

Gov. Greg Abbott signs bill restricting city tree removal policies

Just two months after vetoing a bill aimed at restricting city rules on tree removal, Gov. Greg Abbott on Wednesday signed a similar measure into law passed during a summer special session.

BY **EMMA PLATOFF** AUG. 16, 2017 6 PM CENTRAL

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Just two months after [vetoing a tree removal regulation bill](#), Gov. [Greg Abbott](#) on Wednesday signed a very similar measure into law.

[House Bill 7](#) allows property owners to offset municipal fees for removing trees on their land by planting new trees in their place, and the measure is near-identical to [Senate Bill 744](#), which Abbott vetoed earlier this summer. Both bills were shepherded through the legislature by state Sen. [Lois Kolkhorst](#), R-Brenham, in the upper chamber and state Rep. [Dade Phelan](#), R-Beaumont, in the House.

When he vetoed SB 744 in June, Abbott said it did not go far enough in combatting local tree rules.

"Senate Bill 744 appears to be a compromise bill that imposes a very minor restriction on some municipal tree ordinances," the governor [said in his veto statement](#). "I believe we can do better for private property owners in the upcoming special session."

HB 7, like the version of the bill that landed on the governor's desk in May, allows individuals who remove trees on their property in cities that regulate tree removal to apply for a tree planting credit to offset the tree mitigation fee.

But HB 7, unlike SB 744, says municipalities can't charge homeowners fees for removing trees that are under 10 inches in diameter. It also [more specifically stipulates](#) who can offset fees, and by how much: homeowners can entirely eliminate fees by planting new trees, while residential developers can offset 50 percent of fees and owners of commercial properties can offset them by at least 40 percent.

Abbott — who himself [ran into tree trouble](#) several years ago when the city of Austin asked him to replant trees on his property — has railed against city tree

ordinances as a "socialistic" evidence of local government overreach. Regulation of tree removal was one on a slate of local control issues Abbott put on the agenda for the special session that ended on Tuesday.

The tree bill proved controversial during the special session, though it passed the House by wide margins each time it came up for a vote. After Kolkhorst altered the initial House version of the bill to bring it closer in line with Abbott's vision, House Speaker [Joe Straus](#) [rejected two major amendments](#) as not "germane" to the "sole purpose" of the legislation. Kolkhorst convinced the Senate to [reverse itself](#) on those provisions in an unusual late-night vote Monday, and the House ultimately approved the altered version.

HB 7 goes into effect Dec. 1.

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