

Applicant: City of Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections	Page 1 of 2	Supersedes: DR 16-2008
	Publication: 2/XX/2022	Effective: X/XX/2022
Subject: Designation of Exceptional Trees	Code and Section Reference: SMC 25.11 – Tree Protection SMC 25.05.675N – State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA)	
	Type of Rule: Code Interpretation	
	Ordinance Authority: SMC 3.06.040	
Index: Land Use Code/Technical Standards and Procedural Requirements	Approved	Date
	(signature on file) <i>Nathan Torgelson, Director, SDCI</i>	2/XX/2022

Purpose and Background

The purpose of this Rule is to provide further guidance for exceptional trees pursuant to Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) Chapter 25.11.

SMC Chapter 25.11 does not apply to tree removal approved as part of an Environmentally Critical Area tree and vegetation plan as provided for in SMC 25.09.070. Tree removal in Environmentally Critical Areas shall comply with the provisions of SMC 25.09.070. In addition, this Rule does not apply to trees located within the right-of-way as those trees are regulated under Title 15.

Rule**SECTION 1: MEASUREMENT OF TREE DIAMETER**

Diameter at standard height (DSH), which means the diameter of a tree trunk measured at 4.5 feet above average grade, is used in determining the diameter of existing trees. Where a tree has branch(es) or swelling that interferes with measurement at 4.5 feet above average grade or where a tree tapers below this point, the diameter is measured at the most narrow point below

4.5 feet. For trees located on a slope, the 4.5 feet is measured from the average of the highest and lowest ground points or, on very steep slopes where this is not possible, the lowest practical point on the uphill side. Where a tree splits into several trunks close to ground level, the DSH for the tree is the square root of the sum of the DSH for each individual stem squared (i.e. - a tree with three stems: $DSH = \text{square root} [(stem1)^2 + (stem2)^2 + (stem3)^2]$).

SECTION 2: EXCEPTIONAL TREE PROTECTION

Table 1 provides a list of size thresholds for exceptional trees starting in size from 6" DSH. In addition, any named cultivars or subspecies of species on the following list have the same diameter threshold as the species on the list. For example, a Japanese maple cultivar (*Acer palmatum* "Burgundy Lace") has the same threshold diameter as Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*).

For all species not listed in Table 1, the threshold diameter is 24" or greater, except that Red alders, black cottonwoods, Lombardy poplars, and bitter cherries are not exceptional trees, regardless of the size measured at DSH; and any tree that is listed on the adopted and subsequently revised [King County Noxious Weed List](#) and is not an exceptional tree regardless of the size measured at DSH.

Table 1: Size Thresholds for Selected Specimen Exceptional Trees

Exceptional Tree Species 6" DSH or greater	
ALDER, Sitka – <i>Alnus sinuata</i>	6"
APPLE, Orchard (Common) – <i>Malus sp.</i>	20"
ASH, European – <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	22"
ASPEN, Quaking – <i>Populus tremuloides</i>	12"
BIRCH, Paper – <i>Betula papyrifera</i>	20"
CASCARA – <i>Rhamnus purshiana</i>	8"
CHERRY, Japanese Flowering – <i>Prunus sp. (kwanzan, serrula, serrulata, sargentii, subhirtella, yedoensis)</i>	23"
CRABAPPLE, Pacific – <i>Malus fusca</i>	12"
DOGWOOD, Eastern – <i>Cornus florida</i>	12"
DOGWOOD, Kousa – <i>Cornus kousa</i>	12"
DOGWOOD, Pacific – <i>Cornus nuttallii</i>	6"
HAWTHORN, Black – <i>Crataegus douglasii</i>	6"
HAWTHORN, Common <i>Crataegus monogyna</i> Jacq.	16"
HAWTHORN, Washington – <i>Crataegus phaenopyrum</i>	9"
HORNBEAM, European – <i>Carpinus betulus</i>	16"
LOCUST, Honey – <i>Gleditsia triancanthos</i>	20"
MADRONA – <i>Arbutus menziesii</i>	6"
MAGNOLIA, Southern – <i>Magnolia grandiflora</i>	16"
MAPLE, Dwarf or Rocky Mountain – <i>Acer glabrum</i> var. <i>Douglasii</i>	6"
MAPLE, Japanese – <i>Acer palmatum</i>	12"
MAPLE, Paperbark – <i>Acer griseum</i>	12"
MAPLE, Vine – <i>Acer circinatum</i>	8"
MONKEY PUZZLE TREE – <i>Araucaria araucana</i>	22"
OAK, Oregon White or Garry – <i>Quercus garryana</i>	6"
PEAR, Callery – <i>Pyrus calleryana</i>	13"

PINE, Lodgepole – <i>Pinus contorta</i>	6”
PINE, Shore – <i>Pinus contorta</i> ‘contorta’	12”
PLUM, CHERRY – <i>Prunus cerasifera</i>	21”
SERVICEBERRY, Western – <i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i>	6”
SNOWBELL, Japanese – <i>Styrax japonica</i>	12”
SPRUCE, Sitka – <i>Picea sitchensis</i>	6”
WILLOW (All native species) – <i>Salix sp.</i> (<i>Geyeriana ver meleina</i> , <i>eriocephala ssp. mackenzieana</i> , <i>Hookeriana</i> , <i>Piperi</i> , <i>Scouleriana</i> , <i>sitchensis</i>)	8”
YEW, Pacific – <i>Taxus brevifolia</i>	6”

¹ This table is based on Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast, 2016, by Jim Pojar, Andy MacKinnon

Trees and Shrubs of the Pacific Northwest, 2014, by Mark Turner, Ellen Kuhlmann

Trees of Seattle, 2nd edition, 2006, by Arthur Lee Jacobson.

Champion Trees of Washington State, 1996, by Robert Van Pelt.

International Society of Arboriculture, <https://www.isa-arbor.com/>

SECTION 3: USE OF THIS RULE IN THE APPLICATION OF SEPA

The policy provided in SMC 25.05.675.N.2.c calls for protecting specific special habitat:

- Rare, uncommon, unique or exceptional plant or wildlife habitat; or
- Wildlife travelways; or
- Habitat diversity for species (plants or animals) of substantial aesthetic, educational, ecological or economic value.

If determined through SEPA review that a proposed project would reduce or damage one or more of these special habitats, an exceptional tree that may otherwise be approved for removal per Chapter 25.11 may be required to be retained.