

TODAY'S DATE: March 31, 2026  
MEETING DATE: April 15, 2026  
TO: Mayor and Council  
FROM: Councilor Kyle Schreiber, outgoing Council Liaison to the Urban Forestry Commission  
SUBJECT: **Heritage Tree Categories and Definitions**

In recognition of the benefits of a healthy urban forest, Sandpoint City Council adopted the City of Sandpoint Urban Forestry Ordinance in 2008 with the goal of encouraging and promoting the preservation, expansion, protection and proper maintenance of the community forest of the city. Found in chapter 15 of Sandpoint City Code, the ordinance grants the city authority over planting, maintenance, and removal of trees in public rights-of-way. It aims to manage public tree inventory, improve safety, and promote canopy growth.

Subsection 13 of the ordinance covers the Protection of Public and Private Historic and Heritage Trees. The code provides for trees to be designated as heritage trees for protection based on the criteria in Sandpoint's adopted Arboricultural Manual. However, the manual lacks any mention of Historic and/or Heritage trees.

The protection of heritage trees was the topic of significant public input leading up to the finalization of the 2024 Comprehensive Plan. Chapter 4, Goal 2B reads: "Reasonably mitigate the effects of new development on existing neighborhoods, creating standards that encourage protecting heritage trees and native vegetation." Appendix B of the Comprehensive Plan defines a heritage tree as "A tree or collection of trees that is acknowledged and valued for the exceptional characteristics that set it apart from others." Some input received from the public suggested that this definition was not sufficiently thorough.

At the January 23rd, 2025 meeting of the Urban Forestry Commission, Sandpoint's City Forester gave a presentation based on International Society of Arboriculture guidelines, highlighting the potential risks associated with the lack of a clear definition for heritage trees. The commission agreed that it was a top priority and the topic appeared on the agenda for nearly every commission meeting in 2025.

The Urban Forestry Commission has now completed a list of five categories to be used as criteria to qualify a tree for Heritage Tree protection. These categories and their definitions were approved unanimously by the Urban Forestry Commission on November 21, 2025.

Based on their recommendation, it is proposed that 7-15-13 of Sandpoint City Code be amended as noted below. Potential actions include:

- Approve these proposed changes to Sandpoint City Code 7-15-13
- Refer the categories/definitions back to the Urban Forestry Commission and/or staff with direction for desired modification
- Postpone decision until a more comprehensive update of the entire Urban Forestry Ordinance is brought forward

## 7-15-13: - Protection of Public and Private ~~Historic and Heritage~~ Trees:

The ~~historic and~~ heritage tree preservation designation recognizes the significance of trees to the city. A tree may be retained beyond its useful life because of its contribution to the environment and city character. A heritage ~~or historical~~ tree may be designated by the **Urban Forestry Commission** ~~tree committee~~, in coordination with the ~~historic preservation committee based on the criteria as described in the arboricultural manual.~~ **based on the following criteria:**

1. Historical- A tree which by virtue of its association with or contribution to a historical structure or district, or its association with a historical event.
2. Specimen- Age, size, health, or aesthetic factors may qualify the tree as unique among the species in Sandpoint, Idaho.
3. Rare- One or very few of a kind, or is unusual in some form of growth or species.
4. Significant Grove- Outstanding or significant groups of trees that impact the city's landscape.
5. Ecological- A tree that provides a unique ecological benefit or service to the urban environment.