

Urban Forest Policy Element

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Section I – Introduction

Vision

The City of Tacoma takes the lead in establishing a citywide tree canopy cover of 30 per cent by the year 2030 ("30-by-30") through effective education, extensive outreach, innovative partnerships and pragmatic implementation strategies.



Copper Beech at Wright Park

Introduction

An urban forest means different things to different people. Depending on one's point of reference, it can be as small as one's yard or the trees in the planting strip or right-of-way, or it can be as obvious and as large as Point Defiance, the entire City of Tacoma or even the Puget Sound region. This element refers to the urban forest as the natural and planted vegetation within the City of Tacoma.

Trees are an integral part of our communities and the ecological systems in which they exist. They provide significant economic, social and ecological benefits, such as carbon sequestration, reduction of the urban heat island effect, energy savings, reduction of stormwater runoff, improvement of water quality, provide healing and calming qualities, and increase the value of business and residential properties. Planting and maintaining trees helps a city become more sustainable and reduce the negative impacts on the ecosystem from urban development. Trees are as necessary as water, infrastructure, and energy to sustaining healthy communities. The health of the urban forest is directly linked to the health of the Puget Sound.

Our urban forest is a collection of individual trees and plants that could be living in traditional landscape settings or forest remnants in parks, open spaces, and private property. It encompasses the living components of the complex urban landscape and is an integral part of Tacoma's infrastructure. Our urban forest influences and is influenced by the built environment that surrounds it. The juxtaposition of built and living creates the environment that is the City of Tacoma. In our urban forest, a single tree may be as important as a patch of forest remnant.

Tacoma's urban forest exists on different types of property that are managed differently depending on ownership, uses, and the vegetation present. Properties where the urban forest can be found include City-owned property, other publicly-owned property, such as parks and schools, private property, and rights-of-way.

Urban forests and forests in developing areas face a number of challenges that rural or wilderness forests do not. A rural forest area is often owned by a single owner or limited number of owners and can be managed through relatively simple single-purpose policies. In contrast, our urban forest is overlaid with a complex set of ownerships, values, and goals with differing maintenance levels and approaches towards tree planting and preservation. Urban forest growing conditions vary greatly from the natural forest processes and are often in conflict with other needs and management goals; therefore, a multi-faceted approach to management of our urban forest needs to be utilized to create a high-quality

human habitat and to strike a balance between the needs of the community and the needs of individuals.

For additional discussion on the importance of trees and open spaces, please see the City of Tacoma Open Space Habitat and Recreation and Environmental Policy Elements, and the City of Tacoma's Climate Action Plan.

Purpose and Intent

The purposes of the Urban Forest Policy Element are to identify and define the common goals and values of citizens, businesses, property owners, and local agencies in our urban forest ecosystem, and to direct and coordinate management in ways that meet the overall intent to promote, conserve, protect and improve our urban forest, while flexibly accommodating a diverse range of land ownerships, uses and activities. Partnerships, such as with Metro Parks Tacoma which is responsible for managing a large portion of the urban forest, are crucial to achieving the goals set forth in this element.

This element was created to help our community better understand our urban forest as an important community resource and asset; to keep our community safe and reduce risks from an improperly managed urban forest; and to achieve a more attractive, healthy and livable city. This can be achieved by shifting our focus and thinking from the existing development model to a different model. A model that recognizes the importance of trees and other vegetation and their interaction with the built environment for the improvement of the quality of life in Tacoma should be used.



Deodara Cedar

This Urban Forest Policy Element strives to preserve, protect, and improve the health and general welfare of the public by promoting the planning, management and preservation of trees and forests. This purpose will be accomplished by providing direction for a range of future actions, including establishing programs, practices, regulations, standards, and guidelines that reflect the best available science and best management practices to result in a safe and healthy urban forest.

The focus of this element is to set forth guidance on managing vegetation on city properties and within the public right-of-way, and providing education and outreach to support citywide actions to manage the urban forest. This approach is in harmony with and supplemental to existing state and federal laws, including, but not limited to, the Forest Practices Act. A point of clarification: because the City is highly urbanized, little or no commercial timber harvest occurs here. Therefore, the City is not exercising its discretion under the Growth Management Act to assume jurisdiction over the regulation of timber harvest from the Washington State Department of Natural Resources.

Benefits of the Urban Forest

A Well-Managed, Healthy Urban Forest:

- Provides opportunities to develop neighborhood and community partnerships that benefit the participants physically, sociologically and psychologically.
- Can lessen the impacts of drought, tree diseases, insect pests, construction, storm damage and stormwater runoff.
- Benefits the entire community economically, aesthetically, and ecologically.
- Supports the conservation, protection and enhancement of Tacoma's watersheds and the Puget Sound, and promotes the health of fish habitat.
- Has a positive effect on surrounding businesses and residences and people's sense of well-being.

The following objectives establish the guiding principles for the intent, policies, and recommendations that follow. The objectives and policies will be used in conjunction with other goals, objectives, and policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

Objectives

- Promote and facilitate communication and coordination among City Departments, as well as Tacoma Public Utilities, Metro Parks Tacoma, Tacoma Public Schools, Port of Tacoma, Puyallup Tribe of Indians, Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, adjacent municipalities, local universities and colleges, non-government organizations community property owners, developers, and contractors, concerning their respective actions that affect the urban forest and urban ecosystem, both within the City and within adjacent jurisdictions.
- Establish incentives and programs, and review and update regulations and standards to support urban forest management and enhancement taking into consideration the needs of differing land uses, both current and future.
- Use the Urban Forest Policy Element as the foundation for an Urban Forest Management Plan and Manual for City staff, agencies, contractors, developers, engineers, and others living or doing business in Tacoma on the maintenance, preservation, and enhancement of the urban forest using the best science and management practices available.
- Increase public involvement in urban forest management and community stewardship.
- Mitigate tree loss and tree damage caused by construction activities, invasive species, and tree diseases and pests.
- Promote sustainable, green streetscapes that provide an amenable, safe, attractive, and comfortable pedestrian environment.
- Explore cost-effective options to increase and sustain the tree canopy in Tacoma to maximize the environmental benefits

including carbon sequestration, cleaner air, improved water quality, interception of rainfall, and infiltration of stormwater, reducing runoff and flooding.

- Reduce infrastructure conflicts with trees.
- Increase the awareness of the urban forest, the urban ecosystem, benefits and how our actions affect the health and livability of Tacoma and surrounding areas.

Expectations and Implementation

The Vision statement sets the goal of achieving 30 percent tree canopy coverage by the year 2030. Achieving this ambitious goal will require both tree retention and planting. It cannot happen solely through planting on public lands, and will require both strong City leadership and widespread public participation. Therefore, education, outreach, incentives and neighborhood tree planting programs are all essential components of reaching the 30 by 30 goal. Setting a canopy coverage goal also calls for an assessment of the existing tree canopy cover, and periodic re-assessments, in order to benchmark progress.

In recognition that this element calls for a change in urban forest management within the city, implementation of policies within this element will be conducted in phases, as resources become available and as directed by the City Council. The phased implementation will be detailed in the Urban Forest Management Plan to be developed as the first implementing action.

Implementation steps may include education and outreach, development and expansion of programs and changes to regulations and standards. Where applicable, implementation steps will be developed with an open public process. Recognizing that there may be costs and other impacts associated with some implementation steps, every effort will be made to be sensitive to differing viewpoints, to solicit input from all stakeholders and to craft an Urban Forestry Program that cost-effectively achieves its goals. Revisions to City permitting and review processes should be integrated into existing codes and processes to reduce duplication and avoid conflicts. Any revision should be crafted to

achieve the intent in a manner that is as streamlined and simplified as possible.

This policy is intended to supplement existing urban forest management goals and policies and to add new policies to address concerns that are not already addressed in the Open Space Habitat and Recreation Element or elsewhere in the Comprehensive Plan. In particular, the Open Space Habitat and Recreation Element provides detailed guidance on the management of urban forest areas located on City open space lands. Together these policies will provide thorough guidance that will serve as a foundation for citizens and staff to manage our urban forest and maximize the benefits to the fullest extent.

Section II – General Policies

The policies listed below are generally applicable and intended for the entire Tacoma urban forest existing in rights-of-way, private and public properties.

Urban Forest Management

Trees are recognized as an essential asset of the City of Tacoma urban forest infrastructure. As with other City infrastructure, regular maintenance and management sustains the benefits provided to the City of Tacoma; however, an urban forest is a unique infrastructure, in that the value and benefits increase with management over time. In contrast, the absence of management can lead to a range of problems including utility conflicts, property damage from fallen trees, and the spread of infectious pests and diseases. Therefore, proper management is necessary for a healthy and safe urban forest for Tacoma's citizens and visitors, including maximizing its contribution to quality of life, wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities.

UF-1 Urban Forest Infrastructure

Consider Tacoma's urban forest together with other infrastructure systems when planning, designing, and/or maintaining infrastructure.

UF-2 Management

Achieve a balance between the competing needs of the environment, budget limitations, utilities and infrastructure, safety, the rights of property owners and the desires of the public.

UF-3 Public Safety

Take reasonable measures to mitigate trees that pose a high level of risk to public health and safety.

UF-4 Resource Needs

Ensure adequate resources to manage Tacoma's urban forest and ecosystem, to educate the public about the benefits of Tacoma's urban forest, to coordinate with others concerning forestry management, and to provide assistance and training on proper forestry practices.

UF-5 Urban Forestry Account

Establish an Urban Forestry Account for the maintenance, preservation, education improvement, and support of Tacoma's urban forest.

UF-6 Funding Sources for Maintenance

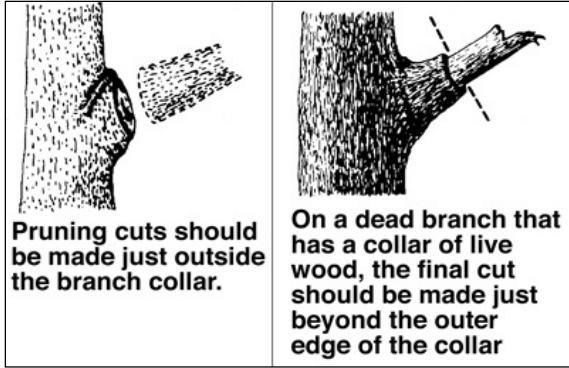
Find or develop new funding sources such as assessment districts, fundraising, donations, grants for projects, or an urban forest utility fee to fund adequate tree maintenance.

UF-7 Urban Forest Management Plan

Create an Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP), consisting of an analysis of existing conditions and a detailed work program for policy implementation. Update the UFMP often to reflect changing policies and regulations, standards, best management practices, and accomplishments.

UF-8 Urban Forest Manual

Create, and regularly update, an Urban Forest Manual using the best available science and current best management practices, accepted standards and guidelines to support the UFMP, and this element.



A drawing demonstrating proper pruning cuts.

UF-9 Citizen Advisory Board

Establish an Urban Forest and Open Space Advisory Board to support the development of the urban forestry program and to take an active role in ensuring increased citizen involvement and oversight of urban forestry and open space activities. The Citizen Advisory Board should be broadly representative of community interests and of pertinent technical expertise.

UF-10 Tree Care Services

Develop an approach to educate tree care firms, or individuals that wish to provide professional tree maintenance services, about Tacoma’s policies, regulations, and standards to ensure the proper care of our urban forest.

UF-11 Tree Valuation

Develop tree valuation methods that closely reflect the complete value of trees for use when assessing fines, determining damages or estimating loss.

UF-12 Coordination of Efforts and Partnerships

Develop partnerships and coordinate and cooperate with federal, state, regional and local governmental jurisdictions, local community non-profits and the private sector, to preserve, restore, manage, and design our urban forest.

UF-13 Public Agencies

Public agencies that maintain an Urban Forestry Program (see glossary) should be given autonomy in meeting the intent and policies of this element in exchange for the sharing of urban forest management data, provided that the agency agrees to periodic review of the agency’s progress in meeting the City’s urban forestry goals.

UF-14 Diverse Land Uses

Develop incentives, programs and/or regulations to meet the intent of this element that are tailored to the needs and characteristics of differing land uses.

UF-15 Equity

Provide equitable urban forest resources and services throughout the city regardless of geographic, racial or social differences.

UF-16 Recognition

Achieve recognition from state and national urban forestry programs. Develop a local recognition program for citizens, businesses, and agencies to encourage community stewardship of the urban forest.

Urban Forest Records and Information

Proper integrated management of our urban forest requires basic information to be collected and readily available, such as quantity of canopy cover, condition and health of the forest, diversity of species, etc. Collecting data on the urban forest will help to reduce risks, identify and target priority planting areas, identify current and desired canopy cover, and quantify benefits provided by the urban forest.

UF-R-1 Historical Records and Information

Collect and make available historical and new urban forestry information to the public.

UF-R-2 Management Data

Collect data regarding Tacoma’s urban forest, such as quantity of canopy cover, forest condition and diversity of species, to support the creation of an Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP).

UF-R-3 Partnerships

Partner with federal, state, regional and local governmental jurisdictions, community non-profits, the private sector and others to share urban forest and ecosystem resources.

Education and Outreach

Public education and outreach are essential parts of any strategy to improve the urban forest.

Education and outreach can expand public awareness of the importance of the urban forest, the benefits offered by this asset, and proper management techniques of this unique infrastructure and therefore increase community stewardship of the urban forest. Strong community stewardship increases the likelihood of meeting Tacoma’s urban forestry goals, increasing community leadership, civic pride and engagement, improved natural systems and a greater understanding by the community.



Fall Tree Festival October 2008- An outreach special event encouraging families to be active in their urban forest.

UF-EO-1 Education

Provide appropriate resources, advice, and educational materials to communicate policies, incentives, standards, and regulations in relation to the management of Tacoma’s urban forest. Increase awareness of urban forest ecosystem issues such as proper plant selection, planting practices, and maintenance, invasive species, insects and diseases, and appropriate use of native species.

UF-EO-2 Promote Stewardship

Increase the awareness of the benefits of street trees and the urban forest, and the threats to their health, through a citywide education effort. Develop programming that leverages the commitment of citizens to engage in stewardship of Tacoma’s natural resources.

UF-EO-3 Incentives

Develop voluntary and incentive-based programs to build broader community support for the urban forest, enhance canopy cover, and flexibility in management.

UF-EO-4 Partnerships

Partner with federal, state, regional, tribal and local governmental jurisdictions, community non-profits, the private sector and others in education and outreach efforts.

Preservation

Preservation of our urban forest ecosystem is critical to achieving the objectives set forth in this element, including an enhanced quality of life for the citizens of Tacoma. Inherently there is a time lapse between the planting of a tree and realizing its full benefits; Tacoma’s urban forest is not easily or readily replaceable. Therefore, preservation of existing healthy trees is crucial. Elements of our urban forest have significant cultural, historical or ecological meaning to residents and deserve to be recognized and preserved for future generations to enjoy. In addition to ecological benefits, an urban forest provides significant return by creating appealing streets, calming traffic, softening the built environment and increasing property values. Trees and forests provide buffering and screening between differing land uses and are a source of community identity and civic pride.

Achieving tree preservation goals will require actions citywide by a broad range of stakeholders. The City will lead by example through responsible planting, care and maintenance of trees on its own property. The City will support and encourage voluntary efforts through incentives, education and outreach, and technical and material support. Incentives to encourage tree retention may include landscaping code modifications, flexibility in City requirements for infrastructure improvements, reductions of City fees related to stormwater management, and other approaches.

UF-PR-1 Retention of Trees

Encourage and promote the retention of trees, whenever practicable and appropriate, through education, outreach and incentives.

UF-PR-2 Flexible Regulatory Approaches

Recognizing differing land use needs and characteristics, structure regulatory approaches in a manner that provides flexibility and various options to support the preservation of trees. Examine regulations to remove disincentives for tree planting, care, and maintenance.



Fencing used around trees to help protect them through construction.

UF-PR-3 Protection of Trees During Development

Promote the long-term health and survival activities of trees that are retained during construction.

UF-PR-4 Heritage Trees

Establish a Heritage Tree Program for the voluntary recognition and protection of trees with unusual or unique historical, ecological, cultural and/or aesthetic significance. Recognize that trees are living things, and all living things have a finite lifespan; therefore, Heritage Trees that are dead or in a state of decline may need to be removed to ensure public safety.

UF-PR-5 Threatened Native Tree Species

Protect rare and threatened species from the impacts of urbanization. Establish incentives, regulations and education efforts to protect and preserve native tree species, especially threatened species such as Oregon White Oaks (*Quercus garryana*) or Pacific Madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*).

UF-PR-6 Native Remnant Forests

Contribute to, and preserve the integrity of, the native remnant forest both within and adjacent to the right-of-way. Encourage the planting of native species, or compatible trees and plants that are found not to be a threat to the ecology of the native forest remnant in adjacent areas.

UF-PR-7 Protect Steep Slopes

Pursue retention of existing trees and vegetation that help stabilize steep slope areas in order to increase public safety, maintain slope stability, decrease soil erosion, and retain environmental function and natural character.

UF-PR-8 Partnerships

Partner with federal, state, regional, tribal and local governmental jurisdictions, community non-profits, and the private sector to increase sound preservation of our urban forest.

Planting, Care and Maintenance

Proper planting, care and maintenance are necessary to ensure that objectives set forth in this element are met and to sustain or enhance the quality of life in the built environment for Tacoma now and in the future. In addition, trees can be used to accomplish other land use goals and should be a significant part of Tacoma’s visual identity, contributing to a special “sense of place” within the Pacific Northwest and bringing a sense of natural beauty to the built environment. Planting and protecting trees in Tacoma will help to maintain strong and healthy neighborhoods and business districts by enhancing Tacoma’s identity and civic pride.



Shovels ready to plant trees.

UF-PCM-1 Planting Priorities

Prioritize tree planting and landscaping in street and freeway rights-of-way, in particular in highly visible locations such as business districts and major corridors. Include utility rights-of-way, parks, school sites, and other publicly owned property when and where appropriate.

UF-PCM-2 Species Selection

Encourage the selection of project, location, and site condition appropriate species. Avoid and/or minimize conflicts with existing public infrastructure, natural systems, and/or utility facilities.

UF-PCM-3 Tree Planting Program

Maintain a tree program to provide free trees for citizens to plant in the rights-of-way. Encourage residents and property owners to plant and maintain trees on their own property, especially in areas where planting strips are too narrow to sustain mature shade trees.

UF-PCM-4 Planting Native Species

Encourage the planting of native species, especially trees, where appropriate.

UF-PCM-5 Tree Canopy Cover

Achieve 30 percent citywide tree canopy cover by the year 2030 as an important step in becoming a healthy and sustainable city.

UF-PCM-6 Demonstration Projects

Develop demonstration projects, in diverse areas representative of the range of land use and development patterns in the City, implementing outreach and education strategies targeted toward achieving the City’s tree canopy goal. Implementation of the demonstration projects should be a high priority in the Urban Forest Management Plan. Learn from what works and implement effective strategies citywide.



New trees at S 23rd and S Alaska St

UF-PCM-7 Invasive Species Removal

Help identify and encourage removal of invasive species and noxious weeds to protect native plant and animal habitat. Provide public education about the detriment of invasive and noxious weed species to the urban forest.

UF-PCM-8 Non-Native Removal

Refrain from removing non-native plants solely because they are non-natives. Plant removal should be related to other valid management policies, including habitat restoration.

UF-PCM-9 Survival of Newly Planted Trees

Promote the survival of newly planted trees through proper maintenance using community education, management standards and regulations. Encourage planting to occur generally between the months of September and April, or if planting occurs during other months, that adequate steps are taken to ensure tree survival.

UF-PCM-10 Landscape Maintenance Management Plans

Ensure that landscaping in new developments is properly cared for and survives, both during the plant establishment period and in perpetuity through such means as landscape management plans, maintenance agreements, and monitoring.

UF-PCM-11 Partnerships

Partner with federal, state, regional, tribal, and local governmental jurisdictions, community non-profits, the private sector and others to increase the reforestation of Tacoma.



A property owner is moving a tree during a neighborhood group planting.

Planning and Design

Proper planning and design provides consistent conditions for growing healthy trees. Trees are an integral aspect of the Tacoma landscape and add to the livability of Tacoma. They provide aesthetic and economic value to property owners and the community at large. Inherently there is a time lapse between the planting of a tree and realizing the full benefits of a mature tree. Therefore preservation of existing mature healthy trees through planning and design is crucial to our health and the health of Tacoma's urban forest.

UF-PD-1 City Design Coordination

Establish coordination among City departments and utility providers when planning and designing public projects that include landscaping and tree planting.

UF-PD-2 Infrastructure Design

Design streets, sidewalks and other infrastructure with thorough consideration of trees during the planning, design and construction processes.



A tree that has overgrown the rooting space it was given.

UF-PD-3 Soils

Encourage retention and use of native soils for areas intended to be used for plants in new developments. Encourage use of soils engineered to be supportive of tree health in planting pits, continuous trenches, planting islands in parking lots, and other similar areas as necessary to provide a sustainable growing environment for trees where native soils and growing conditions are not sufficient or optimal.

UF-PD-4 Soil Compaction

Discourage the compaction of soils and encourage soil amendments in areas intended to be used for plants to increase or maintain infiltration of stormwater on-site and reduce runoff.

UF-PD-5 Landscaping and Stormwater Management

Align the City's landscape regulations and stormwater management manual to promote the integration of landscaping elements and low impact development stormwater management approaches. Emphasize use of techniques which can effectively achieve multiple urban forestry and stormwater management objectives, including native vegetation preservation, native soil retention and soil amendment, stormwater dispersion and infiltration.

UF-PD-6 Partnerships

Partner with federal, state, regional, tribal, and local governmental jurisdictions, community non-profits, the private sector and others to enhance the planning and design of public and private development and improvements in Tacoma.

Sustainable Urban Forest

Sustainability can be described as maintaining a level of ecological balance by avoiding degradation or depletion of a resource. An urban forest that is managed sustainably is healthier and allows more trees to mature and more species to thrive. Healthy forests ultimately increase the ecological, social, and economic benefits of the forest and improve with forest management. In keeping with Tacoma's existing policies to become a more sustainable city, Tacoma's urban forest should be no exception. While preservation, planting, care and maintenance, and the "30 by 30" canopy cover

goal are strategies of urban forestry that meet sustainability goals there are also other ways to increase the sustainability of our urban forest. This section is intended to address those methods.



South Yakima and 6th Ave planting project 2008

UF-S-1 Partnership

Partner with federal, state, regional, tribal and local governmental jurisdictions, community non-profits, the private sector and others to increase the sustainability of Tacoma’s urban forest ecosystem.

UF-S-2 Species Diversity

Provide adequate species diversity and an appropriate mix of tree types (evergreen vs. deciduous). Provide varied forms, textures, structure, flowering characteristics and other aesthetic benefits to enhance the types of street environments found in the City.

UF-S-3 Species Distribution

Encourage varied distribution of species throughout the City to protect the health of our urban forest.

UF-S-4 Mixed Ages

Provide a mixed-age tree population. Recognize and plan for growth and aging of the urban forest over time.

UF-S-5 Green Waste

Recycle all green waste generated by the maintenance of the urban forest. Encourage the highest and best sustainable uses of wood from removed trees.

UF-S-6 Natural Landscape Care

Encourage the practice of natural landscape care.

UF-S-7 Nutrients

Discourage over-fertilization and reduce stormwater runoff pollution by avoiding use of synthetic fertilizers, especially those with high nutrient levels, in landscapes. Encourage the use of low-nutrient naturally derived products to provide a more sustainable nutrient source to the urban forest when needed.

UF-S-8 Green Roofs

Encourage the installation of green roofs on new buildings and retrofits, if possible and practicable. Encourage use of rooftops on existing buildings for container gardening if buildings cannot sustain a green roof.

Urban Agriculture

Urban food production can help provide food security for residents, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and help meet Tacoma’s goal to become a more sustainable city. Urban agriculture encompasses comprehensive and diverse food production--including community gardens and animal husbandry--involving the raising, cultivation, processing, marketing and distribution of food in urban areas. The most striking feature of urban agriculture is that it is integrated into the urban economic and ecological system: urban agriculture is embedded in --and interacting with-- our urban forest ecosystem. Linkages between urban agriculture and our urban forest ecosystem include the use of typical urban resources for both, direct impacts of urban agriculture that are both positive and negative on our urban forest ecosystem, and competition for land with other urban functions. In addition, both are influenced by urban policies and management.

UF-UA-1 Urban Agriculture Program and Partnerships

Create an urban agriculture program. Encourage and assist partners to support and/or create urban agriculture programs and policies. Work with partners to establish a model community garden program, including strategies to increase quantity, quality, security, land use, mitigate soil contamination and address other issues that affect community gardens.

UF-UA-2 Education

Implement an education and outreach program to increase the awareness of the benefits of locally and sustainably grown food. Encourage the use of integrated pest management, sustainable water usage, and natural and organic methods to produce food.

UF-UA-3 Community Gardens

Establish a target level of service for community gardens. Identify and prioritize the establishment of new gardens in the UFMP for areas that do not meet this level of service.

UF-UA-4 Plant Selection

Encourage the use of native and/or regionally produced edible plants or seeds for use in urban agriculture. Educate citizens about the selection and care of plants in a manner that does not threaten the health of the urban forest ecosystem.

UF-UA-5 Support

Increase support for urban agriculture and community gardens through partnerships and resource sharing.

UF-UA-6 Land

Identify existing and potential community garden sites and give high priority to community gardens in appropriate locations, in consideration of the full range of community benefits. Work to secure additional community gardening sites through long-term leases or through ownership as permanent public assets.

UF-UA-7 Zoning

Adopt zoning regulations that establish community gardens as a permitted or conditional use in appropriate locations.

UF-UA-8 New Housing Developments

Encourage new affordable housing units to contain designated yard or other shared space for residents to garden.



Garden tomatoes



Colorful bean flowers in a raised bed garden

UF-UA-9 New Construction

Encourage development in Mixed-Use Centers, Downtown, and commercial areas to incorporate green roofs, edible landscaping, and the use of existing roof space for community gardening. Community garden space should count towards open space requirements.

UF-UA-10 Security

Encourage local law enforcement to recognize the risk of vandalism of and theft from community gardens and provide appropriate surveillance and security to community gardens. Recognize that the community itself should assist law enforcement in addressing security concerns.

More discussion of this topic can be found in the Open Space, Habitat and Recreation Element.

Section III – Rights-of-way and Public Property

The policies below are intended to apply solely to the urban forest on rights-of-way and City-owned properties.

Ownership of Forest/Trees

Proper management of the urban forest includes an understanding and agreement of who is responsible for maintaining and who owns trees and vegetation in the rights-of-way. Street trees are trees growing in the rights-of-way, usually next to an improved surface, such as a street, alley, or sidewalk. The policies below are intended to help ensure that the maximum benefits are enjoyed from our urban forest through clarifying ownership and maintenance responsibilities.

UF-ROW-1 Partnerships

Develop partnerships for maintenance and enhancement of the rights-of-way and public property, such as Business Improvement Areas, Local Improvement Districts, and community stewardship groups.

UF-ROW-2 Unimproved Rights-of-Way

Trees and other vegetation in unimproved rights-of-way are typically owned by and shall be the responsibility of the abutting property owner to maintain in perpetuity with proper permitting. Exceptions include maintenance necessary for utilities such as overhead power lines. Unimproved rights-of-way may be used, when appropriate and with the proper permitting and design review, for natural drainage systems to manage stormwater, urban forest management, or urban agricultural purposes.

UF-ROW-3 Improved Rights-of-Way

Trees and other vegetation in the improved rights-of-way are typically owned by and shall be the responsibility of the abutting property owner to maintain in perpetuity, with proper permitting, unless the trees and other vegetation were planted by and/or routinely and historically maintained by the City or other public agency. Exceptions include maintenance necessary for utilities such as overhead power lines. Improved rights-of-way may be used, when appropriate

and with the proper permitting and design review, for natural drainage systems to manage stormwater, landscaping, or urban agricultural purposes.

UF-ROW-4 Medians

Medians that are planted within the City on public streets, unless otherwise designated, shall typically be the responsibility of the City of Tacoma to maintain. Medians may be used for natural drainage systems to manage stormwater or landscaping. Where there are safety concerns, medians should not be used for community gardens.



South Tacoma Way Median

UF-ROW-5 Traffic Circles, Cul-de sac Islands & Bulb-outs

Traffic circles, cul-de-sac islands bulb-outs and other similar traffic calming devices in neighborhoods are typically the responsibility of the neighborhood to maintain with proper permitting. Encourage planting of trees and shrubs that are low maintenance. Plantings shall not pose a public safety hazard. Due to safety concerns, traffic circles, bulb-outs, and other similar traffic calming devices should not be used for community gardens.

UF-ROW-6 Roundabouts

Roundabout center islands shall typically be the responsibility of the City to maintain. Roundabouts should be planted in accordance with traffic guidelines. Due to safety concerns, roundabouts should not be used for community gardens.

UF-ROW-7 Review Maintenance Approaches

Consider potential approaches for the City to support, facilitate and/or actively manage the ongoing maintenance of street trees, in recognition of the benefits they provide to the public and the capacity of the City to effectively maintain them.

Planning and Design Within the Right-of-way and on City Property

Street trees provide invaluable benefits to the public. Street tree planting and design standards facilitate achieving Tacoma’s desired tree canopy coverage, and enhance the overall appearance of commercial and neighborhood development. In a built environment such as Tacoma, conflicts between the infrastructure systems are inevitable. The policies below are intended to reduce the frequency and severity of those conflicts that affect the urban forest. In addition, the City will seek every opportunity to lead by example when developing City-owned property.

UF-RPD-1 Recommended Street Tree List
Maintain and update the Recommended Street Tree List. Encourage diverse plantings in developments, especially those that support wildlife habitat.

UF-RPD-2 Poor Practices
Prohibit poor practices that harm the health of the tree, such as topping or indiscriminate pruning, and the inappropriate use of spikes, of street trees and trees located on City land.

UF-RPD-3 Air and Root Space
Increase the dedicated airspace and dedicated root volume available for street tree planting to provide better accommodation of large canopy street trees and assist with achieving the optimum canopy coverage goal.



A continuous trench with pavers



Installation of alternative sidewalk material

UF-RPD-4 Tree Grates
Discourage the use of tree grates due to maintenance, rooting volume and expense concerns. Consider open boulevards, continuous trenches, or alternatives to tree grates, such as other landscaping, before the use of tree grates.

UF-RPD-5 Avoid Conflicts Between Trees and Sidewalks
Aim to preserve trees when sidewalk infrastructure conflicts occur, whenever practicable and appropriate, provided the species is appropriate for its location per City regulations and standards. Explore the use of alternative sidewalk materials as appropriate.

UF-RPD-6 Removal of Inappropriately Located Trees

Implement a voluntary removal/replacement program of inappropriately located trees within the rights-of-way, such as under overhead utility lines, to reduce tree/infrastructure conflicts.

UF-RPD-7 New Plantings Near Existing Utilities

Develop standards and educate the public about appropriate species when planting under overhead utilities, over underground utilities and adjacent to streets to reduce future conflicts.



Inappropriate trees under power lines

UF-RPD-8 Buildings

Allow street trees and trees located on City-owned property to be trimmed away from buildings, if desired by the abutting property owner. Such pruning shall be conducted in a manner and to the extent that does not significantly harm the tree(s) and with the proper permit.

UF-RPD-9 Business Signs

Allow street trees to be trimmed to increase visibility of business signs. Such pruning shall be conducted in a manner and to the extent that does not significantly harm the tree(s) and with the proper permit. Encourage the use of non-traditional signage or placement of signage below the canopy for increased visibility. Educate business owners about the value of trees to their businesses.

Removal of Trees within the Right-of-way and on Public Property

Despite the best of our intentions to preserve and protect Tacoma's urban forest, sometimes trees need to be removed. Trees can be removed for various reasons, some of which may include threats to public safety, right-of-way improvements or maintenance, or consistency with a management plan. Trees are living things with a finite lifespan, particularly in a built environment with multiple goals and expectations to balance. The intent of the policies below is to provide guidance on when to remove a tree located within the right-of-way and how to prevent unnecessary tree loss.

UF-REM-1 Existing Street Trees

Retain existing street trees whenever practicable, appropriate and desired by the abutting property owner(s). Provide education and assistance for their necessary care.

UF-REM-2 Existing Trees on City Land

Retain as many mature trees as practicable and appropriate during development of City owned land.



A severely damaged tree before removal

UF-REM-3 Tree Removals from Streets and City Property

Discourage the removal of safe, healthy and appropriate trees located on City property or within rights-of-way, while recognizing the abutting property owners' discretion to remove street trees, with proper permitting.

UF-REM-4 Posting Public Notice

Notify the public of impending removals of mature trees located in the rights-of-way and on City properties.

UF-REM-5 Permit Requirements

Establish a fee for removal permits for mature trees located in the right-of-way.

UF-REM-6 Replacements

Require the replacement of trees removed from rights-of-way and City properties. Replacements should at least be equivalent at maturity to the canopy cover lost or quantity of tree(s) removed, whichever is practicable.

and an interesting and memorable horizon point for vistas from the hills and flatland neighborhoods that surround it.

The intent of this section is to recognize that Tacoma's hillsides have aesthetic values, natural resources (soil, wildlife, vegetation), safety hazards (susceptibility to landslides, erosion, and fire), and access constraints that limit their capacity for development. This policy aims to achieve an appropriate balance between public scenic views and conservation of the City's topography and green spaces.

Views provide a variety of significant and tangible benefits for both residents and visitors to the City. Views contribute to the economic environment of the City by substantially enhancing property values. Views contribute to the visual environment of the City by providing inspiring panoramas and distinctive supplements to architectural design. Views contribute to the cultural environment of the City by providing a unifying effect, allowing individuals to relate different areas of the City to each other in space and time.

Scenic Areas



Views and vistas of some sort are afforded from almost everywhere in Tacoma. The City's topography and setting provide a variety of interesting and panoramic views. From open hillsides, one can see as far south as Mt. Rainier, as far north as Maury and Vashon Islands, as far west as the Olympic Mountains, and as far east as the Cascade Mountains. Views from the flatlands may be equally dramatic, taking in the broad sweep of hillsides and features across the water such as Gig Harbor, Browns Point, and the Downtown skyline. Downtown is a visual landmark, creating both interesting and dramatic vistas from within

This section seeks to provide guidance for balancing the often conflicting objectives of view enhancement, maximizing the health of the urban forest, and protecting steep slopes and other critical areas, specifically on City-owned land. The City's standard approach to management of its forested lands is to prioritize urban forest health, and to allow only limited and sensitive tree pruning for the purpose of improving private views. In the case of publicly beneficial views over City owned land, the City recognizes that both the public views and the urban forest are important. Therefore, City management decisions should strike a balance between enhancing public views and other objectives, including maintaining urban forest health, slope stability, critical areas health, natural character and other issues, while also taking into account any policies or objectives that may apply specifically to the area.

This section includes a list of public views over City or parks owned land. The list is not intended to represent all valuable public views in the City, but specifically to provide guidance for when tree-view conflicts exist over city or parks land. Additional publicly beneficial views over City or parks owned lands may be identified and added to this list through future action.

The policies below are intended to apply solely to the urban forest on rights-of-way and City-owned properties.

UF-SA-1 Public Views Established

The following scenic views over public property and rights-of-way are recognized as publicly beneficial to Tacoma. Other public views which can be demonstrated to have a similar value to the public may also be considered Public Views:

- Views from Stadium Way of Commencement Bay, Browns Point and Mt. Rainier
- Panoramic views from Ruston Way of Commencement Bay, Vashon and Maury Islands, Mt. Rainier
- Views from N Stevens St of Mason Gulch, Commencement Bay and Browns Point
- Views from Marine View Drive of the Port, Commencement Bay, and Downtown Tacoma
- Views from Narrows Drive of The Narrows, bridges and Gig Harbor
- Views from designated viewpoints within Point Defiance Park
- Views of downtown, Commencement Bay and the Cascades from McKinley Hill
- Views of the Cascades from East Grandview Drive



UF-SA-2 Public Views Protected

Protect designated publicly beneficial views through proper ongoing maintenance and management of open space areas, subject to resource availability.

UF-SA-3 New Plantings

New planting on public property should consider the potential impact on designated publicly beneficial views and seek a balance between view and habitat restoration objectives.

UF-SA-4 Overlooks and Pullouts

Explore the development of scenic overlooks and pullouts where the terrain allows, keeping conservation of natural features and habitat areas in mind.



UF-SA-5 Enhance Underutilized Visual Resources

Enhance Tacoma's underutilized visual resources, including the waterfront, creeks, architecturally significant buildings or landmarks, and major thoroughfares. Encourage the development of plazas, pocket parks, pedestrian walkways, and rooftop gardens in Tacoma's major activity centers and enhance the appearance of these and other public spaces with landscaping and art.

UF-SA-6 Achieve Balance

Achieve a balance between the often-conflicting needs/desires of the public and private interest in trees and vegetation through accepting, allowing and working toward partial views over or through city properties and rights-of-way.

UF-SA-7 Steep Slopes and Views

Protect the integrity and stability of steep slopes during view enhancement through creation of partial views and reforestation with view friendly vegetation.

UF-SA-8 Planned Landscaping

In the case of areas that have been landscaped to enhance the pedestrian experience, such as parkways and boulevards, the landscaping plan/design should be given precedence in tree management decisions.

UF-SA-9 Partnerships

Partner with the community, the private sector and others to achieve a balance between public and private needs/desires, maintain or enhance partial views, and decrease environmental impacts due to tree and vegetation removals.

Further discussion of this topic can be found in the Open Space, Habitat and Recreation and Environmental Elements of Tacoma's Comprehensive Plan.

Section IV – Glossary

NOTE: This glossary seeks to clarify terms used only within this element, and is not intended to apply to other elements or City documents except where specifically noted.

Affordable housing shall have the same meaning as described in Chapter 13.06 of the Tacoma Municipal Code.

Continuous trenches, and boulevards, also called planting strips, shall have the same meaning as described in Chapter 10.14 of the Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC). They are a shared planting pit that accommodates several trees and their root systems in a streetscape design.

Disturbance means the interruption of settled soil by excavation or fill.

Establishment period is the time following the transplanting/installation of trees for a minimum of three years where maintenance is crucial to the survival of trees.

Green Roof is the roof of a building that is partially or completely covered with vegetation and soil, or another growing medium, planted over a waterproofing membrane.

Heritage Trees are trees that have been voluntarily nominated, publicly recognized as valuable to the citizens of Tacoma, and designated for protection from removal, due to their unusual or unique historical, ecological, cultural and/or aesthetic significance.

Landscape management plan or management plan means a comprehensive plan addressing the long-term goals and strategic planning related to vegetation planting, pruning, removal, and maintenance needs to encourage the sustainability of the urban forest.

Maintenance includes planting, pruning, trimming, watering, feeding, protecting, and any other activity intended to help a tree achieve its mature size, full environmental function, and ensure public safety.

Mature Tree is a tree that measures at least 6-inches in diameter at standard height (4½ feet above existing soil grade, also known as diameter at breast height).

Native Species, in reference to the urban forest, shall mean plants that were historically found in the Puget Sound region and which are ecosystem appropriate.

Natural Drainage Systems mean methods of stormwater management methods such as rain gardens and bioswales. Please refer to the Surface Water Management Manual for more information.

Partial view means less than 180 degree unobstructed views of water, land or other commonly desirable views. Partial views consist partly of trees and other plants as well as windows or clearings through the vegetation for views.

Planting pit is a tree planting site that is surrounded on all sides by paved surfaces. A typical planting pit is an opening in the sidewalk of an otherwise paved boulevard or plaza. It may be raised, sunken, or at the same level as the surrounding pavement.

Right-of-way includes the area of land, the right to possession of which is secured by the City for right-of-way purposes and includes the traveled portion of the public streets and alleys, as well as the border area, which includes, but is not limited to, any sidewalks, planting strips, traffic circles, or medians. “Right-of-way” may also be unimproved, such as rights-of-way without pavement and/or grading.

Roundabout is a circular intersection, typically on arterial streets or highways, with yield control at the entrances and a raised center island. A roundabout may have two or more lanes of traffic around the island and generally has a truck apron so that all vehicles can traverse the intersection.

Site Plan Review shall have the same meaning as described in Chapter 13.11 of the Tacoma Municipal Code.

Steep Slopes areas are generally defined as areas with 40% or greater slope. In some cases, areas with less than 40% slope will require special consideration due to soils, drainage or

other factors (see the City's Critical Areas regulations).

Street tree means a tree whose trunk is wholly or partially located within the right-of-way.

Traffic circle is a small raised island in the center of a residential intersection around which traffic circulates.

Tree is a woody perennial that generally matures over fifteen feet in height, generally has a minimum mature canopy width of ten feet and is capable of being shaped and pruned to develop a branch-free trunk to at least seven feet in height.

Tree Canopy - Per the Evergreen Communities Act (RCW 35.105.210 (10)) "Tree canopy" means the layer of leaves, branches, and stems of trees that cover the ground when viewed from above and that can be measured as a percentage of a land area shaded by trees.

Tree Care consists of the maintenance of trees including, but not limited to, pruning, fertilizing, pest or disease treatment, and removal.

Tree Unit is a measurement of tree density that calculates a quantity of units based upon sizes, conditions, and locations of trees on a site prior to development.

Urban agriculture encompasses a wide range of activities--including community gardens--involving the raising, cultivation, processing, marketing and distribution of food in urban areas.

Urban ecosystem shall mean the relationships of living things, including people, and the built environment. In an urban ecosystem, humans influence ecological factors such as plants, air, soil, and animals. Human decisions, such as where to build houses, parks, highways, and schools, are influenced by ecological factors.

Urban Forest Manual is a compilation of City Urban Forestry practices and standards developed using the best available science and current best management practices.

Urban Forester is a qualified person whose responsibility is to maintain the urban forest.

Urban forestry is the art and science of planning, managing, and protecting natural and planted vegetation in urban areas.

Urban forest management data consists of information such as quantity of canopy cover; forest condition; diversity of genera, species and age class; and identification of pests, diseases and management needs.

Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) consists of identification and analysis of the structure and nature of the urban forest (including identified areas for enhanced protection, such as historical areas and/or areas with high quantity of threatened species) and the effectiveness of specifications and policies impacting said urban forest. The plan will include the following:

- Prescribed precautions to protect ecosystem health and mitigate the probability of catastrophic events such as fire
- Prioritize planting locations
- Define methods to begin addressing conflicts between trees and infrastructure, canopy loss, and forest health decline
- Identify maintenance issues and practices and define protocols and standards to measure urban forest conditions and health
- Address operations and management of the urban forest
- Recommend education and marketing options to promote the plan
- When necessary, complete a programmatic environmental review.

Urban Forestry Program consists of a minimum of the following: An Urban Forester to manage vegetation and carry out an UFMP with supporting goals and management policies consistent with this element.