

NEIGHBORHOOD LEADERSHIP GATHERING – FEBRUARY 26, 2019

Q and A with subject matter experts: Matthews Jackson, Jennifer Ewing, Geoff Bradley

Q: Can you elaborate on alternative tree restoration and replacement?

A: The Land Use Code (LUC) requires minimum tree retention of 30% of the diameter inches of significant trees. A significant tree is defined as a tree that is 8 inches or greater in diameter at chest height. This is a minimum requirement and we encourage people to save as many safe existing trees as possible.

Where minimum retention of existing trees is infeasible, an applicant can request an alternative tree retention/replacement plan. For a typical large conifer we would typically require a replacement ratio of three new trees for each one removed.

Q: What are the repercussions from the City if someone wants ALL their trees removed?

A: If a site does not contain critical areas, is not located in the R-1 zone of the Bridle Trails neighborhood, and doesn't have other plat restrictions regarding trees, they may be able to remove all their trees with the appropriate permit. Where trees have been illegally removed without a permit we typically require them to get a retroactive clearing and grading permit which may require double fees. The City does have civil violations for illegal tree removal on both private and public property, however, they have generally only been issued for illegal public lands such as parks.

Q: Is there a 3-6 feet requirement?

A: Where a specific tree height is mentioned in the LUC, it is usually six feet at planting. We have found that trees between three and six feet have a higher survival rate and become better acclimated to their environment.

Q: Does City regulate what replacement trees are planted? Species?

A: The City often will provide guidance for replacement trees or other trees required for mitigation. The preference is to utilize plant materials which complement the natural character of the Pacific Northwest, and which are adaptable to the climatic, topographic, and hydrologic characteristics of the [site](#), and shall include at least 50 percent native species in the required plantings. If the property contains critical areas, the applicant must plant species which enhance that [critical area](#) and [critical area](#) buffer functions. In selecting species, the applicant should utilize plant materials which reduce or eliminate the need for fertilizers and herbicides.

Q: What is the percentage of tree canopy coverage in Bellevue? Is there a decrease of 20%? According to the report there is 20% decrease but the slide you showed does not reflect that.

A: The tree canopy in 1986 was 45%, and it is now 37%, which is an 18% decrease from the 1980's.

Q: Is the City looking to partner with residents? What additional resources are available to residents? Will we know what trees to plant?

A: The City has some resources on the website (www.bellevuewa.gov/trees) regarding tree care and planting and is looking for input from residents on what additional information is needed to help people

care for and plant trees, and for ideas for how to build partnerships with community organizations to help preserve and grow the tree canopy.

Q: What are proposed solutions and concrete actions to get to the goal of 40%? There is no more land for parks or forest. If policy only requires permit to cut 5 trees, the percent will go down, not up. Also, the subdivisions only require 30% tree canopy.

A: As part of the update of the Environmental Stewardship Initiative Strategic Plan, we will analyze strategies for achieving the 40% tree canopy goal, including the impact of preserving and growing the existing canopy along with planting new trees. We will study opportunities for increasing the tree canopy in areas with lower tree canopy, and we will also assess the impact of our existing codes and policies. We will also look at strategies for fostering partnerships with community groups to achieve our goals.

Q: Why do you allow 5 trees to be cut without a permit?

A: In recent years the clearing and grading code was updated to require a permit for the removal of more than five trees. In prior years, the practice had been to allow the removal of up to twenty trees without a permit if there were no critical areas or other restrictions. The amendment to the clearing and grading code was approved by the City Council after discussion.

Q: In Bridle Trails, there is no enforcement of clear cutting. Why not require replacement of trees if there is no development? Why are permits granted?

A: Enforcement of tree regulations in the Bridle Trails neighborhood happens on a daily basis. Due to the large size of the lots and the number of trees it may appear that properties are clear cut even though they are meeting code requirements and have valid permits. In Bridle Trails once a property is down to eight or less trees, replacement is required at a one to one ratio. Replacement in other areas of the city is not always required but could be evaluated in the future.

Q: It seems that the focus is on area relating to canopy. Do you consider height?

Bellevue's tree canopy is comprised of approximately 61% evergreen trees, and 39% deciduous trees, according to the [2018 Tree Canopy Assessment](#). A 37% canopy in Bellevue would actually provide more environmental benefit than a 37% canopy in a municipality which has more deciduous trees or a less mature tree canopy. Unfortunately, at this time there is no available model that allows for an accurate assessment of canopy volume. However, when we are reviewing a permit application for tree removal, we do take into account the diameter of the tree trunk at breast height, which has some correlation to the tree height and environmental benefit of the tree.

Q: How do we think about enforcement and quality of trees? As an example, crowning trees is awful.

A: Pruning of trees should be done per best practice techniques. Topping is not an approved pruning technique and it can result in an unusual growth pattern that will result in a future hazard or it may eventually kill a tree. There are approved techniques such as limbing up and windowing that can improve views and reduce potential wind hazard. You may remove up to twenty five percent of the live canopy using appropriate pruning techniques without any permitting. This type of pruning should be done by a certified arborist.

Q: A few years ago, codes were pushed through regarding tree removal. Can a citizen advisory committee be formed? City needs a foundation to build on for Great Neighborhoods.

A: As part of the Environmental Stewardship Initiative Strategic Plan update, the city is planning a robust public engagement process with Bellevue residents. There are not any plans to form a citizen advisory committee, but there will be ample opportunities for the public to participate in the plan update process and have their voices heard. The dates for further outreach and engagement opportunities are being finalized, and will be posted on www.bellevuewa.gov/environment.

Q: Can a partnership be formed with PSE? There is nothing in the 20 year PSE energy plan about trees. There is no advisory group at PSE about trees.

A: As part of the update of the PSE Franchise Agreement in 2018, the city worked with PSE to update the Vegetation Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) of the Franchise Agreement and established a working group of city staff and PSE arborists to improve pruning and vegetation management practices. PSE has also piloted a tree giveaway program through the Arbor Day Energy Saving Trees Program, and has promoted this program to neighborhoods in Bellevue with a lower tree canopy. The Integrated Resource Plan which PSE is required to develop by the Utilities and Transportation Commission is focused on planning for the demand and supply of electricity, and any vegetation management in Bellevue is governed by the city's franchise agreement and vegetation MOU. To learn more about this topic, go to: <https://bellevuewa.gov/city-government/departments/community-development/planning-initiatives/electrical-facilities-planning>.

Q: Trees are coming down for no apparent reason. What can we do to regulate that?

A: There are many different reasons that a person may want to remove trees. Our permit thresholds are the way we regulate tree removal.

Q: The economics of trees should be built into code enforcement. Can the City charge developers for trees they remove?

A: Civil violations for illegal tree removal can result in fines of two hundred dollars for each significant tree cleared, cut, damaged or removed or the value of each significant tree cleared, cut, damaged or removed, the value to be the replacement value as determined under the methods described in the Guide for Establishing Value of Trees and Other Plants, published by the International Society of Arboriculture, now or as hereafter amended.