

D# 18 LANDSCAPING & STREET TREES

General Description

The last major revision of Renton's landscaping codes occurred fourteen years ago and has since been followed by incremental additions and changes. The Planning Division requested this docket item as a more comprehensive review and an update is needed to:

- Consolidate code into a common landscaping section,
- Create greater clarity to increase consistency and predictability for users,
- Eliminate redundancy, and
- Improve aesthetics and provide environmental benefits throughout the City.

Landscaping can be used to create distinctive character for developments, neighborhoods, and along city streets, to frame views and block unsightly views, mitigate the scale of large buildings, and reduce traffic noise and headlight glare. Landscaping also provides environmental benefits such as reducing stormwater runoff, improving air and water quality, and energy efficiency.

Impact Analysis

Effect on rate of growth, development, and conversion of land as envisioned in the Plan

Minimal, if any, impact is foreseen as envisioned in the Plan.

Effect on the City's capacity to provide adequate public facilities

Minimal, if any, impact is foreseen. Specifically for street trees, spacing standards will have to be flexible to not create negative impacts for public facilities such as sidewalks, gas, and water so such facilities function effectively.

Effect on the rate of population and employment growth

Minimal, if any, impact is foreseen. Although, landscaping, especially street trees in commercial districts, provide increasing sales and customer visits according to economic studies, this increase is not expected to affect employment growth significantly.

Whether Plan objectives are being met as specified or remain valid and desirable

Comprehensive Plan objectives are being met as specified and remain valid and desirable. There are a number of related policies found mainly in the Community Design and Land Use Elements including policies for:

- Citywide standards for landscape design, installation, and maintenance (CD-83),
- Using existing vegetation and unique site features (CD-7),
- Requiring landscaping for infill and building alterations (CD-11),
- Landscaping of pervious areas, setbacks, and abutting rights-of-way (CD-34 & 35), (Obj. CD-N), (CD-76),
- Landscaped buffers between different land uses or more intense designations, mitigating for visual and noise impacts, privacy, different heights, etc. (Objective CD-G and related policies)

- List of preferred street and landscape trees (CD-80),
- Tree planting along streets, in parking lots, and other pervious areas (CD-84),
- Landscaped parking areas (CD-85), and
- Landscaping for water retention / detention ponds (CD-94).

The Comprehensive Plan also has Automall district policy guidance for landscaping, although as part of this docket item these standards will not be worked on. Additionally, Comprehensive Plan policies reference a “citywide landscape plan” and a “comprehensive landscape architectural plan.” There are no citywide landscape plans other than the current development standards and the newly adopted Renton Urban and Community Forestry Development Plan. Given the update of the Comprehensive Plan by the City beginning in 2010, these references to a “citywide landscape plan” will be reviewed.

Effect on general land values or housing costs

Landscaping improves general land values. Studies show that yard trees increase property values by as much as 25% (and reduce the amount of time houses take to sell).

Whether capital improvements or expenditures are being made or completed as expected

Not applicable.

Consistency with GMA, the Plan, and Countywide Planning Policies

Landscaping and street tree docket work is consistent with the GMA, the Plan, and Countywide Planning Policies.

Effect on critical areas and natural resource lands

Critical areas and natural resource lands are not impacted.

Effect on other considerations

Landscaping is a significant amenity. Examples of the benefits to our economy are referenced in the Urban and Community Forestry Development Plan, specifically in reference to trees as they increase property values, reduce energy costs, increase economic stability, and reduce the demand on infrastructure (construction of stormwater systems and repair of asphalt).

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends a comprehensive review of current landscape development standards. This includes:

- Review of where landscaping is currently required,
- Evaluation for gaps and redundancies,
- Where clarification is needed, and
- Where updated standards can provide more effective guidance for the user.

Staff also recommends providing interim planting standards for trees in the right-of-way until more comprehensive standards are established through the Urban and Community Forestry

Development Plan. Further, lists of acceptable materials (shrubs, ground cover, and trees) should be made available to provide to users as part of the development process.

LANDSCAPING CODE REVIEW & UPDATE

As part of the comprehensive review, staff has identified elements that should be updated. The table below provides a brief analysis of code elements that should be improved and basic recommendations.

Table A: Landscaping Code Issues and Recommended Changes

Issue	Recommendation
Landscaping regulations are spread throughout the RMC: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zone Development Standards • Parking • Urban Design Regulations • Street Standards • Urban Separator Standards • Grading, Excavation and Mining Regulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidate code sections as feasible, • Reduce redundancies
Plant material consistency/mix not predictable, specific enough	Clarify plant material requirements – at minimum trees, possibly ground cover and shrubs
Minimal maintenance standards	Review and update
Irrigation systems are generally required	Provide greater flexibility and options for drought-tolerant plantings such as hand watering
Phase for required installation	Review and update when landscape installation is required
Pipestem lots lack clear standards	Review and update
Small builders may lack funds for professional to create plan	Create “permit-ready” typical landscape plans approved by a licensed landscape architect for single family dwelling
Performance surety puts cost on City, and enforcement is difficult	Review and update; evaluate an inspection fee in lieu of surety for single family
Parking lots next to residential areas need landscaping buffers	Create new standard for parking areas adjacent or abutting residential zones
Street tree spacing standards needed	Create interim standards
Reference to City-approved tree species, but no list	Review other tree lists and create acceptable species (small, medium, large sizes)
Fences and Hedges code is confusing	Clarify for consistent application

STREET TREES

Currently, the development regulations provide inconsistent and very general spacing standards and requirements for street tree planting. The Urban and Community Forestry Development Plan states the gap where, “regulations to guide tree planting and maintenance are few and do not sufficiently address the concerns of many City staff and the public... for example there are no regulations about planting trees near street lights” (pages 23 and 25). Part of the Renton Urban and Community Forestry Development Plan work program is to create standards. Until that part of the work program is accomplished, interim standards should be recommended through this proposal including a list of acceptable tree species. Staff is working with the Urban Forestry group to create interim standards and a list of acceptable trees.

There are a variety of elements to be aware of when trees are planted, including above and underground utilities, species size, etc. Below are example standards from Seattle and Portland:

Table B: Street Tree Spacing Examples

Distance from (in feet)	Seattle	Portland	Notes (*)
Curb line of intersection	30'	25'	
Face of the curb	3.5'		
Alley margins		5'	
Driveways	7.5'*	5'	*10' recommended
Fire hydrants		5'	
Underground utilities	5'	5'	
Utility Poles	10'*	5'	*10' from power poles (15 recommended)
Directional traffic signs		10'	
Stop or yield signs		25'	
Street lights	20'	25'*	*If a narrower-growing species of tree is selected, the distance may be reduced to 15'
Adjacent existing trees	20'	20'*	*This is determined by species of tree selected and the species of adjacent trees
Water meter		5'	

To see the recently adopted Renton Urban and Community Forestry Development Plan on the internet, go to the following weblink <http://rentonwa.gov/living/default.aspx?id=16702>.

LISTS OF LANDSCAPING MATERIALS

Many jurisdictions have started providing lists of approved and acceptable plant materials. These lists are usually broken into categories for differing materials such as street trees, native plants, drought-tolerant plants, plants amenable to stormwater bioretention areas, etc. Staff is recommending creating a resource list external to the code to be available to project

applicants. The resources may be Renton specific or references to other lists that have been created in the region. Example listings are provided below:

Bioretention Plant List

Appendix 3 - Low Impact Development Technical Guidance Manual for Puget Sound
http://www.psparchives.com/publications/our_work/stormwater/lid/lid_tech_manual05/LID_manual2005.pdf (pages 185-194)

Native Plant List

King County Native Plant Guide
<http://green.kingcounty.gov/GoNative/Plant.aspx?Act=list>

Noxious Weeds

King County, Noxious Weeds List
<http://www.kingcounty.gov/environment/animalsAndPlants/noxious-weeds/laws/list.aspx>

Street Trees

City of Seattle, Street Tree Lists (Small, Medium, and Large Trees)
<http://www.seattle.gov/Transportation/smalltrees.htm>

Stormwater Pond

"Integrated Ponds," King County Land and Water Resources Division
<http://www.kingcounty.gov/environment/waterandland/stormwater/documents/integrated-pond.aspx>

Implementation Requirements

- Planning staff to update code language and standards based on Table A and present these suggested updates to the Commission.
- Staff to work with Urban Forester on creating a list of acceptable street trees and planting standards.