

TREE AND VEGETATION RETENTION REQUIREMENTS FOR DEVELOPED SINGLE FAMILY PARCELS

What type of approval do I need to remove trees and vegetation on my property?

- Any proposed removal of trees and vegetation requires approval by the City of Federal Way unless exempted under *Federal Way Revised Code* (FWRC) 19.120.030.
- Many non-exempt activities do not require a permit application, only written approval by the city.
- A permit application, including preparation of a Tree and Vegetation Retention Plan by a qualified expert, may be required in the following instances:
 - a. Tree or vegetation removal within an environmentally sensitive area (reference FWRC 19.145.010 et seq.).
 - b. Removal of trees or vegetation that was required to be retained by or through any development permit.
 - c. Tree and vegetation removal that will change the points where stormwater or groundwater enters or exits the subject property or changes the quality, or velocity of stormwater or groundwater.

If you are unsure as to whether the trees and vegetation you wish to remove requires either written approval by the city or a permit application, you should consult with the Permit Center (253-835-2607 or permitcenter@cityoffederalway.com) prior to conducting any tree or vegetation removal activity.

What if I would like to remove hazard trees or nuisance vegetation?

Hazard trees¹ and nuisance vegetation¹ located on developed single family lots may be removed without city approval if the following criteria can be met:

- Any trees or vegetation removed must be outside any area that is within the jurisdiction of FWRC 19.145.010 et seq. (designated environmentally sensitive areas).
- No trees or vegetation will be removed if that vegetation was required to be retained by or through any development permit issued under this chapter or any prior zoning code.
- Tree and vegetation removal will not change the points where the stormwater or groundwater enters or exits the subject property and will not change the quality or velocity of stormwater or groundwater.

What are the requirements for tree and vegetation retention/replacement?

- Removal of any trees measuring six inches (6") or greater in diameter at four and one-half feet (4.5') above ground is subject to the minimum tree units per acre requirements established in FWRC Table 19.120.130-1.

¹ See definitions contained in this handout.

- For property zoned single family residential, the minimum tree density requirement is 25 tree units/acre.
- In order to determine whether or not tree removal requires planting of replacement trees, the property owner must determine:
 1. The minimum tree units required for the parcel from which the trees are proposed to be removed (size of parcel in acres x 25 tree units/acre); and
 2. The current number of tree units on the parcel from which the trees are proposed to be removed (determine size of each existing tree and multiply by tree unit credits based on size of each tree).
- Tree replacement is required if the removal of trees would result in the property having fewer than the minimum tree units per acre retained on the site.
- When tree replacement is required, the property owner must plant enough replacement trees to bring the tree unit count up to the minimum tree units per acre for the property, or minimum number of tree units that exist on the property prior to proposed tree removal, whichever is less.
- The following table specifies the tree unit credits established for retained (*existing*) trees and planting of new trees (*replacement*):

Tree Unit Credits (Table 19.120.130-2)	
<i>Existing Tree Category</i>	Tree Unit Credit
Existing Tree 1" to 6" d.b.h.	1.0 tree units per tree
Existing Tree >6" to 12" d.b.h.	1.5 tree units per tree
Existing Tree >12" to 18" d.b.h.	2.0 tree units per tree
Existing Tree >18" to 24" d.b.h.	2.5 tree units per tree
Existing Tree > 24" d.b.h.	3.0 tree units per tree
<i>Replacement Tree Category*</i>	
Replacement Tree, Small Canopy Species (Mature canopy area < 450 SF)	.50 tree units per tree planted
Replacement Tree, Medium Canopy Species (Mature canopy area 450 to 1,250)	1.0 tree units per tree planted
Replacement Tree, Large Canopy Species (Mature canopy area > 1,250 SF)	1.5 tree units per tree planted

*Refer to the "Recommended Tree Species" handout.

What is the penalty for removing trees without proper approval?

Removal of trees without proper approval is subject to civil penalties and additional fees of up to \$1,000.00 for each tree removed or up to the marketable value of each tree removed. In addition, restoration of any environmental and property damage is required. Refer to FWRC 19.120.270 for additional details.

Relevant Definitions from the FWRC

Clearing means the destruction and removal of vegetation by manual, mechanical, or chemical methods.

Critical root zone shall be defined as: an area equal to 12 inches radius for every one inch of tree diameter measured at four and one-half feet above ground.

Diameter at Breast Height (dbh) means the diameter of a tree trunk as measured at 4.5 feet above the ground surface.

Hazard tree shall mean any tree which, in the opinion of the city or an expert approved by the city (such as, but not limited to, a professional forester, certified arborist, or landscape architect), poses an unreasonable risk of failure and poses a hazard to a permanent structure or high use outdoor area.

Invasive species include non-native species of plants or animals that out-compete native species in a specific habitat and that cause or are likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human, animal or plant health. Invasive species include species on the noxious weed list maintained by the King County Noxious Weed Control Board. See also *Native Vegetation* and *Nuisance Vegetation*.

Native vegetation includes native, undisturbed areas or rehabilitation of previously disturbed areas that consist of trees, plants, forest litter, and understory indigenous to the Pacific Northwest or near natives that are suitable for the Pacific Northwest climate. Invasive species, such as Himalayan Blackberry or Scotch Broom are not native species.

Nuisance vegetation shall mean any tree or vegetation that, in the opinion of the city or an expert approved by the city (such as, but not limited to a professional forester, certified arborist, or landscape architect), is an invasive variety, is an allergen, or due to its location is causing or is likely to cause damage to a permanent structure, or other economic or environmental harm or harm to human, animal, or plant health that cannot be mitigated without removal of the tree or vegetation.

Topping means a pruning cut to the main stem of a mature tree. Such cuts can result in serious decay and/or forcing out growth of weakly attached upright sprouts below the cut. Topping also results in permanent alteration of tree architecture. For purposes of this chapter, topping shall be treated the same as tree removal.

Tree means any self-supporting perennial woody plant characterized by one main stem or trunk of at least six inches in diameter measured four and one-half feet above ground, or a multi-stemmed trunk system with a definite crown, maturing at a height of a least 20 feet above ground level.

Trees-Deciduous means trees that shed or lose their foliage at the end of the growing season.

Trees-Evergreen means trees that retain their leaves for more than one growing season.

Tree unit is a measurement to give value to the number of trees retained on a site. [FWRC] Table 19.120.130-2 assigns tree unit credits based upon the size of the existing or newly planted trees. For new trees, tree units vary depending on the size that the trees will reach at maturity (smaller size at maturity, fewer tree unit credits).

How do I find a Qualified Expert?

A list of certified arborists can be located at www.pnwisa.org, www.isa-arbor.com, or call the Pacific Northwest Chapter of International Society of Arboriculture at (800) 335-4391. If using “Tree Service” in the yellow pages, look for the “certified arborist” logo. Be sure to check references and information on licensing, bonding, and insurance.

NOTE: This is an overview of tree and vegetation retention requirements, for more details and information visit our website at www.cityoffederalway.com.