



PLANNING DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

TREE REMOVAL PROCEDURE

Date: October 2007
To: Tree Removal Permit Applicants
From: Dave Dockter, Managing Arborist, Planning Division
Subject: **PROCEDURE FOR REMOVING A REGULATED TREE**

General

The City of Palo Alto procedures for reviewing an application to remove a Regulated Tree requires that the following steps be completed and the information submitted to the Planning Division for review, response and action. Regulated trees include protected trees, publicly owned trees and designated trees.

Protected Trees are defined as: *Coast Live Oak or Valley Oak* trees that are 11.5-inches in diameter or greater; *Coast Redwood* that are 18-inches in diameter when measured at 54-inches above natural grade; and individual trees designated by City Council as *Heritage Trees*. Further definition and details are outlined in the Palo Alto Municipal Code (PAMC) Section 8.10, as well as maintenance requirements and the criteria used in allowing their removal. A Protected Tree removal requires that a permit be issued, as result of a decision by the Director of Planning and Community Environment. A director's decision letter (permit) is issued after to the property owner and is a public record. As for most director's decisions, the required appeal period of 14 days applies before the tree can be removed. See *CITY REVIEW* below for the application instructions, noticing details and process for a Protected Tree Removal Application.

Publicly owned trees are those growing in the right-of-way (i.e. street trees) and on city lands. They are protected and removal or pruning them is prohibited unless approved, per PAMC 8.04. A property owner must contact the Public Works Department at (650) 496-5953 and receive written approval prior to working on a publicly owned tree.

Designated Trees are trees which are located on commercial property or other parcels in which the trees are included as part of the landscape plan of a discretionary City review. Other than maintenance practices, removal of one or more of these trees is considered a minor change to an existing site plan, and requires Planning Department approval before tree removal, as provided for in the Zoning Ordinance, PAMC, Title 18.76.

STEP 1 - APPLICATION FORM & INSTRUCTIONS

Complete a standard Application Form obtained from the Palo Alto Development Center, 285 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto, CA 94301. Block #1 of the form must have the Protected Tree Removal box checked, and reflect payment of application fee (see [Fee Schedule](#)). Your application should specify the reason for the request, and how the request meets the findings provided in the tree ordinance, section 8.10.050. The basis of each finding and any other relevant information must be documented by a qualified expert (in most cases, a certified arborist). You may obtain a copy of the Tree Preservation Ordinance or the Palo Alto *Tree Technical Manual* for this and other specific detailed information by browsing the tree programs web pages at <http://www.city.palo-alto.ca.us/trees/>.

STEP 2 – APPLICANT CHECKLIST_ MAKE AN APPOINTMENT

Please arrange an appointment with Planning Division staff to submit the following material for routing to the city arborist.



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Appointments are arranged at (650) 329-2441, and must be in person.

- Completed City of Palo Alto Tree Removal Application
 - Payment of review fee, in the form of a credit card or personal/company check.
 - Provide an Arborist Letter Report (Arborist Name, Certification # and company letterhead) including the following for each tree:
 - o Written details from an ISA Certified Arborist report, describe how the municipal code findings are met, as listed in Palo Alto Municipal Code, section 8.10.050.
 - o Species (common and scientific name)
 - o Size (diameter, height and crown spread)
 - o Condition (foliage, vigor, structural integrity, etc.)
 - o Discussion (is the tree dangerous, imminent hazard, clarify property damage, possible to correct conditions?)
 - o The attached Hazard Evaluation Form may be used to rate a dangerous condition
 - o Life expectancy
 - o Location diagram, structure, street, adjacent trees and photograph.
 - o See also: Tree Reports, Section 6.00, Palo Alto Tree Technical Manual, at http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/planning-community/tree_index.html
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STEP 3 - CITY REVIEW

Make a Staff Appointment & Process

At the scheduled meeting time, the assigned staff planner will (1) date-stamp the application and tree report; (2) enter the application into the [Accela Permit Manager](#), and assign the next consecutive file number and enter same onto application; (3) document the fee payment, giving the applicant a copy of receipt; (4) route the application material to the Planning Division Arborist.

Review Period

Upon receipt of all required submittal items the Planning Division staff will mail a notice of the pending removal to adjacent property owners as a courtesy comment period of 10 days. After review of the information, the written director's decision will be mailed to the applicant within approximately 10 working days. Staff may require a site visit, contact with the applicant, arborist or additional information if needed. If the tree prognosis is deemed urgent or is a life/safety emergency, the Planning Division Arborist or City Staff shall have the discretion to approve or modify this process as needed, with documentation to follow after the hazard has been brought to a safe level, pursuant to the city Tree Technical Manual, Section 4.00, Hazardous Trees.

Action

Directors Decision. The Director's written response letter constitutes the Protected Tree Removal Permit, and is valid for a period of one year, after which, a new application is required. The response letter may be *approval* (may be with conditions for tree replacement or other requirements), *denial* (with reasons cited and/or mitigating recommendations) or *request for additional information*. No work on the subject tree is permitted until written City approval is granted. Permit Posting. A copy of the approval letter (permit) must be on site when the tree is being removed. The permit letter may be provided to the following places: Applicant, adjacent neighbors, city web site <http://www.city.palo-alto.ca.us/trees/treeremovalpermits>, police and public works departments, and /or specifically requested courtesy copies. Appeal Period. An appeal of this Director's decision by the property owner may be filed in writing with the City Clerk/Planning Division fourteen (14) calendar days after the date of the approval letter (permit), as provided for in PAMC, Chapter 18.78, after which, the tree may be removed.

STEP 4 - CONDITIONS

Frequently, a file will remain open if the approval is conditioned upon required replanting with one or more trees of a predetermined size. To satisfy these director's permit conditions, it is the applicant's responsibility to insure that requirements are implemented, and to schedule a follow-up inspection with the Planning Arborist at (650) 329-2441.
