

# Summary of Comments from May 30, 2015 Urban Forestry Summit

## Introduction

The Lake Oswego City Council hosted an urban forestry summit on Saturday, May 30, from 9:00 a.m. to noon, at the Lake Oswego Adult Community Center. The summit served as the kickoff event for the Council's goal to "convene a community dialog on the tree code". About 70 people attended the summit, with the vast majority being residents of the City. Approximately 20% of the attendees indicated that trees or urban forestry were involved in some aspect of their profession.

During the summit, attendees participated in instant polling surveys, listened to presentations by local tree experts on the benefits and management of urban forests, and then broke out into small groups facilitated by members of the City Council and other City boards. Attendees were also invited to fill out comment sheets.

While some attendees suggested that the Tree Code be repealed and others thought it shouldn't be changed at all, the majority of the comments centered around changes to the existing Tree Code that would increase flexibility for the removal of trees on developed single-family lots. Below is a summary list of the comments from the small group discussions and the comment sheets.

## Summary of Comments

Several participants commented on the City's current approach to tree regulation:

- The current Tree Code provides a "disincentive" to plant new trees because property owners know that they will need a permit if they want to remove the trees later on. This leads to the retention of larger, more mature trees, but with fewer younger trees to replace them when they die.
- The current Tree Code ignores the existing conditions on a parcel. Thinning should be allowed on treed lots. Access to sunlight is a quality of life issue.
- Trees are great, but they do not always add value to a property. They can cause costly damage to structures and utilities and are expensive to remove. The Code does not provide options or flexibility for removal under these types of circumstances.
- A big issue is development in Lake Grove. Large homes are being built on lots with stands of mature firs and too many trees are being removed. Many residents recognize the value of our natural resources, but our City government does not.
- A one-size fits all approach doesn't work for large developments like condo or apartment complexes that have a lot of trees to maintain. Mitigation requirements are particularly troublesome when trees are being removed because they were inappropriately planted or need to be thinned.
- The City's tree regulations are not stringent enough. Tree removal impacts neighborhood character and immediate neighbors.
- The current regulations pit neighbors and/or builders against each other.

There were many suggestions on the general approach the City could take on regulating trees:

- The focus of tree regulation should be shifted from managing individual trees to communities or clusters of trees.
- The preservation of old growth/mature trees in the City is important. The City should have an arborist reviewing tree permits.
- If a person planted a tree on their property, they should be able to remove it later without needing a permit from the City.
- Repeal the Tree Code and provide incentives to plant and manage trees instead.
- Allow more flexibility to remove trees for common issues; for instance, thinning on lots that have a lot of trees, removal of undesirable species, for fire protection and safety, solar access, etc.
- Tree regulation should be scientifically-based.
- The City needs to be clear about the goal of the Tree Code and to find a balance. Education and outreach should be a component.
- There should be more flexibility for removal and maintenance of trees on developed residential lots.
- A revised tree policy should focus more on maintaining clearance over sidewalks and streets and maintenance of trees on private property to reduce safety issues on abutting lots.
- Continue and increase assessment of the condition and nature of existing tree canopy in the City. Consider differences in neighborhoods, implement common sense amendments to the code (e.g. raise minimum diameter and allow thinning) and increase education and outreach.
- In regards to the First Addition-Forest Hills neighborhood, there should be more careful consideration (or perhaps a moratorium) on the removal of old growth Douglas fir trees.
- Tree removal for new development and in open spaces should be regulated differently than developed single-family lots.
- What individual property owners do with their trees impacts the neighbors so it is important to have rules.
- Developers have short-term goals and must be closely regulated.
- Take advantage of resources like the OSU Extension Office to develop a master plan.
- Keep the current regulations.
- Review the current code to address the community's concerns, but maintain our "Tree City" characteristics.

Several comments and suggestions were made regarding tree code regulations and removal process:

- The decision for tree removal on a lot can be left to the neighbors. If they approve in writing, the trees can be removed, but if neighbors don't agree, then the removal could be reviewed by the City.
- Allow homeowners to remove up to three trees within three years without regulation.
- Increase tree size thresholds for permits.
- Eliminate all ambiguity in the Tree Code.
- Allow for neighborhood-specific tree code requirements and/or targets.
- The tree removal process needs to be more streamlined. The criteria need to be more balanced.
- Allow for tree permits to be submitted online.

- Should allow the removal of trees for view purposes.
- Need to define “significant trees” and values to preserve and enhance their role in urban forests.
- The role of habitat value should be included in tree code provisions.
- Mitigation shouldn’t always be required, especially on wooded lots.
- The tree permit process is way too cumbersome and expensive.
- Need more flexible regulations, especially regarding trees causing damage and thinning on wooded lots.
- Restore the Community Forestry Commission.
- Focus on public education to assure the right tree in the right place.
- Whatever regulations come about, they should be enforceable, flexible and predictable.
- Require developers to maintain a certain percentage of existing trees on a lot instead of allowing them to denude entire lots.
- There should be more stringent regulations on tree removal for infill lots.
- Hazard tree permits are being abused by developers to allow the removal of viable trees. Consider requiring an arborist that is not associated with the company removing the tree to evaluate the tree, requiring the arborist to be risk assessment certified, or only allow City-designated arborists to do hazard evaluations.
- Fruit trees and trees less than 10” in diameter should not be regulated.
- Require mitigation with larger caliper trees and mitigation fees should be put in a forest management fund.
- Fees should be tied to the size of the tree. Higher fees for larger trees.
- Require PGE to completely remove trees below power lines rather than disfigure them.
- Homeowners should be allowed to count trees that they previously planted as mitigation.
- Should incentivize the retention of existing trees.
- The recent regulations adopted for large forested tracts is a step in the right direction.
- The tree program should pay for itself.

A few participants commented on other City regulations that impact trees:

- Lot coverage should be strictly regulated and exceptions should not be allowed.
- Total impervious surfaces on a lot should be limited.
- The homes that are being developed are too large.