



Tumwater Landscape Code Update

Baseline Assessment

To Brad Medrud, Planning Manager, City of Tumwater

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Date: January 30, 2023

Project: Tumwater Landscape Code Update

Subject Baseline Assessment

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Introduction

The next step for the City of Tumwater’s implementation of the 2021 adopted *Urban Forestry Management Plan (UFMP)*, is an update to Tumwater Municipal Code (TMC) relative to landscaping and buffering regulations. This update calls for amending various sections of the TMC, specifically TMC 18.47 *Landscaping*, as well as reviewing and updating any other relevant regulations and standards.

This update is intended to guide local government staff, developers, and landscape professionals in assisting the City meet its environmental and sustainability goals associated with UFMP. The overall intent of this update effort is to:

- Ensure implementation and consideration of the UFMP
- Ensure the Landscaping Code reflects the City’s current goals and needs
- Reflect any changes to federal, state, and local codes

- Ensure ease of use by city staff, developers, landscape professionals and the community

This memo is a baseline assessment/ gap analysis outlining the applicable policies, plans, and areas of improvement in the City's Landscaping Code, TMC 18.47, and other relevant regulations and standards.

Long Range Plan Guidance

While a number of plans directly inform the update to Section 18.47, the 2021 *Urban Forestry Management Plan* is the most directly impactful to this effort. However, it is important to note that the following plans address landscape and buffering guidance.

Tumwater Comprehensive Plan, 2036 (Adopted 2016)

The City's Comprehensive Plan establishes policies and vision for future development. The Land Use Element addresses a variety of items relevant to updating the landscaping and buffering section of the TMC. Notable sections of the plan include the following:

- Policy LU-2.5 Encourage development of architectural and landscape design standards.
- Policy LU-7.4 Provide a variety of open spaces including landscaped buffers, small parks, plazas, and other community areas to balance higher density development and enhance quality of living.
- Policy LU-10.5 Group commercial, industrial, and manufacturing uses into centers rather than dispersed throughout the City. These centers shall have a landscaped, urban park quality.
- Policy LU-10.6 Rest future development of commercial, manufacturing, and light industrial areas in the City on a comprehensive, integrated planning scheme incorporating performance standards regarding green belts, and buffering, landscaping, parking facilities, and other items of site design as appropriate.
- Policy LU-10.8 Ensure commercial and industrial structures, where practical, are low profile and provide landscaping including lawns, trees, and shrubs.
- Policy LU-11.5 Encourage existing and new development to use landscaping to take advantage of the sun's warming rays in winter and to provide shade in summer.
- Policy LU-11.7 Consider the impact of new development and landscaping on solar accessibility of adjoining lots and mitigate wherever feasible.
- Design review and guidelines – address design issues such as circulation, stormwater runoff, landscaping and buffering, building location, and design.
- Heavy industrial areas should be separated from residential and commercial uses by such methods as vegetative or lighter intensity land use buffers and should have controls to establish compatibility with surrounding non-industrial development and to protect from nuisance-creating occurrences such as noise, dust, odor, vibration, air, and water pollution.
- To ensure commercial development that is compatible with surrounding uses and the general character of the community architectural and landscaping design and development guidelines should apply to commercial development.
- Areas designated Neighborhood Commercial should be of a low intensity and minimally affect adjacent residential areas. Neighborhood Commercial areas should provide a buffer area between adjacent residential uses. This buffer should consist of landscaping and sound barriers

Brewery District Plan (2020)

The Brewery District Plan includes some of the oldest portions of the City around Custer Way, Cleveland Avenue and Capitol Boulevard. Various goals are set in the Plan including sense of place, transportation access and safety, economic vibrancy and appearance and function of the built environment. The landscape code and TMC 18.27 *Brewery District Zone* implements various portions of this plan and specifically creates a sense of place, aesthetic and function. Specific areas called out in the plan directly impacting this update include:

- Surface parking screening with landscape buffer.
- Site development standards can address setbacks, building frontage, parking location, driveway width, and landscaping requirements.

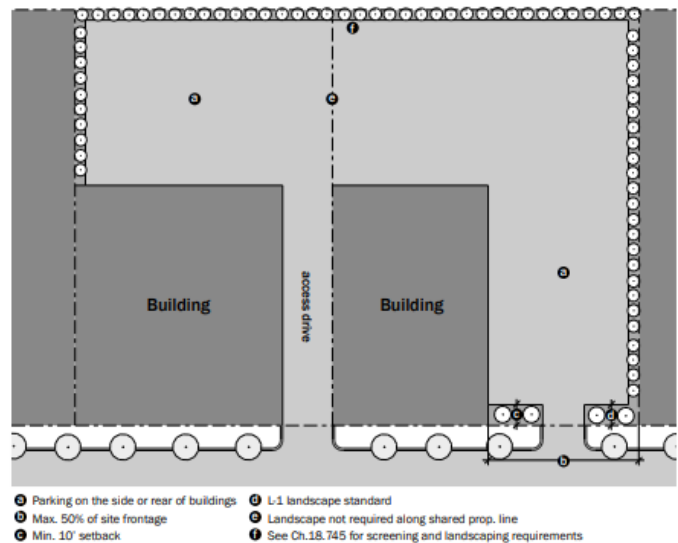
Black Hills Subarea Transportation Plan (2003)

While this plan is mainly focused on transportation connections and improvements to the subarea, various sections mention streetscape visualization and landscape strips between transportation corridors and land uses.

Capitol Boulevard Corridor Plan (2014)

Capitol Boulevard is a major arterial that carries heavy traffic around and through the center of the City. This plan focuses on enhancing the corridor through economic conditions, transportation and aesthetics. There are relevant parts of the plan that support revisions of the landscape code and TMC 18.21 *CBC Capitol Boulevard Community Zone District* with a focus on the Capitol Boulevard Corridor.

- Landscaping buffer on sidewalks from traffic and pedestrian zones
- Landscaping as urban design and environmental respect
- Perimeter site design with landscape buffer as a priority
- Landscape screening between land use types such as commercial and residential
- Buffer options to minimize neighbor property impacts such as rain gardens, formal planting, trees, shrubs, garden and fencing



Example of a code diagram illustrating regulations pertaining to setbacks, building frontage, parking location, driveway width, and screening requirements

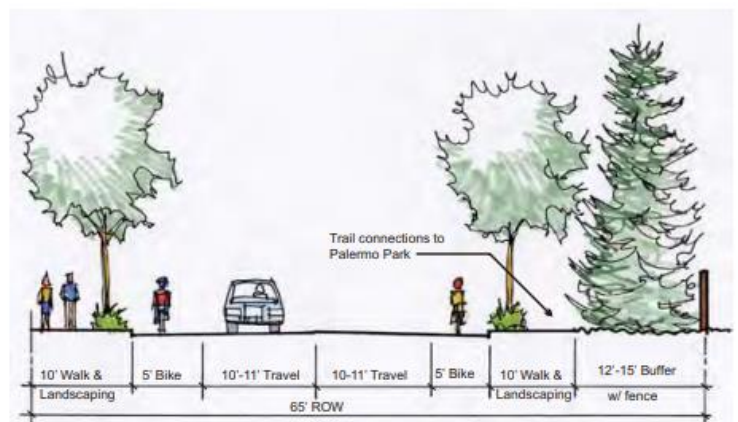


Figure 7-12. The proposed new North-South Access Street conceptual plan and section

Littlerock Road Subarea Plan (2018)

The Littlerock Road Subarea vision was established in the Comprehensive Plan and further studied in the subarea plan. Core elements are to create a mixed-use area village atmosphere on the south-central portion of the subarea and to provide vibrant retail opportunities along I-5. Achieving these intentions brings various components such as design, infrastructure, land use and of course, landscape and buffering. Specific to the efforts on the landscape code, the following are relevant sections from the plan:

- Review and revise as needed the City's development regulations to identify subarea gateways and transition areas, including boundaries between zoning districts for the subarea.
- Said gateways, transition areas and boundaries may be attractive for certain enhancements such as public art, plazas, enhanced landscaping, entry signs, or other architectural features.
- Where appropriate, enhanced noise and visual buffering could be required along boundaries of the subarea to provide extra buffers between commercial and residential neighborhoods.
- Consider amending TMC Title 18 Zoning to require Type 1 landscaping to provide more separation between commercial and non-commercial uses.
- Mitigate impacts of development through opportunity for open space provisions including storm drainage, air quality, and buffering of highway noise.

Urban Forestry Management Plan (2021)

The long-range plans give great context to decades of planning work that the stage for the UMFP, adopted in March 2021. The City has embarked on various efforts including the update to Section 18.47 *Landscaping* in order to best implement the Plan. The landscape code will be updated to ensure it aligns with the goals and objectives laid out in the UFMP, input and comments from stakeholders, city staff, the Tree Board, the Planning Commission, City Council, and other relevant plans and objectives. Relevant goals and actions outlined in the UFMP include:

- Reviewing tree preservation, landscaping, and street tree regulations regularly to ensure that they are working with other City strategic priorities, plans, and regulations, responding to changes in climate, and implementing the UFMP.
- Ensuring that landscaping regulations provide for the preservation of trees with potential and the planting of new trees and understory when removing existing trees and understory on public and private properties.
- Requiring appropriate tree planting in new development and redevelopment, emphasizing proper planning for trees, correct planting techniques, and aftercare that supports the healthy establishment of newly planted trees.
- Promoting the use of Native and Northwest-adapted plants species on public and private property to enhance desired wildlife habitat and tree canopy in the City.

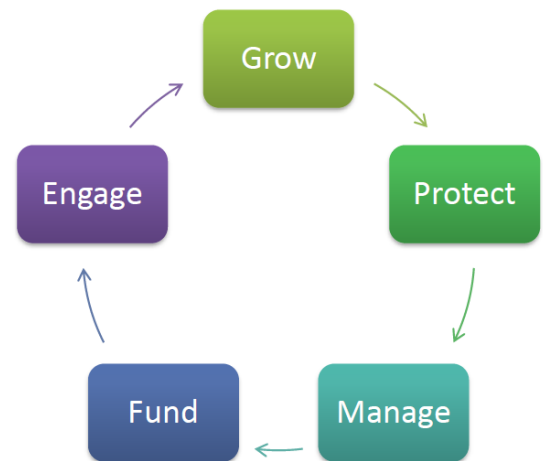


Figure 1: State of the Community and Urban Forest - five concepts

- Promoting the use of the *Habitat at Home* (WDFW) or *Certified Wildlife Habitat* (NWF) mindset to encourage support of wildlife habitat within the city.
 - <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/living/habitat-at-home>
 - <https://www.nwf.org/CERTIFY>
- Work with representatives of the Native Plant Salvage Project to accomplish tree-planting projects.
- Enforcing tree protection regulations to protect healthy existing trees and forested areas and replace on public and private properties.
- Coordinating with the Noxious Weed Board and the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Updating the recommended City Street Tree and Landscaping Tree Lists based on discussions with City Staff, the Tree Board, the Planning Commission, City Council, Stakeholders, and Landscape and Arborist professionals.
- Balancing the protection and support of the community and urban forest with other City strategic priorities, which include, in part, providing affordable housing, developing a walkable urban community, economic development, addressing climate change, and protecting endangered species.
- Designating tree species based upon specific purposes and site conditions for each project and maximizing the benefits of trees while maintaining species diversity.
- Communicating how the community and urban forest is integral to quality of life in the City and affirm that it is considered when the City Council establishes strategic priorities and makes budget and regulatory decisions; City boards and commissions make development and regulatory recommendations; City staff implement adopted plans and codes; and City residents, property owners, and business owners make landscaping decisions.
- Considering whether planting of edible landscaping such as berry plants and fruit trees would be appropriate in City parks or open spaces, taking into consideration factors such as public safety, attraction of vermin, disease transmission, and maintenance ability and costs.
- Considering the use of topsoil and existing plant life on parcels being developed or redeveloped.
- Promoting use of water absorbing shrubs and trees in stormwater ponds or areas in need of excess drainage capacity.
- Reviewing the definitions throughout the code and referenced sections to ensure consistency.
- Encouraging the use of pollinator plants.
- Promoting the use of efficient temporary or seasonally used irrigation systems, including use of exposed rain sensors, zones of irrigation, and the City's Irrigation Audit Program.
- Promoting ecologically prioritized landscapes that support visual security and connection.
- Encouraging multi-purpose use for buffers, stormwater, open spaces and general landscape design.

Code Audit

The City's existing Landscaping Code (TMC 18.47 *Landscaping*) was adopted in 1998 with the last substantial update in 2008 and minor amendments as recent as January 2022. With the 2021 adoption of the UFMP and the City's sustainability, climate mitigation, and Tree City goals, the landscape code is in need of a refresh to better reflect the City's goals.

To ensure consistency throughout the MC, we have reviewed supporting documents, current code, and staff recommendations to create a list of other items that may need amendments to better align or clearly reference the correct or new portions of the TMC after the update has been adopted. As part of this analysis the City's current code was reviewed for relevant cross sections and the Tumwater Development Guide was reviewed for areas of consideration and amendment.

Tumwater Development Guide - Considerations

- Add Tree City and Backyard Habitat language to Intent/Introduction
- Review and possibly update 1.14 *Tree & Vegetation Protection Ordinance*
- Review and possibly update 4.31 *Illumination Design Standards* and TMC 18.40.035 *Exterior illumination*
 - Consideration and discussions to change landscape lighting to be no brighter than 3,000k. This assists in beneficial habitat of local species and non-discouragement of potential breeding and use of plant life. This consideration should explore a decrease in footcandle allowance (potentially to 0.1) for all development rather than only residential developments. Landscape lighting near a designated critical area should be discouraged.
 - Ensure lighting and security access hardware coexist.
- Review and possibly update 4.49 Street Trees in coordination with the concurrent development of the Street Tree Plan and revisions to TMC 12.24 *Street Trees* in 2023. Consideration and discussions to change list to include or remove Trees/Shrubs/Groundcover based on lists developed in conjunction with city staff and the Tree Board.
- Review and possibly update Chapter 5 *Drainage Design and Erosion Control Manual*
- Review and possibly update Section 6.15 *Irrigation*

Tumwater Municipal Code Review – Cross-Reference Areas and Actions

- Title 12 *Streets, Sidewalks and Public Places*
 - TMC 12.24 *Street Trees*
- TMC 13.12 *Stormwater System*
 - Review and possibly update to include stormwater buffering requirements or reference to landscape code.
- TMC 16.08 *Protection of Trees and Vegetation*
- TMC Title 18 *Zoning*
- TMC 18.21 *CBC Capitol Boulevard Community Zone District*
- TMC 18.27 *Brewery District Zone*
- TMC 18.43 *Citywide Design Guidelines*
 - Update to add a section specifying landscape requirements (not specific but a reference to the City's landscaping code); or
 - Update language in TMC 18.43(C)(8) for screening landscaping requirements or add reference to screening requirements further laid out in TMC 18.47 *Landscaping*.

Sustainability Considerations

The City sees sustainability as a priority. The city participates in Sustainable Thurston which helps create places and preserve spaces for a sustainable future in the Thurston region. In addition, the City adopted the Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan in 2021. The City's Water Resources & Sustainability Department is dedicated to water resources and sustainability including climate change response, critical resources, and improving the urban environment through the preservation and expansion of urban forest canopy. There are a number of areas where sustainability can come into play relating to landscaping and buffering, the following have been discussed and identified as a focus area for the code amendments.

- Water efficiency and conservation
- Flexibility and encouragement of alternative landscaping methods such as eco-lawns
- Prioritize Native and Northwest-adapted Plants
- Encourage composting and the use of compost in landscaping
- Strongly encourage plants that attract bees and pollinators
- Explore City certification: *Habitat at Home (WDFW)* or *Certified Wildlife Habitat (NWF)*
- Balance ecological needs with environmental design



Figure 2: No mow eco-lawn example, source: prairie nursery

Key Themes & Takeaways

The baseline assessment is meant to take the pulse of where the City has been and where this code update process should be headed. There is lots of feedback relating to design, aesthetics, sustainability, cost, and security. In order to move this project, forward it is important to keep in mind the key themes and takeaways guiding the update.

Multi-Purpose

As the City continues to develop, it is important to maintain landscaping, open space, critical areas, recreation, drainage, buffers, etc. An important aspect of this code amendment includes addressing multi-purpose opportunities for landscaping as well as addressing various needs such as stormwater management, visual barriers, trails, recreation, etc.

Be Innovative

In order to achieve many of the objectives outlined in this memo, the City will need to be innovative and flexible in its standards and direction. Keeping an open mind to new techniques and products which could include but not be limited to eco-lawns, decrease year round maintained turf, permeable pavers, living ground covers, compost, etc. Part of this code amendment process is to establish parameters but leave room for innovation where appropriate.

Reuse

Sustainability is a common theme in the entirety of this code amendment. There is an opportunity to prioritize reuse as a general aspect of sustainable design such as reuse of topsoil on site, water reuse, and maintain and protect existing foliage where appropriate.

Design flexibility

There are a breadth of design opportunities and options for any given site. This code should establish the parameters for plant groups, objectives, and encourage creative ways to implement. This could include a variety of things such as a percentage of native or Northwest adapted plants in a site design.

Water conservation

Prioritize plants that will survive without irrigation past their initial establishment. Encourage less water usage through drought tolerant species and water quality plants. Promote efficient temporary or seasonally used irrigation systems, including use of exposed rain sensors, zones of irrigation, and the City's Irrigation Audit Program. Encourage the use of reclaimed water whenever available.

Habitat preservation

Establish and maintain landscaping that supports, protects and/or attracts pollinators, endangered species, and other wildlife. Habitat preservation also is another multi-purpose use for landscaping and buffer areas.

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Consider code amendments that address CPTED. There are four main principles of CPTED: natural access control, natural surveillance, territoriality, and maintenance. Balance using these principles while designing buildings, homes, and neighborhoods, to create an environment that influences human behavior and discourages crime.