



CITY OF RENTON | PERMIT CENTER

REGULATIONS FOR TREE CUTTING AND LAND CLEARING

This handout addresses the most commonly asked questions and provides general information regarding tree cutting, removal, and vegetation management. Please see [RMC 4-4-130](#) for more detailed information.

DO I NEED A PERMIT TO CUT OR REMOVE TREES ON MY PROPERTY?

A Routine Vegetation Management Permit is required for:

- The removal of landmark trees. A landmark tree is defined as a tree with a caliper of twenty-four inches (24") or greater, except for Big Leaf Maples, Black Cottonwoods, and Red Alder trees, which qualify as landmark trees with a caliper of thirty inches (30") or greater.
- The removal of more than two (2) significant trees within a calendar year. A significant tree is defined as a tree with a caliper of at least six inches (6"), except alder or cottonwood trees, which qualify as significant trees with a caliper of eight inches (8") or greater.
- Removing/Trimming trees, mowing/cutting of ground cover, or any vegetation management on a vacant property.

LANDMARK TREE REMOVAL REQUIREMENTS

Removal of a landmark tree must comply with specific criteria that is evaluated through a Routine Vegetation Management Permit. Landmark tree removal may be granted for situations where:

- The tree is determined to be a high-risk tree; or
- The tree is causing obvious physical damage to buildings (over two hundred (200) square feet), driveways, parking lots, or utilities, and it can be demonstrated to the Administrator's satisfaction that no reasonable alternatives to tree removal exists, including tree root pruning, tree root barriers, tree cabling, or preventive maintenance, such as cleaning leaf debris, deadwood removal, or directional/clearance pruning; or
- Removal of tree(s) to provide solar access to buildings incorporating active solar devices. Windows are solar devices only when they are south-facing and include special storage elements to distribute heat energy; or
- The Administrator determines the removal is necessary to achieve a specific and articulable purpose or goal of City code.

PROHIBITED TREE CUTTING AND LAND CLEARING ACTIVITIES

The following tree cutting, removal, land clearing, and ground cover management activities are prohibited:

- Cutting or removal of Landmark Trees without a Routine Vegetation Management Permit.
- Removal of any trees or landscaping required to be retained as part of a "[Land Development Permit](#)."
- Tree cutting, removal, or land clearing on any site for the sake of preparing that site for future development unless a land development permit for the site has been approved by the City.
- Tree cutting, removal, land clearing, or groundcover management within critical areas, critical area buffers, or shorelines of the state, without prior written authorization by the City.
- Tree topping unless the tree has been approved for removal.
- Removal of trees beyond the maximums allowed without an approved Routine Vegetation Management Permit.

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WHEN IS A ROUTINE VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PERMIT NOT REQUIRED?

Except for tree removal or vegetation management within shorelines of the state, critical areas, or critical area buffers, a Routine Vegetation Management Permit is not required for the following activities:

- Removal of a maximum of three (3) high-risk trees within a one (1)-year period, provided no landmark trees are proposed for removal.
- Removal of up to two (2) significant trees within a one-year period, but no more than five (5) significant trees within a five-year period, provided the removal is conducted in accordance with the following requirements:
 - ⇒ There is no active land development permit or application for the subject site;
 - ⇒ The tree proposed for removal is not a protected tree or a landmark tree;
 - ⇒ The tree proposed for removal is not located within 10 feet (10') of a surface parking lot with ten (10) or more parking spaces;
 - ⇒ The tree proposed for removal is not one of the only two (2) significant trees remaining on the lot, unless identified as a high-risk tree; and
 - ⇒ In conducting minor tree removal activities, rights-of-ways shall remain unobstructed unless a right-of-way use permit is obtained.
- Land clearing in conformance with the above restrictions is permitted for purposes of landscaping (i.e. installation of lawns, trees, shrubs, flowers, and ground cover).

TREE REMOVAL AND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT WITHIN CRITICAL AREAS

Tree cutting, tree removal, land clearing, or groundcover management is not permitted:

- On portions of property with protected critical habitats, streams and lakes, shorelines of the state, wetlands, and their associated buffers; or
- On protected slopes (40% or more); or
- In areas classified as very high landslide hazards; or
- In "[Native Growth Protection Easements](#)," areas, or tracts.
- Approval may be granted when trees proposed for removal are identified as high-risk (see above). The City must authorize the removal or pruning of high-risk trees within critical areas, critical area buffers, or shorelines of the state, prior to the removal or pruning.

HIGH-RISK TREE REQUIREMENTS

A tree identified as high-risk must be certified in a written arborist report, prepared by an arborist with an International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ), as possessing the following ISA Tree Risk Assessment characterizations:

- The tree has a probable or imminent likelihood of failure; and
- The tree has a medium or high likelihood of impact; and
- The consequences of failure for the tree are significant or severe.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ARBORIST REPORTS

An arborist report is required for Routine Vegetation Management Permit applications. The arborist report must be prepared by an ISA certified arborist or ASCA certified consultant and include the following:

- The project location, description of proposed development, and description of proposed tree removal; and

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- A conceptual tree removal and retention plan; and
- An inventory of all trees on-site to be retained and removed, with details regarding tree species, size, health, proposed reasons for any removal, and the tree credit value for each tree pursuant to the table shown in RMC 4-4-130.H.1.b, Tree Credit Requirements; and
- In cases where high-risk trees are proposed for removal, the report shall be prepared by an arborist with ISA Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ) and include an ISA Tree Risk Assessment standard form fully completed.

ROUTINE VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PERMIT APPLICATION PROCESS

Submittal requirements are available through the City's "[Submittal Requirements](#)" webpage or from the Planning Division. You must submit a complete application package, including the processing fee (see the City of Renton Fee Schedule). Once a complete application is received by Staff, the application will be reviewed administratively within an estimated timeframe of 2-3 weeks. Approved Routine Vegetation Management Permits are valid for one year.

CITY-OWNED TREES, STREET TREES, TREES IN THE PUBLIC RIGHT-OF-WAY

Permission from the City Forester and/or Administrator must be obtained for the planting, removal, or pruning of City-owned trees, street trees, and trees within the public street right-of-way. Tree removal may be authorized if the tree exhibits a risk to public safety. In order to remove a street tree, the abutting property must provide proof of insurance coverage, a traffic control plan, and obtain a right-of-way use permit. As a condition of removal, replacement street trees may be required. See the "[Urban and Community Forestry](#)" webpage for additional information about public trees and for general resources regarding trees.

TREE REMOVAL ON PRIVATE PROPERTY OR SHARED PROPERTY LINES

Permission from property owners must be obtained before removing or pruning trees on private property that you do not own. Where trees grow on two properties, both owners must agree to the removal. You may prune trees up to your property line provided the work does not adversely impact the tree and the pruning does not exceed more than forty percent (40%) of the tree canopy.

TREES WITHIN HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATIONS (HOA)

Tree removal or maintenance for trees owned by Homeowners Associations (HOAs) must comply with City of Renton regulations regarding tree removal and pruning (see above). Your property may be subject to HOA rules regarding tree removal. Check with the HOA before removing or pruning trees.