental health, stormwater interception, mitigating urban heat, and crime reduction. Microhabitats and niche diversity increase with tree size allowing for greater urban biodiversity. One mature tree can harbor upward of 300 other species of organisms (insects, birds, fungi, etc.).

E. For these reasons, this Ordinance both encourages the growth of new trees and protects established trees by amending Division 5.10 of the City’s Land Use Code regarding tree planting spacing requirements and works to clean up the Code.

F. During a Work Session on August 26, 2025, Council provided input regarding this proposed update to the City’s Land Use Code. On October 16, 2025, City

staff sought a recommendation from the Planning & Zoning Commission to update the Land Use Code for the purpose of requiring a commercial tree removal permit.

G. The City Council has determined that it is in the best interest of the health, safety and welfare of the City and its residents that Article 5, Section 10 of the Land Use Code be updated, as set forth in this Ordinance.

In light of the foregoing recitals, which the Council hereby makes and adopts as determinations and findings, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF FORT COLLINS as follows:

Section 1. Section 5.10.1(D) of the Land Use Code is hereby amended to read as follows:

5.10.1 LANDSCAPING AND TREE PROTECTION

...

- (D) Landscape Planning and Design. Any landscape plan required must meet at least the standards in this Subsection.

...

- (b) Minimum Tree Stocking Requirements. All developments must establish groupings of trees along all city streets, in and around parking lots, and in landscape areas shown in the landscape plan. These stocking requirements outline the required minimum tree canopy and are in addition to requirements for preserving existing trees, parking lot landscape requirements and required tree mitigation. These stocking requirements are not intended to limit additional tree plantings in any remaining portions of the development. Required tree stocking comprises:

...

- (V) Full tree stocking under this Subsection (D)(1)(b) shall mean formal or informal groupings of trees planted according to the following spacing dimensions depending on species and desired degree of shading of the ground plane:

Table 5.10.1-(1) – Spacing

Tree Type	Minimum/Maximum Spacing
Canopy shade trees	30'—40' spacing
Coniferous evergreens	20'—40' spacing
Ornamental trees	20'—40' Maximum 30' spacing

...

(VIII) Canopy shade trees must constitute at least fifty percent (50%) of all tree plantings. Trees required in Subsections (D)(1)(b)(I) or (II) above, may be used to contribute to this standard. If additional trees beyond the minimum tree stocking and mitigation requirements under this Section are planted, the additional trees must meet the minimum species diversity requirement but are not subject to the fifty percent (50%) canopy shade requirement.

- (c) Minimum Tree Species Diversity. The City Forester shall provide a recommended list of trees that are acceptable to satisfy the requirements for landscape plans, including approved canopy shade trees that may be used as street trees. To prevent uniform insect or disease susceptibility and eventual uniform senescence within a landscape planned area or in the adjacent area or the district, species diversity is required, and extensive monocultures are prohibited. No more than three (3) consecutive trees of the same cultivar or variety may be planted in a row, including corners and groupings. The following minimum requirements apply to any landscape plan.

...

- (d) Tree Species and Minimum Sizes. The City Forester shall provide a recommended list of trees that are acceptable to satisfy the requirements for landscape plans, including approved canopy shade trees that may be used as street trees.

...

- (II) Reduced Minimum Sizes for Affordable Housing Projects. In any affordable housing project, the following minimum sizes shall be required:

Table 5.10.1-(4) – *Affordable Housing Minimum Tree Size Table*

Type	Minimum Size
Canopy Shade Tree	1.0" caliper container or equivalent
Evergreen Tree	4.0' height container or equivalent
Ornamental Tree	1.0" caliper container or equivalent
Shrubs	1 gallon
Canopy Shade Tree as a street tree on a Local or Collector street only	1.25" caliper container or equivalent

...

Section 2. Section 5.10.1(E) of the Land Use Code is hereby amended to read as follows:

(E) Landscape Materials, Maintenance and Replacement.

...

- (4) Maintenance. Trees and vegetation, irrigation systems, fences, walls and other landscape elements shall be considered as elements and infrastructure of the development in the same manner as parking, building materials and other site details. The applicant, landowner or successors in interest shall be jointly and severally responsible for the regular maintenance of all landscaping elements in good condition. Required maintenance includes, but is not limited to, the following:

...

- (d) Preserve and protect trees and the critical root zone (CRZ) designated for preservation. Preserving and protection includes but is not limited to avoiding damage to the tree and CRZ. Damaging actions include but are not limited to ~~backing into a tree~~ **damaging the bark**, excavating or trenching in the CRZ, storing heavy equipment on the CRZ, and over pruning.

...

- (6) Mitigation. Healthy, mature trees that are removed by the applicant or by anyone acting on behalf of or with the approval of the applicant shall be replaced per Subsection (F) to mitigate the loss of value of

~~existing canopy. The applicant shall select either the City Forester or a qualified landscape appraiser to determine such loss based upon a fair market value appraisal of the removed tree, using the resources listed in Subsection (F) of this Section.~~

Introduced, considered favorably on first reading on October 21, 2025, and approved on second reading for final passage on November 3, 2025.

Mayor

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Effective Date: November 13, 2025
Approving Attorney: Stefanie Boster

Exhibit: None