



Office of the Mayor
City of Seattle
Bruce Harrell, Mayor

Executive Order 2025-09: Actions to Increase Tree Preservation on Private Property

An Executive Order acknowledging the value and importance of trees to Seattle residents' quality of life and the special role that singular tree species and remaining tree groves serve in neighborhoods across the City, and directing City departments to develop and implement policy and regulatory changes to encourage the preservation of such trees on private property.

WHEREAS, urban trees, forests, and riparian ecosystems are critical green infrastructure that cool our city, reduce the urban heat island effect, mitigate stormwater runoff, sequester carbon, filter pollutants, provide vital habitat for urban wildlife, improve physical and mental health for residents, and in some cases, are important remnants of cultural heritage and Tribal identity; and

WHEREAS, the City's [2021 Tree Canopy Assessment report](#) indicates Seattle's tree canopy cover decreased between 2016 and 2021; and

WHEREAS, [Executive Order 2023-03](#) focused on preserving, protecting, and growing the City's tree canopy on public property; and

WHEREAS, with significant changes to Seattle's zoning code as part of the City's major update to the Comprehensive Plan, including the implementation of State mandated density increases in formerly single-family neighborhoods, the City strives to find the right balance between the need for more housing and on-site tree preservation; and

WHEREAS, tree pests, such as Emerald Ash Borer, and diseases, such as fungal root rot, can also lead to significant tree loss, and climate change is exacerbating these risks as hotter drier summers weaken trees' natural ability to fight off pests and diseases; and

WHEREAS, there are currently approximately 300 trees designated as Tier 1 Trees, formerly referred to as "Heritage Trees," which can only be removed under limited circumstances; and

WHEREAS, the city that bears the name of a great tribal leader recognizes that only Tribes are the subject matter experts on Tribal cultural resources; and

WHEREAS, there is a need to further encourage the preservation of trees on private property, especially singular special trees that, because of age, size, ecological function, cultural significance, or species, will be difficult to replace if removed; and

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Bruce A. Harrell, Mayor of Seattle, in recognition of the need for the City to actively encourage and support the preservation of singular special trees or groves on private property, order the following actions:

1. Develop Incentive Program for Private Property Owners to Preserve Singular or Exceptional Trees and Tree Groves

Representatives from the Mayor's Office will convene a work group, including but not limited to staff from relevant City departments (e.g., Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections permitting staff, Seattle Department of Transportation's Heritage Tree program staff, and Office of Sustainability and Environment's urban forestry staff), and external non-profit representatives who have been exploring a conservation easement initiative (Birds Connect and Plant Amnesty- including Plant Amnesty's Last 6,000 Campaign) to devise options for a new voluntary conservation easement program sponsored by the City.

This work group is tasked with designing a tree conservation easement program to be funded by the City to incentivize the permanent preservation of singular trees or tree groves on private property.

A report should be produced no later than the end of the second quarter of 2026 with findings and recommendations that address the following:

- a. Proposed criteria for identifying eligible trees and property owners.
- b. Recommendations on the process that will be needed to vet and approve applications from private property owners interested in participating.
- c. Options to incentivize participation in the program, including direct monetary grants in exchange for a permanent easement and/or potential property tax reduction. (The Mayor's Office will help facilitate discussions with the King County Assessor's Office, which has indicated interest in further exploring this concept with the City.)
Considerations for determining an appropriate level of monetary compensation should include the value of the tree preservation easement to the public, the voluntary nature of an easement program, and creating a true incentive to maximize participation.
- d. Recommended process and support structure for helping property owners navigate applying for a conservation easement.
- e. Recommendations on how the program should be managed and administered, including monitoring and enforcement, and recommended budget estimates for on-going operation, education, and projected participation. Options for administration include a stand-alone City program, a public-private partnership with a non-profit, or wholly contracted out.
- f. Incorporation of applicable race and social justice considerations per the City's [Racial Equity Toolkit](#).

Recommendations should also address whether and how this program should replace or complement the City's existing Heritage Tree program and if a recommendation is made to replace the Heritage Tree program, what current resources from the Heritage Tree program could be redirected to the conservation easement effort.

The Mayor's 2026 Proposed Budget includes \$100,000 in the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections' budget to support the work group effort described above, though a final determination on the amount of on-going funding and specific City department responsibilities will necessarily be based on the report recommendations. Any additional funding and staffing support that is identified will be considered as part of the 2026 mid-year supplemental or 2027 proposed budget.

2. Engage Federally Recognized Tribes on Tribal Cultural Resources

No later than February 2, 2026, OIR shall convene appropriate leadership from the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, Office of Planning and Community Development, Department of Neighborhoods, Seattle City Light and Seattle Public Utilities for the purposes of engaging federally recognized Tribes regarding potential impacts to Tribal cultural resources from housing development on private property.

City departments shall consult with appropriate state agencies and subject matter experts, the latter identified and defined by each affected federally recognized Tribe, to provide guidance on actions the City can take to educate both City leadership and staff and the general public, with the goal of enhancing considerations and treatments for preserving Tribal cultural resources in compliance with State law.

To assist with this effort, the Office of Planning and Community Development shall hire a consultant using existing budget authority. The recruitment and selection of the consultant shall be conducted in collaboration with the affected federally recognized Tribes, who will collectively participate in the decision-making process to identify, evaluate, and select the consultant. The contract should be executed no later than the first quarter of 2026.

A report will be due no later than October 30, 2026. The report should include findings and recommended guidance on processes and procedures for meaningfully engaging with and involving Tribal governments and relevant State agencies on the protection of historical and cultural resources on private property subject to housing development, within the scope and parameters of applicable State law (the report should also note any recommendations also applicable to public property).

3. Create Permitting-related Incentives for On-site Tree Retention

In June 2025, Mayor Harrell issued [Executive Order 2025-05](#) establishing the Permitting Accountability and Customer Trust (PACT) initiative. PACT is a citywide effort to make permitting faster, clearer, and more customer-focused, while advancing key policy goals such as increasing housing supply and supporting small business growth.

As part of this effort, PACT will explore options to incorporate permitting-related incentives for on-site tree retention, preservation, and protection into its workplan. PACT will partner with the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, Seattle Department of Transportation, Seattle City Light, Seattle Fire Department, and Seattle Public Utilities to develop meaningful and actionable incentive options.

A report will be due no later than the end of the first quarter of 2026 and will include identification of options for meaningful incentives for timely permit review and issuance, which may entail providing preferential review and “queue jumping” for construction projects that preserve on-site trees. The report should also provide recommendations on whether a preference should be made for only certain types of trees, the specific actions related to tree retention, preservation, and protection that warrant expedited review, and a detailed plan and timeline to implement.

4. Examine Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection's Practices that may Discourage On-site Tree Preservation during Housing Construction

Housing developers have suggested that the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections' rules and processes to preserve on-site trees during housing construction can inadvertently discourage them from actively seeking to preserve on-site trees. SDCI will seek to understand whether there are indeed issues with its approach and make changes to its policies and practices as warranted.

SDCI shall provide a report on findings and recommendations to the Mayor's Office no later than January 30, 2026.

5. Explore Moving Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection's Tree-related Functions to the Office of Sustainability and Environment

The Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection issues various permits for housing construction and directly oversees several tree-related functions associated with issuing these permits. Representatives in the Mayor's Office shall convene staff from the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections and the Office of Sustainability and Environment to begin exploring the transfer of select SDCI tree-related functions to OSE, with the goal of increasing public confidence and transparency in the City's activities related to tree preservation and reporting.

Specific areas that should be considered for transfer include: 1) activities associated with compliance, enforcement, and implementation of the City's Tree Code; 2) updating, maintaining and improving the accuracy of SDCI's [Tree Public Notices and Permit Tree Tracking database](#), which measures, in part, the City's efforts to retain existing trees during housing construction; and 3) providing regular public reports on the City's progress in this regard.

A report with findings, recommendations and specific implementation steps should be provided to the Mayor's Office no later than the end of the 1st quarter of 2026 so that any functions, funding, and employees subject to transfer from SDCI to OSE can be incorporated into the Mayor's 2027 Proposed Budget. The report may also include other recommendations to increase public confidence and transparency in the City's activities related to tree preservation and reporting.

6. Update Stormwater Code to Support Tree Canopy Goals

Beginning with the 2026 Stormwater Code and continuing with future five-year Stormwater Code updates, Seattle Public Utilities shall revise Seattle Stormwater Code requirements to incorporate new stormwater solutions, such as "soil cell bioretention," that complement Seattle's tree canopy goals.

7. Develop City-wide Tree Pest Readiness and Response Plan

By June 30, 2027, Seattle Public Utilities will lead, along with other City departments including Seattle Parks and Recreation, Seattle Department of Transportation, Seattle City Light, and Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, the development of a City-wide tree pest readiness and response plan. Seattle Public Utilities will coordinate efforts with the Office of Sustainability and Environment to integrate this plan with the Urban Forest Management Plan and other urban forestry plan updates. The plan shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

- a. Assessment of the vulnerability of Seattle's existing tree canopy and identification of the most serious existing and emerging tree pests and diseases.
- b. Analysis of existing department resources and capacity as it relates to tree pest and disease readiness and options to address any identified resource gaps.
- c. Concrete actions and policies City departments can adopt to protect publicly-owned trees from pests and disease.
- d. Options to support private property owners in protecting their trees from pests and diseases.
- e. Pathways for creating training opportunities for field staff to recognize, report, and respond to tree pest and diseases.

Seattle Public Utilities will also coordinate work of City departments to seek outside funding through grants and other resources to support implementation of the tree pest readiness and response plan.

Inquiries regarding this Executive Order should be directed to Director of Policy, Christa Valles.

Dated this 14th day of October, 2025.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bruce A. Harrell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bruce A. Harrell
Mayor of Seattle