



City of Los Altos

Development Services Department

TREE REMOVAL PERMIT PROCESS OVERVIEW

The City's Tree Protection Ordinance was established to promote the growth of a healthy and sustainable tree canopy in Los Altos. Trees in Los Altos are highly valued by the community and provide several benefits, including shade and climate resilience, habitat for wildlife, carbon sequestration and improved air quality, protection against wind and flood hazards, and aesthetic quality.

To ensure that the City's urban forest and tree canopy is healthy, diverse, and well maintained, protected trees require a Tree Removal Permit before they can be removed. Removal requests for trees on private property are processed by the Development Services Department and removal requests for trees located in the public right-of-way or on City property are processed by the Parks and Recreation Department.

This handout is not a substitute for the regulations which contain additional details and requirements and can be found in the City's Municipal Code at [LAMC Chapter 11.08](#)

PROTECTED TREES

The following list of trees are protected and require City approval before removal and/or significant pruning can occur:

- ☐ Any tree that is 12-inches or greater in diameter when measured at 48-inches above the ground.
- ☐ Any tree of a native species that is 10-inches or greater in diameter when measured at 48-inches above the ground.
- ☐ Any tree designated by the Historical Commission as a Heritage Tree or any tree under official consideration by the Historical Commission for a Heritage Tree designation.
- ☐ Any tree which was required to be either saved or planted in conjunction with a development review approval.
- ☐ Any tree located within the public right-of-way.

TREE REMOVAL CRITERIA

To evaluate a Tree Removal Permit, evidence is required to document at least one of the following situations exist:

- ☐ The tree is dead, in poor health (as defined in the most recent edition of the Guide for Plant Appraisal), or has a risk rating of moderate, high, or extreme which cannot be mitigated through sound arboricultural practices to a low-risk rating.
- ☐ The tree species is identified as an invasive or undesirable species (as defined by list on file with the Development Services Department).
- ☐ The tree is interfering or will interfere with a utility, public transportation, waterway, or other public infrastructure system.
- ☐ The tree is causing damage to an enclosed structure which cannot be mitigated in another way.
- ☐ Preservation of the tree will impede the use of real property and no reasonable or feasible alternative (as determined by the Development Services Director) exists to preserve the tree in the current location.

TREE REPLACEMENT

Trees approved for removal (including dead trees) shall be replaced at a 1:1 ratio with a minimum 24” box tree similar in canopy size at maturity to the tree being removed. Where a 1:1 replacement ratio is not feasible to replace the canopy, two or more smaller replacement trees may be allowed which combined provide a similar size canopy at maturity. The City does not have a replacement tree list; replacement trees shall be included in a replacement plan prepared by a Certified Arborist to best address each individual site’s conditions.

REVIEW PROCESS

To initiate City review of a tree removal request, all items on the Tree Removal Permit Submittal Requirements Checklist must be submitted to the Planning Division, including an arborist report and replacement plan prepared by a Certified Arborist. Once received, staff will review the application materials and conduct a site visit. The City’s target processing time is approximately 30 days, but this may vary depending on the Department’s workload and staffing.

If a tree removal request is part of a development application such as a new house or addition/remodel, it will be reviewed as part of that application and a separate Tree Removal Permit application is not required. As such, staff will not consider the approval of trees in advance of the approval of a development application.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION AND APPEALS

Once the City issues a Tree Removal Permit, public notification shall be posted on the property for at least 10 calendar days before the removal can occur. The tree removal notice and posting instructions will be provided by City staff when the permit is issued.

During this public notification period, the applicant or any interested party may appeal the decision of the permit. An appeal must be submitted to the City Clerk within 10 calendar days of the decision by filing a written statement outlining the reasons for the appeal along with the appropriate appeal fee.

VIOLATIONS

Any actions to remove, damage, or significantly prune a protected tree without City approval is considered a misdemeanor and shall be punishable as prescribed in Chapter 1.20 of the Municipal code. Violations shall also incur a penalty fine for each tree removed without proper authorization and replacement.

WAIVERS AND EXEMPTIONS

A Tree Removal Permit is not required in the following situations after verification with the City:

- ☐ A hazardous or dangerous condition of a tree that requires immediate action for the safety of life or property; or
- ☐ Public utilities, such as Pacific Gas & Electric, and agencies outside of the City’s jurisdiction, such as a school district, are allowed to prune and remove trees as necessary to comply with safety regulations and as may be necessary to maintain the safe operation of their facilities.