

# STAFF REPORT

Date: January 13, 2026  
To: Planning Commission  
From: Dana Bowers, Associate Planner; Sharon Lumbantobing, Deputy Community Development Director



## Urban Forestry Code Updates and Street Tree Plan – Project Restart

### 1 – Background

Tumwater has been a Tree City USA for more than 30 years and identifies trees as an essential part of the character of the City. The community identified the need for updated urban forestry codes and City Council included them in the 2018 Long Range Planning Work Programs. Staff began the work by developing an Urban Forestry Management Plan.

On March 2, 2021, the City Council approved adoption of the Urban Forestry Management Plan (Ordinance No. O2020-004). Objective 4.1.D of the Plan is to “review tree preservation, landscaping, and street tree regulations regularly,” with the intended timing to start in Spring 2023 and then every four years.

In 2022, the City secured Washington Department of Natural Resources grant funding to develop a coordinated package of urban forestry code updates, including Street Trees (TMC 12.24), Trees and Vegetation Preservation (TMC 16.08), Landscaping (TMC 18.47), and a Street Tree Plan. Significant progress was made on drafting the code updates and substantial public engagement was completed between 2022 - 2024.

In May 2023, this work was paused due to uncertainties related to how the state’s Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) requirements (RCW 19.27.560) impact implementation of the draft code. As the WUI requirements are still in development, the City will restart the project from the point where work concluded in May 2023. Staff will continue to monitor proposed changes to the Wildland Urban Interface requirements and how they relate to the Urban Forestry Management Plan and update if necessary. At this time, the portion of the WUI mandated for local adoption appears to be limited to building code and does not appear to affect the urban forestry code amendments.

The draft code updates and Street Tree Plan are well developed but require further refinement to ensure alignment with the City’s adopted plans and emerging regulatory requirements, including the recently adopted 2025 Comprehensive Plan, the Citywide Design Guidelines, and

the Development Guidelines. As part of this work, a tree list was developed and adopted in July 2025.

Restarting the code updates and Street Tree Plan will allow the City to update outdated regulations, improve implementation of the UFMP, respond to climate and growth pressures, and ensure that all related codes, plans, and guidelines function together as a cohesive urban forestry framework.

## **2 – Tree and Vegetation Preservation Code (TMC 16.08)**

### **2.1 Project Initiation**

Following adoption of the Urban Forestry Management Plan (UFMP) in 2021, the City initiated a comprehensive update to TMC 16.08 to ensure the regulations aligned with the UFMP's goals and complemented other City plans and development guidance. The City hired DCG/Watershed (now known as Facet) in October 2022 to support the update and to assist staff, the Tree Board, the Planning Commission, and the public in developing proposed amendments.

### **2.2. Public Engagement**

The project began with preparation of a [Public Engagement Plan](#), followed by three “community conversations<sup>1</sup>” in fall 2022 and winter 2023, and the development of a project website. Concurrently, during fall 2022 and winter 2023, the project team conducted internal stakeholder meetings, held joint work sessions with the Planning Commission and Tree Board, and developed a [Gap Analysis](#) to evaluate strengths and limitations of the existing code.

Below is a summary of the themes that were discussed throughout the engagement process:

- Address environmental justice and equitable allocation of resources
- Support tree planting and reforestation on public property
- Allocate tree account funds
- Protect large diameter trees
- Consider habitat value of trees, groves, and corridors
- Create a minor and major permit structure
- Develop stronger tree retention and replacement requirements
- Consider impact of regulations on cost of affordable housing
- Provide incentives for homeowners and developers
- Consider climate change mitigation and adaptation
- Assess strong, but fair penalties for violations
- Use a point or credit system to determine tree retention and replacement requirements

---

<sup>1</sup> Recordings of the community conversations and associated documents utilized in the public engagement process are available at [Protection of Trees and Vegetation — Tumwater Urban and Community Forestry Online Open House](#).

## **2.3 Project Status When Paused**

Using this information, Facet and staff drafted a full set of proposed amendments to TMC 16.08 and underwent multiple rounds of internal review. While the overall structure of the amendments was established, several sections still needed “code testing” against development applications, and more revisions. These areas were noted within the draft code document as comments. As of May 25, 2023, City staff and Facet staff were working on a sixth draft of the ordinance. Staff anticipated continuing the review and refinement process with the Planning Commission and Tree Board when the update was paused.

## **2.4 Next Steps**

Next steps include refining the draft amendments to ensure alignment with the landscape code updated Street Tree Plan, coordination with the Development Guidelines, and incorporation of best available science, operational staff needs, and arboriculture best management practices. The selected consultant, through the forthcoming RFP process, will assist staff in completing the code drafting, preparing updated graphics and standards, and facilitating work sessions with the Planning Commission, Tree Board, and City Council.

# **3 – Street Tree Code (TMC 12.24)**

## **3.1 Project Initiation**

Following adoption of the UFMP in 2021, the City initiated a comprehensive update to TMC 12.24 to ensure the regulations aligned with the UFMP’s goals and complemented other City plans and development guidance. The City hired DCG/Watershed (now known as Facet) in October 2022 to support the update and to assist staff, the Tree Board, the Planning Commission, and the public in developing proposed amendments.

## **3.2 Public Engagement**

The project began with preparation of a [Public Engagement Plan](#), followed by three “community conversations<sup>2</sup>” in winter and spring of 2023, and the development of a project website. Concurrently, the project team conducted internal stakeholder meetings, held joint work sessions with the Planning Commission and Tree Board, and developed a [Gap Analysis](#) to evaluate strengths and limitations of the existing code.

Below is a summary of the themes that were discussed throughout the engagement process:

- Consider impacts and disturbance to soils.
- Outline proper planting practices.
- Provide training for maintenance of trees and landscaping near the trees.
- Use root barriers to protect sidewalks, curbs, and gutters.

---

<sup>2</sup> Recordings of the community conversations and associated documents utilized in the public engagement process are available at [Street Trees – Tumwater Urban and Community Forestry Online Open House](#).

- Consider using smaller trees but more of them for canopy coverage.
- Consider clearance needed for garbage trucks with lifting containers.
- Consider requiring a planting bed area similar in size to the ones used on Littlerock Road to protect trees from equipment.
- Provide guidance on irrigation for street trees because of dry summers and nearest to street and sidewalk heat causing stress.
- Consider interactions with street trees and other City goals such as undergrounding utilities.
- Clarify ownership and maintenance responsibility for sidewalks and street trees – particularly given homeowner association agreements and required tree tracts.
- Consider requiring different varieties of street trees in subdivisions.
- Restrict planting for maples and sweetgums.
- Consider alternatives to street trees: location behind sidewalk, in separate tracts balanced with the needs of heat reduction for streets and sidewalks and aesthetics.

### **3.3 Project Status When Paused**

Development of proposed amendments to TMC 12.24 was underway and substantial public engagement had been completed. Draft code language had been partially developed; however, revisions were still needed to ensure consistency with the evolving Street Tree Plan, Development Guidelines, and other urban forestry updates.

Based on the draft street tree list provided by Facet, City staff pursued the administrative task to update the city's current approved Street Tree List in 2023 and 2024. This list was updated and finalized on July 10, 2025, following years of vetting with internal and external experts.

### **3.4 Next Steps**

Next steps include refining the draft amendments to ensure alignment with the updated Street Tree Plan, coordination with the Development Guidelines, and incorporation of best available science, operational staff needs, and arboriculture best management practices. The selected consultant, through the forthcoming RFP process, will assist staff in completing the code drafting, preparing updated graphics and standards, and facilitating work sessions with the Planning Commission, Tree Board, and City Council.

## **4 – Street Tree Plan**

### **4.1 Project Initiation**

The City hired DCG/Watershed (now known as Facet) in October 2022 to support the update to the existing 2001 Street Tree Plan and to assist staff, the Tree Board, the Planning Commission, and the public in developing proposed amendments.

### **4.2 Public Engagement**

Outreach conducted for the Street Tree Code (TMC 12.24) was utilized for the development of the new Street Tree Plan.

Some specific themes that were discussed related to the Street Tree Plan in addition to the comments considered for the Street Tree included considerations for:

- Requiring native plants and assessing the cost bias for required trees.
- Clarifying definition of Street Trees to exclude natural trees.
- Simplifying and permitting permit processes.

#### **4.3 Project Status When Paused**

As of June 2024, a second draft of the Street Tree Plan had been completed, along with a draft ordinance incorporating key policy elements. However, further revisions are still needed. The draft Street Tree Plan incorporated best management practices, species selection guidance, planting standards, and maintenance expectations, informed by the [Gap Analysis](#), public engagement results, and coordination with related City plans and manuals.

The City's Approved Street Tree List was updated and finalized administratively July 10, 2025.

#### **4.4 Next Steps**

The Street Tree Plan will need refinement to ensure consistency with updated code language, the Development Guidelines, operational needs, and the Citywide Design Guidelines. The selected consultant will assist in updating the plan, integrating graphics and diagrams, and preparing a final public review draft. Staff will then conduct additional engagement as needed and proceed with legislative review and adoption.

### **5 – Landscaping Code (TMC 18.47)**

**5.1 Project Initiation** Following adoption of the UFMP in 2021, an RFP was issued in July 2022, and SCJ Alliance was hired in September 2022 to lead the update of the landscaping code.

#### **5.2 Public Engagement**

SCJ and the project team developed a [Public Engagement Plan](#) for amending the Landscaping Code and held two “community conversations<sup>3</sup>” in the spring of 2023 with the general public on the topic. SCJ Alliance conducted background research through late 2022 and early 2023, including a capacity assessment, review of all relevant City plans and regulations, analysis of regional practices, and synthesis of best available science and arboriculture standards. This work culminated in a [Baseline Assessment](#), which was reviewed by staff, the Tree Board, and the Planning Commission and used to guide the code development process.

---

<sup>3</sup> Recordings of the community conversations and associated documents utilized in the public engagement process are available at [Landscaping – Tumwater Urban and Community Forestry Online Open House](#)

Below is a summary of the themes that were discussed throughout the engagement process:

- Buffering to protect water resource areas.
- Water conservation, including reducing sod and turf and irrigation.
- Stormwater management through landscaping.
- City resources to implement actions.

### 5.3 Project Status When Paused

Following completion of the Baseline Assessment and initial public engagement efforts, City staff and SCJ Alliance drafted proposed amendments to TMC 18.47. Over three months, the team developed updated section-by-section code language based on the Baseline Assessment, public feedback, and input from the Planning Commission, Tree Board, and General Government Committee. Meeting packets, minutes, and supporting documents were produced throughout this process.

### 5.4 Next Steps

Completion of the TMC 18.47 update will require reviewing and refining the draft code language to ensure it aligns with updates to TMC 12.24 and TMC 16.08, as well as with Citywide Design Guidelines, Development Guidelines, and citywide water conservation goals. The consultant selected through the upcoming RFP will support final revisions, refine/develop graphics and technical standards, and assist with public outreach and legislative review. The finalized code language will then be brought forward for Planning Commission and Tree Board review prior to City Council consideration.

## **6 – Status Summary**

Task	Landscaping Ordinance Update (TMC 18.47)	Street Tree Ordinance Update (TMC 12.24)	Street Tree Plan	Tree and Vegetation Ordinance Update (TMC 16.08)
Consultant	SCJ	Facet	Facet	Facet
Public Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engagement Plan completed</li> <li>- 2 community conversations completed</li> <li>- Planning Commission and Tree Board consultation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engagement Plan completed</li> <li>- 3 community conversations completed</li> <li>- Planning Commission and Tree Board Consultation</li> </ul>	Used Street Tree Ordinance Outreach data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engagement Plan completed</li> <li>- 3 community conversations completed</li> <li>- Planning Commission and Tree Board consultation</li> </ul>

Task	Landscaping Ordinance Update (TMC 18.47)	Street Tree Ordinance Update (TMC 12.24)	Street Tree Plan	Tree and Vegetation Ordinance Update (TMC 16.08)
<b>Baseline Assessment</b>	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed
<b>Drafts</b>	Completed	Completed	Second Draft Completed	Sixth Draft Completed
<b>Internal Review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In progress</li> <li>- Planning Commission and Tree Board feedback provided</li> <li>- Paused to consider State WUI code adoption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In progress</li> <li>- Planning Commission and Tree Board feedback provided</li> <li>- Paused to consider State WUI code adoption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In progress</li> <li>- Planning Commission and Tree Board feedback provided</li> <li>- Paused to consider State WUI code adoption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In progress</li> <li>- Planning Commission and Tree Board feedback provided</li> <li>- Paused to consider State WUI code adoption</li> </ul>

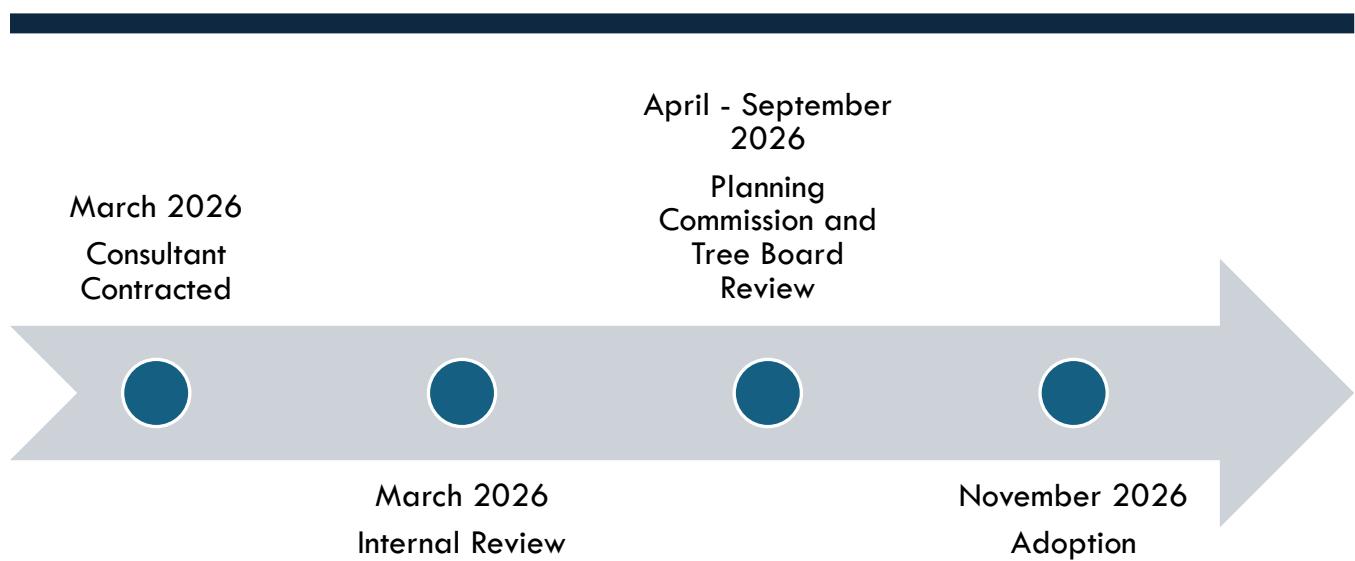
## 7 – Timeline

Work to restart the Tree and Vegetation preservation code updates started in November 2025 as part of the 2025 Long Range Planning Work Program.

The 2026 Long Range Work Program includes updates to the following:

1. Tree and vegetation preservation code (TMC 16.08)
2. Street tree code (TMC 12.24)
3. Landscaping code (TMC 18.47)
4. Street Tree Plan

The timeline for major project milestones is included below:



## **8 – Overall Next Steps**

An RFP will be issued to complete the remaining work, including updating the following:

1. Tree and vegetation preservation code (TMC 16.08)
2. Street tree code (TMC 12.24)
3. Landscaping code (TMC 18.47)
4. Street Tree Plan
5. Maintaining the project website ([www.tumwatertreecity.com](http://www.tumwatertreecity.com))

In addition to the work above, the RFP will also include:

- Code testing with case studies that reflect Tumwater's current and future development proposals.
- Crosswalk tables for alignment with recently adopted codes and plans.
- Public Engagement to review the changes and provide feedback. Boards and commissions asked for feedback include:
  - Planning Commission Review
  - Tree Code Tour to review practical implementation of code revisions
  - Tree Board Review
  - Parks Commission
  - Historic Commission
- Conduct a formal Planning Commission Hearing to accept testimony for consideration.
- City Council Review including the following committees:

- Public Works Committee
- General Government Committee
- Council Adoption

These tasks will complete a robust review to ensure alignment with current codes and plans and test out the proposed code and develop User Guides for City staff and the public.