

One Seattle Urban Forestry

Office of Sustainability & Environment
Office of Planning & Community Development
Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections

Presentation to the Council Select
Committee on the Comprehensive Plan
April 30, 2025



City of Seattle

Introductions & Outline

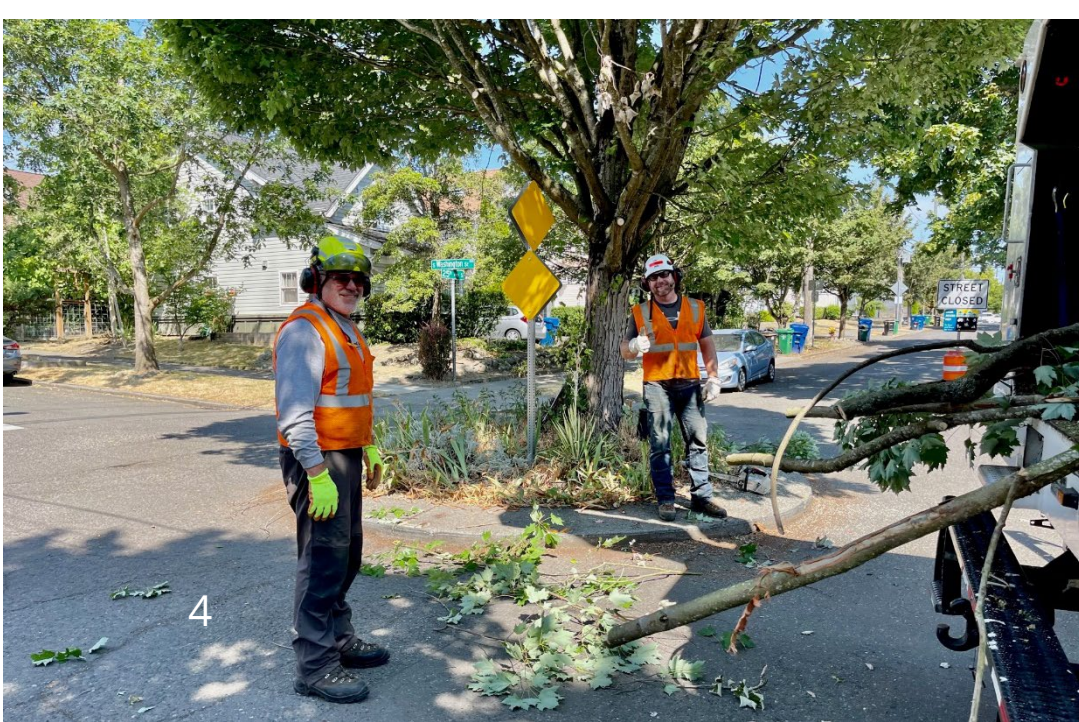
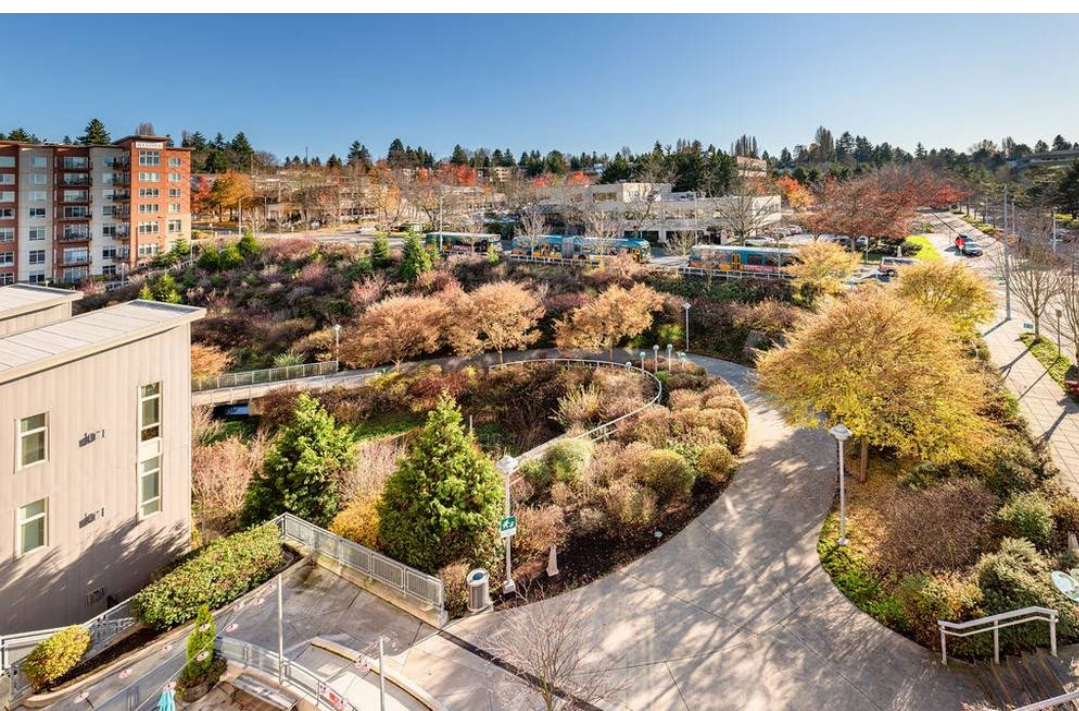
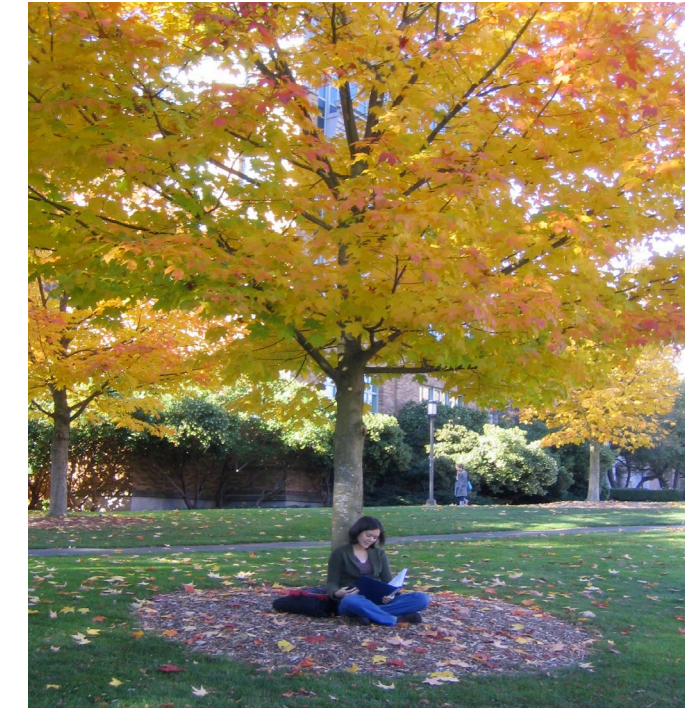
- Overview of Seattle's urban forest
- Citywide approach to managing our urban forest on public & private land
- Special topics:
 - 2023 Tree Ordinance Update
 - One Seattle Comprehensive Plan
- New & Upcoming Efforts



One Seattle Vision

A healthy, thriving Seattle needs more housing AND more trees - we can achieve both

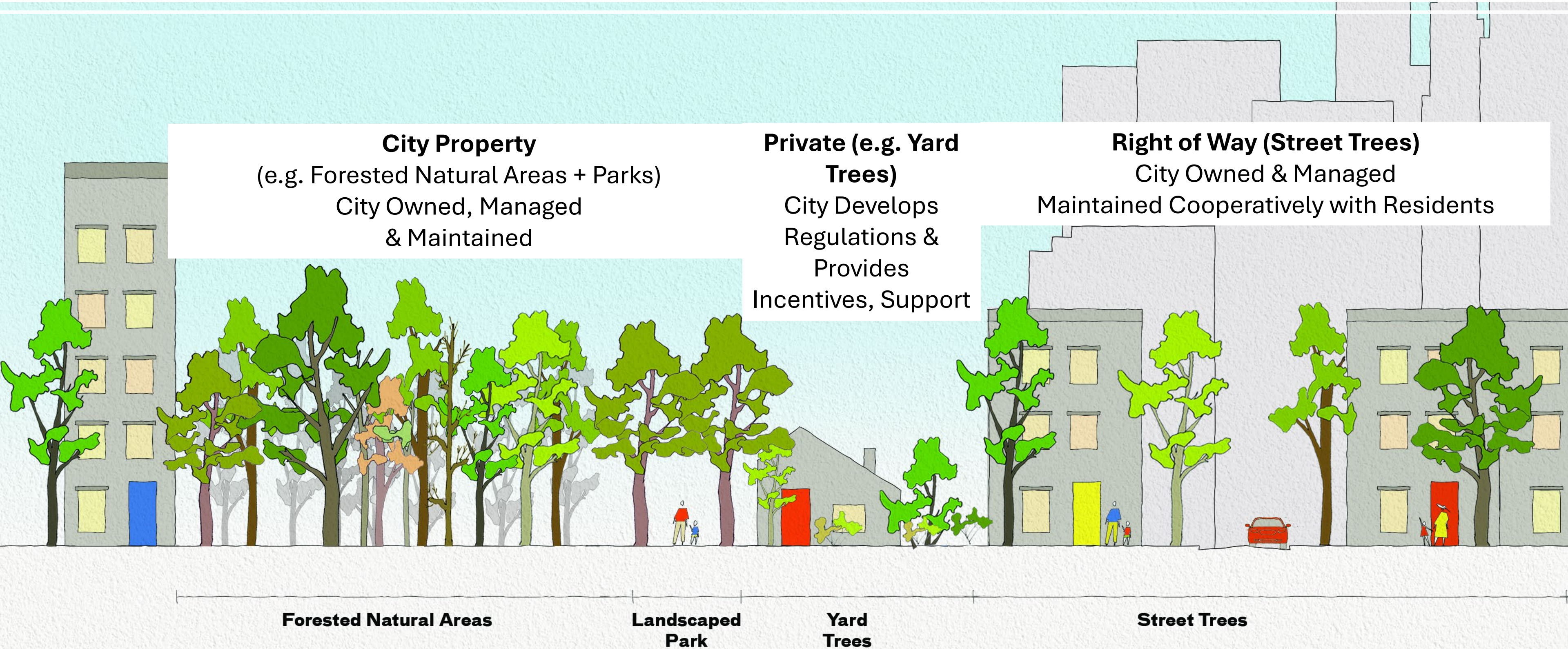
Part of this vision is achieving our goal of at least 30% canopy coverage that is equitably distributed across the city by 2037



Seattle's Urban Forest

05/18/2015

Public & private land make up our urban forest



Integrated Urban Forest Management



Most of Seattle's Canopy is in Right of Way, Parks, & Neighborhood Residential



Right of Way (ROW)

% of City = 27%

% Total City Canopy = 23%



Natural Areas + Developed Parks

% of City = 9%

% Total City Canopy = 19%



Neighborhood Residential

% of City = 39%

% Total City Canopy = 47%

Urban Forests Face Complex Challenges

Stressful Growing Conditions

- Climate pressures + summer drought stress
- Pests + disease
- Soil volume + condition
- Aging trees



Space Limitations & Competing Priorities

- Competition for space below and above ground
- High impervious surfaces
- Costs of tree establishment & maintenance

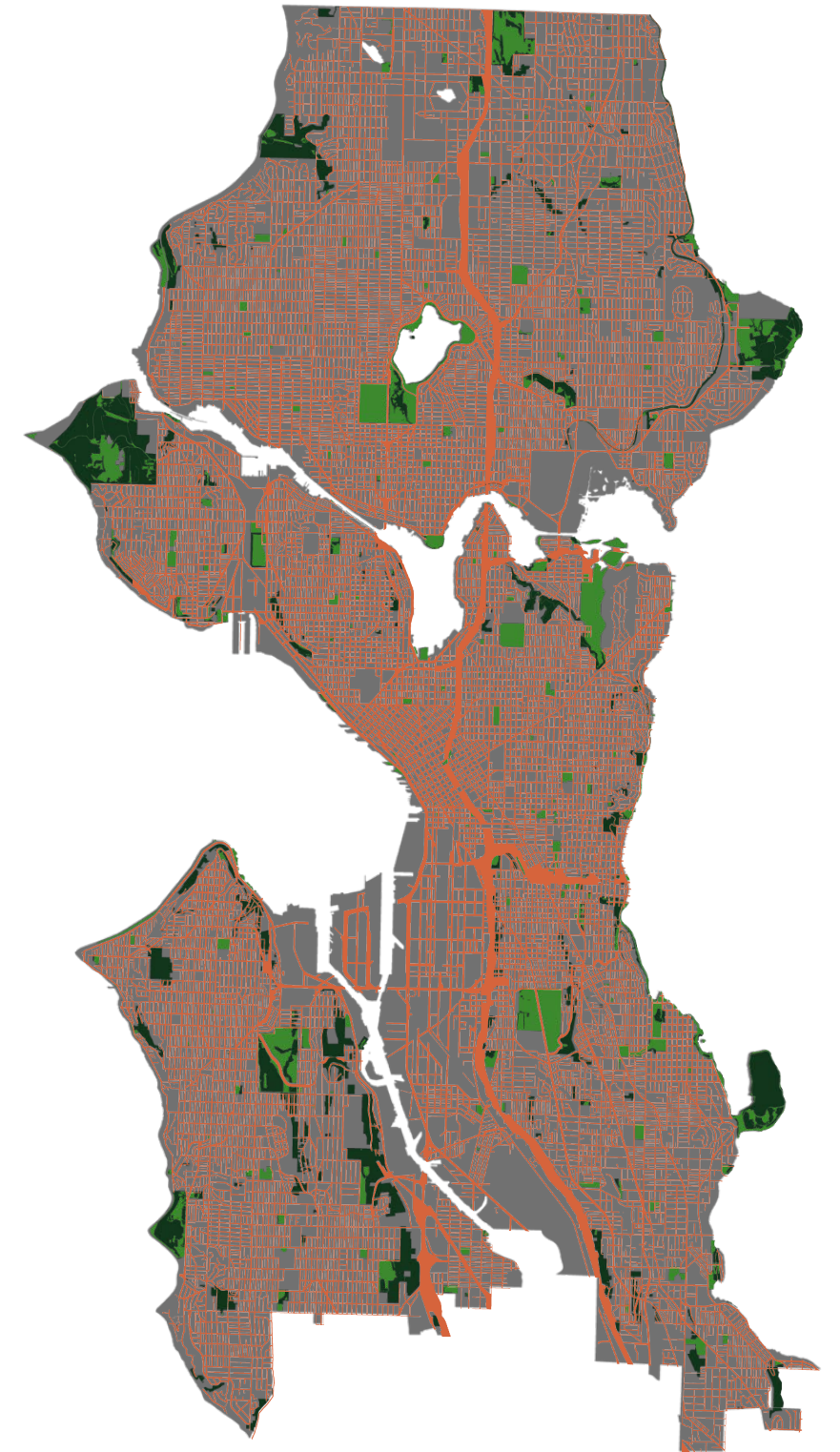


Public Land

Managing and Maintaining Trees on City Property

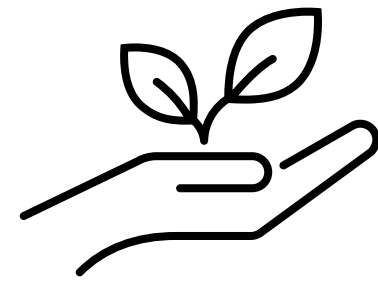
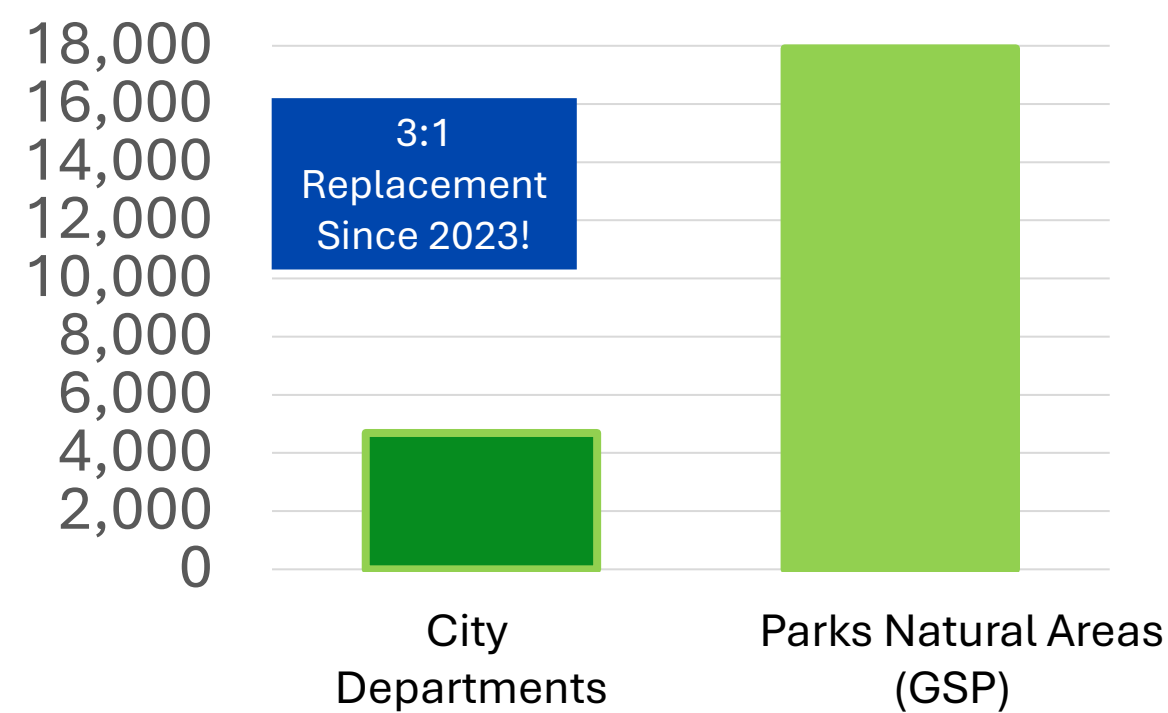
City Land is a Key Opportunity Area to Grow our Tree Canopy

- Parks and ROW alone make-up 42% of Seattle's tree canopy and 36% of our land area
- Everyone has access to tree benefits
 - ROW acts as connective tissue throughout the City
 - 99% of residents live within a 10-minute walk to a park
- We can manage public lands to provide all communities access to our urban forest and the benefits it provides

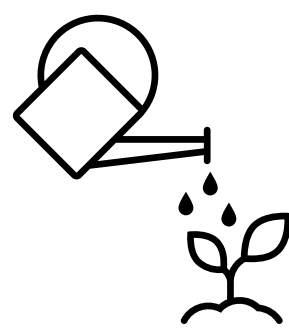


We Grow Thousands of Trees Every Year

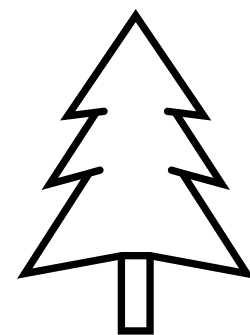
Trees Planted in 2023 & 2024



Plant



Establish



Maintain

Coordination & Planning for Multiple Benefits

- Optimize public spaces to meet multiple mandates, including tree canopy
- Set holistic priorities
- Deepen coordination & collaboration



Safe sidewalks and healthy street trees (SDOT)

Partnering with Residents to Plant and Care for Trees in our Public Spaces

- Residents plant & maintain around 75% of Seattle's ~250K **street trees**
- SDOT permitting, guidance



- Green Seattle Partnership, since 2005
- **Public private partnership** to care for Seattle's forested parklands
- **Volunteer opportunities** almost every day of the year

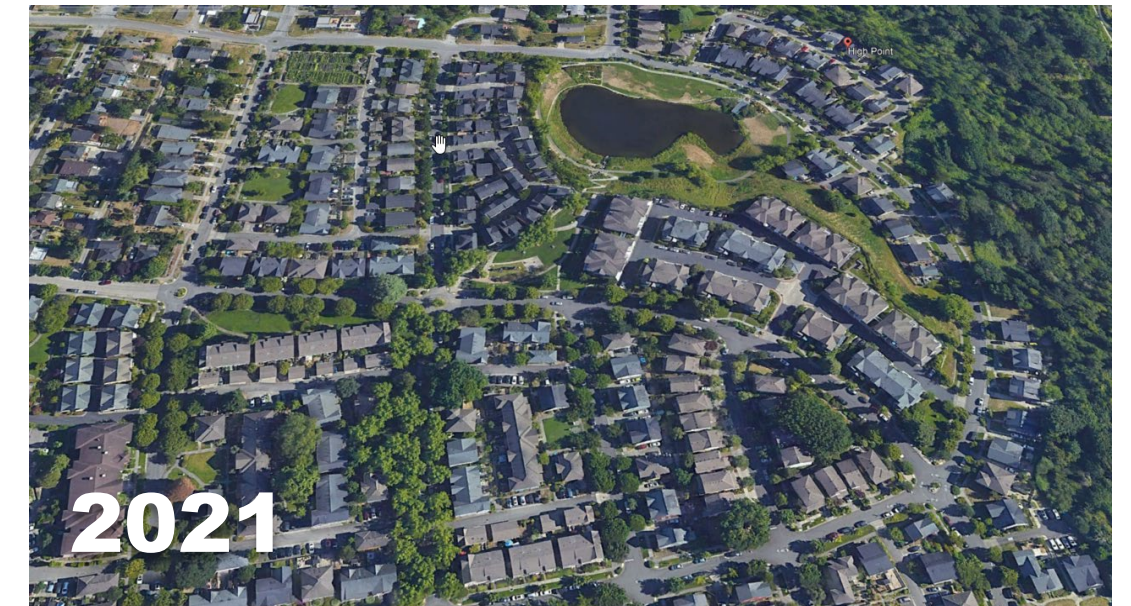
Private Property

Regulating and Incentivizing Tree Planting and Protection

We Can Grow Our Canopy *AND* Address Our Housing Crisis

- Preserve existing trees where possible
- Regulate and incentivize tree planting & replacement

**High Point Redevelopment:
1,500 mixed income homes
and 2,600 new trees
planted**



Regulatory Framework for Trees on Private Property

Tree Protection & Replacement

SMC 25.11 (tree code) + SMC 25.09 (ECA code)

- Requires tree protection
- When removal is allowed, replacement or payment in lieu is typically required

Required Tree Planting & Preservation

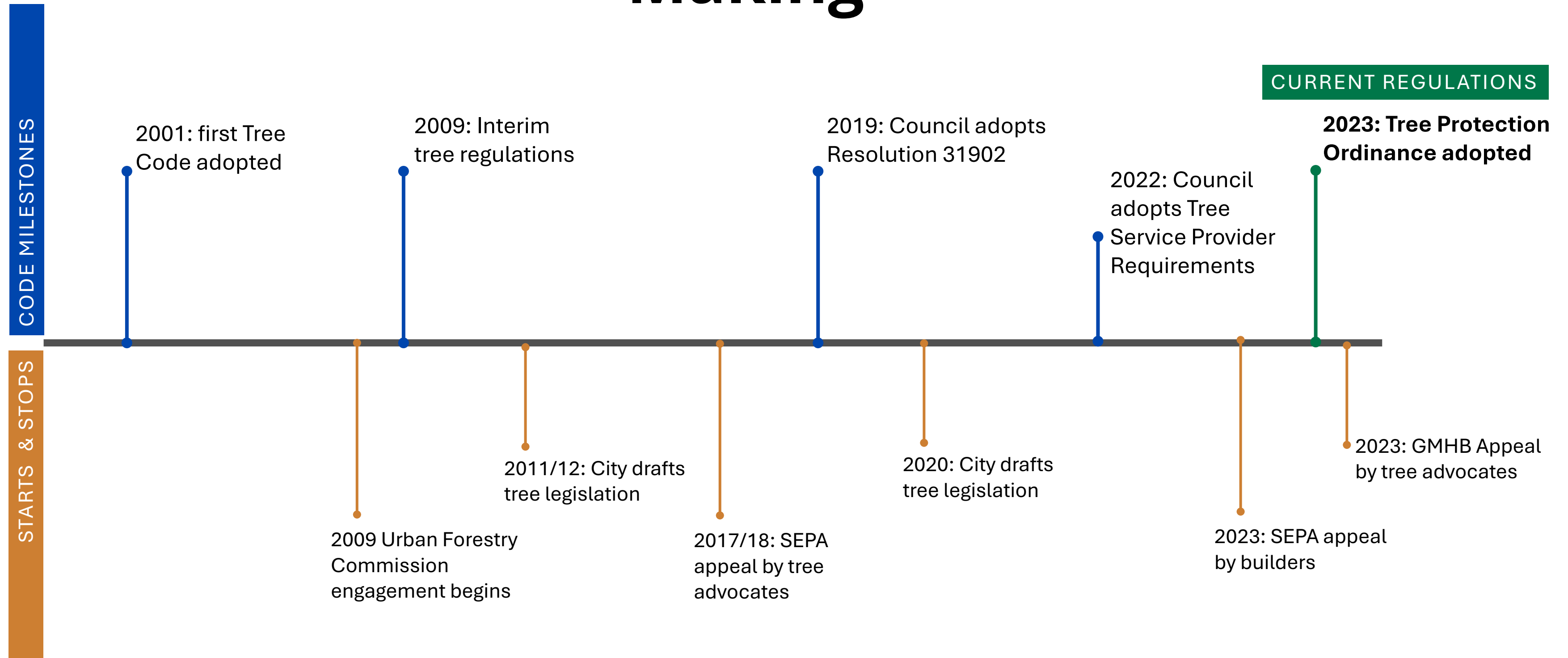
SMC Title 23 (Land Use Code) tree planting and landscaping requirements (including street trees) and incentives to preserve existing trees

Compliance

- Significant penalties for illegal tree removal
- Tree Service Provider Registry + Tree Public Notice



Tree Protection Ordinance: 20 Years in the Making



2023 Tree Protection Ordinance Highlights

Policy	Previous	Current
Protect trees based on size and species	✓	✓
Require replacement when smaller trees are removed during development	×	✓
Allow payment to One Seattle Tree Fund as an alternative to onsite replacement	×	✓
Restrict removal of smaller trees (6 inches or greater) outside of development = thousands more trees regulated and replacement for removed hazard trees	×	✓
Restrict most non-emergency removal of Tier 1 Heritage trees	×	✓
Require developers plant street trees in neighborhood residential zones	×	✓
Establish predictable standards for when trees can be removed in LR zones	×	✓
Review tree decisions administratively, rather than via design review	×	✓
Increase fines for illegal removal by 50% (triple penalty when willful/malicious)		✓

Tree Code: Removal

TREE TIER	DESCRIPTION
Tier 1	A heritage tree as defined in Title 15
Tier 2	Trees 24" DSH or greater (generally)
Tier 3	Trees 12" to 24" DSH
Tier 4	Trees 6" to 12" DSH

Tree Removal Exempt from Tree Code Requirements (need SDCI approval)

With or Without an Associated Construction Permit

- Hazardous
- Infested, diseased, invasive
- Causing obvious damage to structures, or necessary for elderly or ADA access

Tree Removal Allowed by the Tree Code Requirements

With an Associated Construction Permit (part of SDCI approval)

- Tier 3 + 4 trees & Tier 2 trees meeting removal criteria in NR and LR zones
- Tier 1 trees meeting criteria for special exception (Type II MUP)

Without Associated Construction (no SDCI approval required)

- No more than two Tier 4 trees in any three-year period (NR, LR, MR, commercial, SM)
- No more than three Tier 3 & Tier 4 trees within a one-year period (all other zones)

Tree Code: Replacement

Most authorized removal requires planting of replacement trees.

- New trees planted must, at maturity, be at least roughly proportionate to removed canopy
- Must be native and/or culturally significant and climate resilient
- Require 5 years of maintenance (e.g., water) and 80% survival rate (100% if one tree)

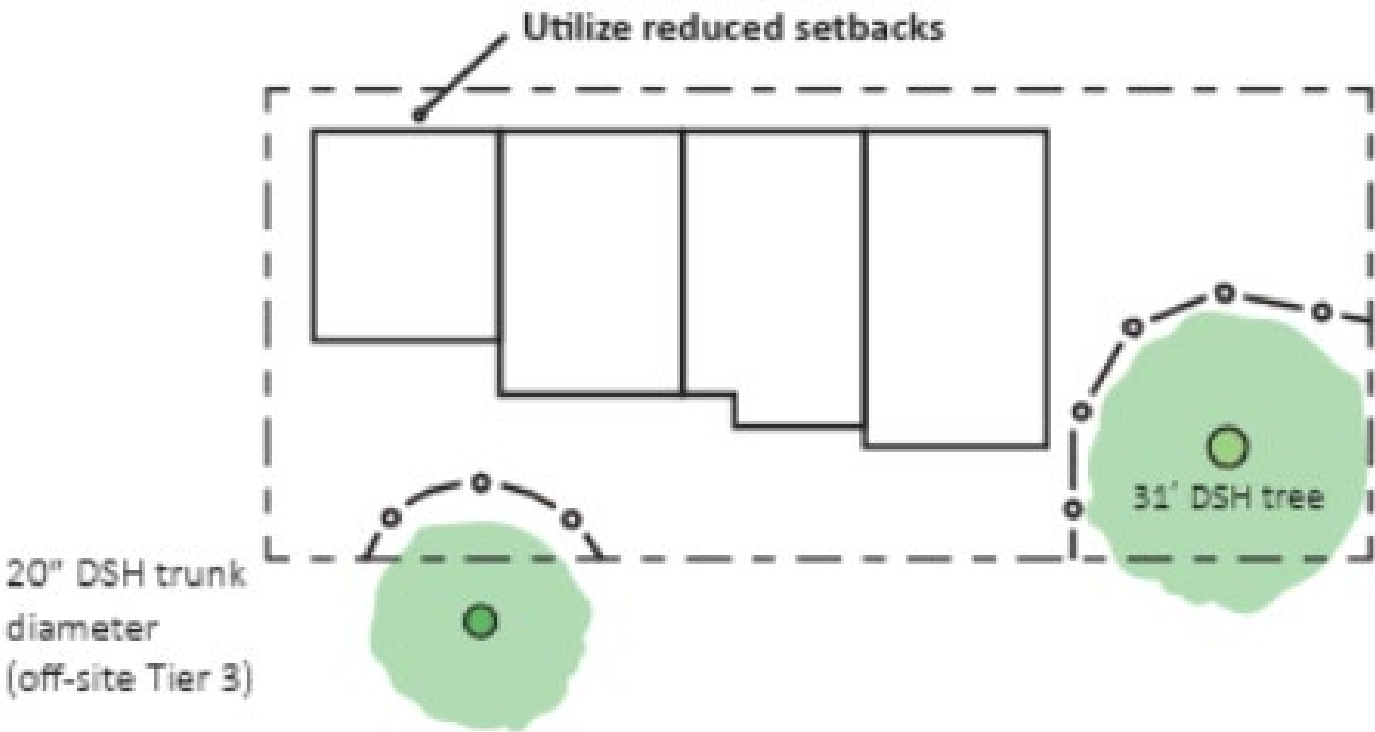
Replacement trees may be planted:

- On-site
- Off-site (code gives preference for planting in a public place)
- Payment-In-Lieu of Planting (SDOT and Parks)

Tree Code: Flexibility to Protect Trees

- Neighborhood Residential Zones
 - Reduced front or rear setbacks, up to 50%
- Lowrise, Midrise, Commercial, Mixed Zones (Tier 2)
 - Reduced setbacks, up to 75%
 - Reduced amenity areas, up to 75%
 - Increased structure width, depth, and façade lengths
 - Landscaping adjustments

Tier 2 Trees With Construction Activity July 2023 – February 2025	
Tier 2 Trees Removed	141
Tier 2 Trees Retained	665



Land Use Code: Tree Planting & Preservation Incentives

- Tree Planting Requirements In Neighborhood Residential Zones
 - Satisfied by preservation of existing trees
- Green Factor Landscaping in multifamily and commercial zones
 - Higher score for preservation of existing trees
- Street tree planting requirements in all zones

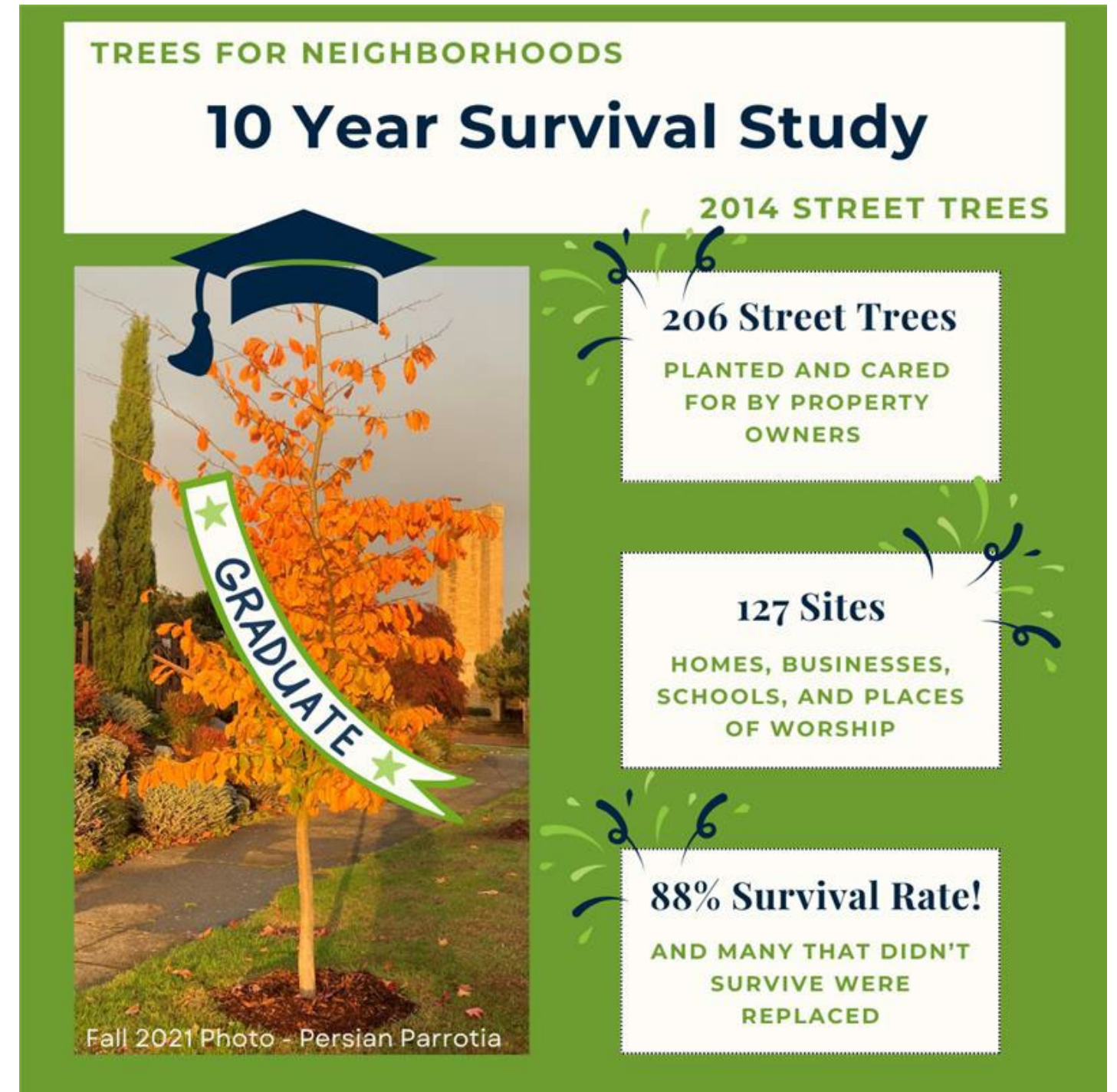


Ensuring Compliance Through the Development Process

SDCI Role: Confirm submitted materials meet code requirements



Supporting Voluntary Tree Planting & Care



Special Topic: One Seattle Plan

Key One Seattle Plan Updates

- New “Urban Forest and Tree Canopy” section
- New sections on resiliency, extreme heat and wildfire smoke, and climate adaption
- Integrated strategies from 2020 Urban Forest Management Plan
- Updates to tree policies in multiple elements



Key Plan Goals & Policies

- **Goal CE G12:** Seattle has a healthy urban forest with a tree canopy which maximizes the environmental, economic, social, and climate-related benefits of trees.
- **Policy CE 12.1:** Aim to achieve an overall tree canopy coverage of 30% by 2037.
- **Policy CE 12.5:** Regularly update the tree canopy analysis to monitor changes and trends in the amount, distribution, and condition of the urban forest and use this information to shape urban forestry management plans, decisions and actions.
- Policies on equity, resiliency, coordination, education, maintenance, regulations, incentives, and pests
- Policies in land use, transportation, and parks elements



Proposed Changes in Zoning Updates

We are proposing some changes to increase planting & space on lots for trees including:

- Updated Tree Planting Requirements in Neighborhood Residential Zones
- New Amenity Area Requirement in NR zones
- Incentives for Stacked Units
- Parking Waivers to allow preservation of Tier 2 or 3 trees

Tree Protection, ECA, and Street Tree requirements would not change.



What's Next: New & Upcoming Citywide Initiatives

Neighborhood Focus

Foresting Seattle

- One Seattle approach
- CID & Beacon Hill
- Community-led, participatory tree planning & planting
- Cross-property natural areas stewardship
- Youth job training

Canopy Equity & Resilience Plan

- Low canopy + racial & social equity priority neighborhoods

Planning & Actions for Climate Resilience



Pest & Disease Readiness



Coming Soon! SPU Tree Nursery



Thank You!