
STAFF REPORT



Date: May 26, 2026
To: Planning Commission
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Community Development Director

Urban Forestry Code Updates and Street Tree Plan

1. Request

The Tree Board and Planning Commission are requested to review the proposed approach and provide feedback on the concepts guiding updates to Tumwater Municipal Code (TMC) Chapter 16.08 Tree and Vegetation Protection, TMC Chapter 18.47 Landscaping, TMC Chapter 12.24 Street Trees and the Street Tree Plan.

The purpose of this meeting is to:

- Introduce the consultant team and discuss roles and responsibilities
- Review project goals
- Review the state and local regulatory framework
- Review timelines
- Discuss tree density credit
- Discuss tree incentives and landmark tree protections
- Discuss Summary of Revisions to TMC 16.08 Tree and Vegetation Protections and TMC 18.47 Landscaping (Attachments A and B)
- Summary of Proposed Code Revisions

2. Background

Current tree and vegetation protection codes were adopted in 1989 and amended in 1994 and 2002. These codes establish basic standards for tree removal and replanting and help maintain Tumwater's character of lush green streets. Adopting standards is also part of the criteria required for Tumwater to retain its status as a Tree City, which it has held for over 30 years.

Since 2018, City Council and Tree Board members, and community members have identified concerns with the current tree codes. To support a comprehensive update process, Tumwater

completed the Urban Forestry Management Plan, which was adopted in 2021. The current tree codes lack specificity needed for enforcement and do not prioritize retention of large trees.

The Urban Forestry Management Plan identifies updates to the Tumwater Municipal Code as an essential part of improving the health, retention, and long-term growth of the urban forest. Updating the codes can also support the “Right Tree Right Place” approach by establishing standards that consider species growth habits, infrastructure conflicts, and the environmental benefits trees provide within the urban environment. The Plan also recognizes that some species can damage public infrastructure. In response, Tumwater completed a Street Tree List in July 2025 to create that identifies prohibited trees and recommends tree species.

The 2026 Comprehensive Plan Update included a Climate Element with goals and policies focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving community resiliency to climate change impacts. Many of these goals and policies identify preservation and expansion of urban tree canopy as an important strategy for both greenhouse gas reduction and climate resiliency.

Other Comprehensive Plan goals and policies were updated that affect trees and development. The Land Use Element updated planned density to help meet future housing needs, while the Housing Element includes goals and policies that support a broader range of housing types and aim to increase housing supply. Both elements recognize that housing, open space, and tree canopy are compatible land uses and that balancing these objectives is necessary.

3. State, and Local Guidance

State

Under the Washington State Growth Management Act, cities are required to adopt regulations that protect critical areas, including Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas. The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife maintains a list of Priority Habitats and Species, which lists Oregon White Oak habitat as a priority habitat and provides management recommendations. Oregon White Oak are found within Tumwater and are considered a species that requires protection.

Comprehensive Plan

Several Comprehensive Plan goals and policies provide the framework for developing regulations to address tree and vegetation protections, landscaping and street trees.

- Land Use Element, which directs compatible land uses.
 - Goal LU-2

Ensure development occurs in an orderly, effective, and cost-efficient manner to best utilize available land and public services, conserve natural resources, protect and enhance critical areas and open space, address equity and climate change, and reduce sprawl.

- Policy LU-6.1:
Ensure development conforms with environmental standards and requirements.
- Policy LU-6.3
Integrate design features of existing natural systems into the layout and siting of new development, including significant trees and noncritical ecological systems, where possible.
- Climate Element, which promotes healthy ecosystems and the benefits they provide.
 - Goal CL 8
Strengthen existing policies and regulations to deploy and enhance natural carbon solutions that are ecosystem-appropriate, store carbon, and offer co-benefits such as pollution reduction, wildlife habitat, and climate resilience.
 - Goal CL-12
With climate, growth, and environmental changes in mind, identify and elevate the protection of key habitats, ecosystem services, and wildlife corridors.
 - Goal CL-13
Promote land use and development decisions that support compact urban development and Tumwater-wide resilience, including a resilient local economy.
- Housing Element, which supports increasing housing to meet raising demand.
 - Policy H-1.4
Support the construction of housing on vacant or unused lots, such as unused commercial buildings, to minimize urban sprawl and reuse existing infrastructure.

Urban Forest Management Plan

The Urban Forest Management Plan identifies 5 key concepts that indicate the desired direction and outcomes for management of the urban forest. These concepts are:

1. Grow the community and urban forest through new plantings to maximize the social, economic, and environmental benefits of urban trees and vegetation.
2. Protect the community and urban forest from threats and loss by preserving existing trees and understory in the City.
3. Manage the community and urban forest through coordinated planning, design, and maintenance to ensure its long-term health and sustainability.
4. Fund the community and urban forest by establishing a long-term City finance strategy.

5. Engage residents, public agencies, community groups, and the private sector in caring for the community and urban forest and fostering their deeper connection to nature.

Goal 1. Restore and enhance the community and urban forest.

Objective 1.1. Increase canopy cover in the City to expand the community and urban forest.

Objective 1.2. Improve and maintain an optimal level of age distribution and species diversity of trees in the community and urban forest by increasing the use of desirable trees.

Objective 1.3. Establish a full complement of beautiful, healthy trees in the City by planting trees in locations that maximize their ability to grow while minimizing damage to the essential infrastructure of the City.

Goal 2. Protect and preserve the community and urban forest, which includes trees, understory, habitat, and soils.

Objective 2.1. Use regulatory and non-regulatory approaches to protect and retain the community and urban forest to the extent practicable within the context of necessary growth and development.

Objective 2.3. Respond to view blockage complaints regarding City trees blocking private views

Goal 3. Manage City-owned community and urban forestry resources for maximum benefit.

Objective 3.1. Promote efficient and cost-effective management of the community and urban forest by selecting, situating, and maintaining urban trees appropriately to maximize benefits and minimize hazards, nuisances, hardscape damage, and maintenance costs.

Objective 3.4. Establish or enhance the character of City streets using trees in City rights-of-way, where adequate rights-of-way exist.

4. Timeline

The timeline for major project milestones is:



5. Tree Density Credit System

The Urban Forest Management Plan establishes tree canopy goals and identifies retention of larger trees as a priority. The proposed Tree Density Credit system is intended to provide a clear and flexible method for quantifying both tree retention and tree planting. Required minimum tree credits would be established by zone district based on the canopy goals for each district and measured in units per 1,000 square feet of buildable area. Table 1 provides proposed minimum tree credit requirements.

Table 1. Example Required Minimum Tree Credits

Zone District	Required Minimum Tree Credits per 1,000 Square Feet of Buildable Area
RSR Residential Sensitive Resource and LDR Low Density Residential	0.50
MDR Medium Density Residential and HDR High Density Residential	0.40
OS Open Space and GB Greenbelt	0.60
All other uses outside of the Port of Olympia – Olympia Regional Airport	0.25

Trees are assigned credit values based on diameter at standard height (DSH). Larger trees receive higher credit values to reflect the greater environmental and community benefits they provide, including canopy coverage, stormwater interception, habitat value, and carbon sequestration. Table 2 provides example tree credit values.

Table 2. Example Tree Credits.

Diameter at Standard Height (DSH)	Tree Credits
6 inches to less than 8 inches	1.0
8 inches to less than 12 inches	2.0
12 inches to less than 16 inches	3.0
16 inches to less than 20 inches	5.0
20 inches to less than 24 inches	7.0
Larger than 24 inches or Landmark	9.0

The Tree Density Credit System is intended to create a clear and measurable implementation tool that does not require specialized equipment to measure canopy and allows flexibility in site design. Property owners may choose to retain existing trees to meet minimum tree credit requirements or remove trees and provide replacement planting. On sites with limited existing trees, additional tree planting would be required to achieve the minimum credits and support long-term canopy goals.

6. Tree Incentives and Landmark Tree Protections

The guiding principle of “Right tree, Right place” recognizes that different trees provide different environmental, aesthetic, and functional benefits within the urban landscape. Some trees are better suited to urban conditions due to growth patterns, root structure, drought tolerance, or compatibility with infrastructure. Larger and mature trees also provide greater benefits, including shade, stormwater interception, habitat value, and carbon sequestration.

To support this guiding principle, the proposed tree code updates include both restrictions and incentives related to tree species selection and tree retention. A Street Tree list identifying approved and restricted species was adopted in July 2025 to help guide appropriate tree planting within urban areas.

The proposed code updates also include incentives for retention of Landmark Trees. Landmark Trees include trees that are 30 inches or greater in diameter at standard height, as well as selected tree species that are considered significant at smaller diameters due to species characteristics, rarity, habitat value or growth patterns. For example, Pacific Madrone and Pacific Yew typically do not reach 30 inches in diameter but are still considered important trees for preservation. Table 3 provides Landmark Tree definitions.

Table 3. Proposed Landmark Tree definitions.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Diameter at Standard Height
Grand fir	<i>Abies grandis</i>	24 inches
Vine maple	<i>Acer circinatum</i>	10 inches
Bigleaf maple	<i>Acer macrophyllum</i>	24 inches
Pacific madrone	<i>Arbutus menziesii</i>	8 inches
Port Orford cedar	<i>Chamaecyparis lawsoniana</i>	24 inches
Cascara	<i>Frangula purshiana</i>	8 inches
Sitka spruce	<i>Picea sitchensis</i>	24 inches
Lodgepole or shore pine	<i>Pinus contorta</i>	12 inches
Western white pine	<i>Pinus monticola</i>	24 inches
Douglas-fir	<i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i>	24 inches
Pacific yew	<i>Taxus brevifolia</i>	8 inches
Western redcedar	<i>Thuja plicata</i>	24 inches

Western hemlock	<i>Tsuga heterophylla</i>	24 inches
Tree not listed in this table	Not applicable	30 inches or greater
Heritage tree	Not applicable	All sizes

7. Summary of Proposed Code Revisions

Attachments A and B provide a summary of proposed revisions and additional recommended updates to TMC 16.08 Tree and Vegetation Protections and TMC 18.47 Landscaping for review and discussion.

8. Next Steps

1. JOINT City Council-Planning Commission-Tree Board Meeting and Tour
 July 28, 2026 – 6pm
 Purpose/Deliverables: Tree and vegetation issues in the community and how the code can address them.

2. City Council Work Session
 August 25, 2026 – 6 pm
 Purpose/Deliverables: Present Street Tree Plan and proposed code– same content as Joint PC /Tree Board meeting

3. JOINT Planning Commission-Tree Board Meeting
 Aug 25, 2026 – 7 pm
 Purpose/Deliverables: Present proposed code and proposed Street Tree Plan

Urban Forestry Code Updates - TMC 16.08 Tree and Vegetation Protections

Summary of revisions

Code Section	Title	What changed and why?	Additional Revisions/Recommendations
16.08.020	Purpose	Updated purpose and intent for consistency with UFMP elements: regarding balance with other goals, canopy cover goals, and guiding principal, "right tree right place".	
		Added "M" to purpose that ties the code to housing allowances and priorities.	
16.08.30	Applicability	New section to clarify applicable development.	Recommend City revises Applicability to be more clear and specific, referencing canopy, climate, and housing goals.
16.08.040	Definitions	<p>Purpose: to clarify and consolidate terms. Added: ANSI, Caliper, City Tree protection professional, Class IV Forest Practices</p> <p>Removed: "City", "Conversion option harvest plan (COHP)", Developed Lot, Greenbelt Zone, Ground Cover, Hazardous Tree, Heritage Tree, Historic Tree, Lion tailing, public nuisance, tree, tree protection professional, undeveloped lot, F3+D3 weed definition.</p>	
		Added landmark tree diameter definitions for different species. This allows us to protect important native tree species that are considered large diameter/landmark at a lower diameter thresholds.	Revise to simplify.
		Revised "buildable area" to with how other jurisdictions use this term in regard to tree density applicability.	
16.08.050	Heritage trees	Updated with additional detail to provide a more specific framework for how the City evaluates heritage trees. Permit requirements specified here.	

16.08.060	Landmark trees	Created a new tree designation to protect large diameter trees. As "large" differs from species to species, important native species have been identified and listed with appropriate diameters at standard height.	Further revision to simplify needed.
		Revised and condensed as 1 and 2 are mostly the same.	
16.08.070	Tree credits	Replaced standards with Tree Credits. This approach quantifies tree volume without requiring aerial measurements or photography.	May need to revise to include exemptions for native prairie habitats/soils.
		Added ratios for minimum tree density calculated from the UFMP canopy goals.	
		Added provision stating that low density lots be brought into conformance with minimum required tree density when development is triggered.	
16.08.075	Heritage trees designated	Moved section of code to designation section rather than permit section.	
16.08.080	City tree protection professional.	Updated to clarify role for a broader audience.	
16.08.090	Forest practice applications.	Updated to clarify requirements of applications, timing, provisions for maintenance, etc.	
16.08.100	Tree account.	Updated to expand use of the account to meet canopy goals.	
16.08.110	Tree and vegetation removal permits.	Establishes new major and minor permits to provide levels of permit requirements dependent on different types of development.	City to confirm requirements then Facet will revise.
		Revised to include preliminary review of site plan approval.	
		Vegetation to be addressed in landscaping code and using critical root zones. Revised minor tree removal permit section to include considerations for uprooting trees.	

16.08.120	Tree removal not associated with development.	New code section for Tree and Vegetation Removal Not Associated with Development per Gap Analysis section 2.9.3 Tree Retention and Replacement Standards. To clarify, move, and rename tree removal waiver process.	The earlier code section could be clarified to state that all removal of significant trees is subject to notification and may require permitting. Added language to TMC 16.08.110(B) stating requirement for notification.
			May add the requirement for trees to be replaced at a 1:1 ratio.
		Moved C to replacement trees (TMC 16.08.170); deleted D as it is repetitive.	
16.08.130	Tree removal associated with development	New code section to streamline permit review processing to include required forestry review at each stage of development, add groves and significant trees to checklist, and all new items in 16.08.110.	
		New code section to add retention incentives relocated to TMC 16.08.150.	
		Relocated permit requirements to this section.	
16.08.140	Forest management plan.	Requirements added for clarification	Revise for further clarification regarding grove tree value.
16.08.150	Tree retention.	This section was separated from the other standards to group it with standards for the arborist report.	
		Added a table to quantify tree health and vigor.	
		Updated to clarify species selection, location and quality.	
		Incentives relocated here. Revised/condensed tree protection areas.	
16.08.160	Tree retention plan.	New section to clarify permit requirements.	Needs further clarification between arborist report and tree retention plan.
		Tree Replacement Plan replaces TMC 16.08.050.C.6.	
			Some of these don't seem applicable to tree retention requirements, consider relocating to clearing and grading code.

16.08.170	Replacement trees.	New section to clarify replacement standards.	
16.08.180	Erosion Control	New section for erosion control provisions.	Recommend removing this from the tree code and integrate into clearing and grading code.
16.08.190	Tree and soil protection during construction.	New section for tree and soil protection standards.	
16.08.200	Maintenance	Revised/condensed for clarity and to reflect a three year maintenance period.	
			The covenant/maintenance agreement could be simplified to be easier for the applicant.
16.08.210	Performance and maintenance bond	Updated to clarify staff roles for bond releases.	
16.08.220	Exemptions.	Removed to reduce duplication with critical areas provisions.	
		Updated to exempt pruning and thinning.	
		New exemption per endangered species and Habitat Conservation Plans.	
16.08.230	Alternative plans.	Updated to group codes together for better understanding and implementation.	
16.08.250	Violation - Criminal penalties.	Updated with new additions per gap analysis section 2.15.	
16.08.260	Violation - Civil penalties - Presumption - Other remedies.	Penalties updated due to inflation.	

Summary of revisions by code section

Code Section	Title	What changed? (2002 to 2023)	2026 Additional Revisions/Recommendations/Alignment with Policies & Plans
18.04.040	Definitions.	Added drought tolerant plant species, native plant species, Northwest adapted plant species definitions.	<p>Only show the proposed definition in the ordinance. Some of the other definitions appear to have already been adopted into the code, and the code includes definitions beyond what is included in the ordinance.</p> <p>Consider adding definitions for mulch, compost, groundcover (does it include mulch/stones/lawn), hazard of existing trees, required landscaping.</p>
18.47.010	Intent.	Minor new additions.	Use bullet points to more clearly lay out the intent of this section.
18.47.015	Applicability.	New section.	Apply provisions of this chapter to all areas of required landscaping for all development projects within the city where ground disturbance is proposed.
18.47.020	General requirements.	New additions to clarify requirements provide consistent formatting for better readability.	<p>Expand the minimum landscaping plan requirements to include property address, tax parcel number, lot dimensions, parcel boundaries, existing features labeled as to remain or to be removed, proposed plant materials (including location, size, spacing, quantity, and species), graphic bar, and scale.</p> <p>Landscaping plans for projects with an area greater than 5 acres shall be accompanied by an integrated pest management plan, per Thurston County guidance.</p> <p>Moved to exempt smaller projects(single-family dwellings, individual manufactured homes that are not part of a manufactured home park, and individual duplex dwellings that are not part of a development of four or more dwelling units in one project) from plan requirements, but not from code requirements.</p> <p>Add figure to improve clarity.</p>
18.47.020	General requirements.	Added Landscape Requirements	<p>Update title to 'Compliance with other code requirements.' Reorganize for improved clarity:</p> <p>Move Perimeter Buffering (4) to 18.47.050 because it refers to a landscape type, not requirements.</p> <p>Remove parking lot landscaping (5), as this is not a requirement for all sites or required for compliance with other codes.</p> <p>Move stormwater sentence (6 and 7) to section 18.47.050 as part of a 'Stormwater Facility Buffers' section.</p> <p>Move existing native vegetation sentence (8) to section 18.47.030 because it applies to minimum planting requirements.</p>

18.47.020	General requirements.	Added species choice standards.	<p>Move Species Choice section to section 18.47.030 as it is more related to minimum planting requirements than general landscaping requirements. Align with other species selection requirements already included in section 18.47.030.</p> <p>Move "Overgrown vegetation shall be managed pursuant to TMC Chapter 8.04." to maintenance section since it is unrelated to species choice.</p>
18.47.020	General requirements.	Added: Temporary Irrigation, Exemptions from Irrigation	Remove exemptions from irrigation. All landscaping should require at least temporary irrigation through at least a two-year establishment period, no exceptions. Expand requirements for temporary irrigation, and add hand watering as an option. Require an inspection two years after planting to ensure that the landscaping has become established.
18.47.020	General requirements.	<p>Added: Installation prior to Occupancy, Endangered species Act compliance, Washington Wildland-Urban Interface Code compliance, Parking Lot Landscaping</p> <p>Removed: J, L, M, N</p>	Relocate to a new section called, "Compliance with other codes and requirements," and move section before irrigation. New section includes references to TMC 16.08, Tumwater Development Guide, and OHP/airspace requirements.
18.47.020	General requirements.		<p>Move stormwater sentence to section 18.47.050 as part of a 'Stormwater Facility Buffers' section.</p> <p>Move Species Choice section to section 18.47.030.</p>
18.47.020	General requirements.	Moved Landscaping Matrix to the end of the chapter	<p>Update table title to 'Required Landscaping Types Matrix' and move to the beginning of section 18.47.050 so it is immediately before the landscape types information.</p> <p>Clarify the relationship between zone development standard yard setbacks and perimeter landscaping requirements. "No minimum" setback standards do not conflict with Type 1 or Type 2 landscaping requirements and may remain unchanged. However, minimum yard setbacks that are narrower than required landscape buffer widths (e.g., 5-foot setbacks with 8- or 10-foot landscape requirements) create a standards incompatibility. Consider revising the landscape code to either allow required landscaping to extend beyond yard setback areas, provide reduced buffer widths in constrained yards, or establish clear precedence or alternative compliance provisions.</p>
18.47.030	Minimum planting requirements.	New additions and clarification edits including provisions for native species.	<p>Restructure and utilize bullet points to clearly lay out the intent of this section.</p> <p>Remove required minimum planting area dimensions (A) because dimensions of required planting areas are set by other sections. This will make it harder for applicants to skirt code requirements (i.e. making a planting area 4.5 feet to not be held to code requirements).</p> <p>Shrubs and groundcovers should be planted triangularly and spaced to attain a coverage of at least 80 percent of the planting area within two years.</p>

			By area, require that atleast 50% of the proposed planting be native species and 80% be drought-tolerant species. Provide a native and drought tolderant species list for reference. Incentivize native planting by not requiring the fee outlined in 18.47.020 if 100% of proposed plantings are native and drought-tolerant species.
18.47.040	Maintenance.	New additions to include a standard for erosion control and moisture retention.	Use bullet points to clearly lay out the intent of this section. Relocate "Overgrown vegetation shall be managed pursuant to TMC Chapter 8.04." here from species choice section since it is more related to maintenance than species choice.
18.47.050	Types of landscaping.	Language clarified and simplified.	Move table 18.47 to the beginning of this section. Add a visual for Type 1 Landscaping. Provide more direction on design (slope, height) of earthen berm and fencing/walls. Trees and shrubs shall be sized and spaced so that 50 percent of the site perimeter is visually obscured within two years. Groundcover should be spaced to attain a coverage of at least 80 percent of the planting area within two years. Tree quantity requirements shall be calculated using a formula provided in proposed section 18.47.055.
18.47.050	Types of landscaping.	Language clarified and simplified.	Add a visual for Type 2 Landscaping. Shrubs and groundcover should be spaced to attain a coverage of at least 80 percent of the planting area within two years. Tree quantity requirements shall be calculated using a formula provided in proposed section 18.47.055, rather than one tree for every 25 lineal feet of landscaped area.
18.47.050	Types of landscaping.	New additions include requirements for utility facilities and clarification edits	Move requirements for sites based on their relation to the ARI airport zone to the end of this section; this text is currently located in 18.47.020(B)(4)(c).
18.47.050	Types of landscaping.	Minor text edits to improve clarity.	Incorporate a visual distinguishing the five landscape strip treatment options. Tree quantity requirements shall be calculated using a formula provided in proposed section 18.47.055, rather than one tree for every 35 lineal feet of landscaped area. Groundcover or low shrubs shall be planted to attain 80 percent coverage within two years.
18.47.050	Types of landscaping.	New additions including applicability and clarification edits	Incorporated into new subsection titled, "Parking Lot Landscaping." 30% canopy cover standard incorporated for parking lots.

			<p>The minimum number of trees required shall be calculated using the formula provided in TMC 18.47.055.</p> <p>Increase the required amount of landscaping required to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Twenty-five square feet per parking space for lots containing 11 to 50 stalls. - Thirty square feet per parking space for lots containing 51 to 99 stalls.
18.47.050	Types of landscaping.	New additions and clarification edits	Exempt (subject to approval) type 2 landscaping requirements around stormwater facilities if they are designed to replicated natural pond conditions and provide aesthetic or habitat value. Add that landscaped areas used for stormwater management shall be designed to incorporate plant species consistent with The Thurston County Drainage Design and Erosion Control Manual.
18.47.055	Required tree formula		Add a tree formula based on species rather than standard spacing: "The number of required trees shall be calculated by dividing the total frontage length (as dictated by the parcel dimensions) by the mature canopy spread of the specific tree species proposed."
18.47.060	Alternative landscaping plan.	Updated into sections.	<p>Retitled to "alternative landscaping decision."</p> <p>Require applications pursuing an alternative landscaping plan to submit a landscape plan consistent with Section 18.47.020(A) that demonstrated compliance with the chapter's intent and lists the requirements that cannot be met.</p>
18.47.070	Penalty provision.	Updated into sections.	
		New additions and moved to end of chapter.	