

ARTICLE VIII TREE PROTECTION

Sec. 7-150. Purpose and Intent.

These provisions are intended to regulate the removal and/or destruction of trees within the community for the purpose of:

1. Preserving the existing character of the city, part of which is derived from existing groves of mature pine, oak and other species of trees;
2. Reducing the effects of noise and air pollution;
3. Preventing soil erosion and the siltation of drainage improvements and waterways;
4. Protecting and enhancing the aesthetic qualities of the community; and
5. Adding an element of landscape maturity to new developments in the city thereby enhancing buffering and privacy, and increasing the value of property.

(Ord. No. 833, § 1, 8-28-00)

Sec. 7-151. Applicability.

These regulations shall apply to each protected tree within the corporate limits of the City of Gulf Shores. No protected tree as defined in this article shall be removed, relocated, destroyed or otherwise directly or indirectly injured unless and until a tree permit under this article has first been issued. If enforcement of a City regulation will result in the removal of a protected tree, the Community Development Department (CDD) will work within the regulations to waive or modify the design standards to the extent necessary to save the tree.

The city may issue an annual permit to public utility companies exempting them from this requirement with respect to the trimming of protected trees that may interfere with utility lines located within public rights-of-way, and upon such terms and conditions as may be determined by the city. The mayor of the city may declare an emergency and impose a temporary moratorium on the enforcement of this requirement, following severe storm events within the city.

Sec. 7-152. Definitions.

Diameter at Breast Height (DBH): The measurement of the diameter of a tree trunk measured in inches at a height of four and a one-half (4½) feet above the ground. If a tree splits into multiple trunks below four (4) feet, then the trunk is measured at its most narrow point beneath the split.

Protected Tree: On commercial, multi-family and industrial zoned property any tree that has a DBH of at least ten (10) inches or is a live oak, sand live oak, or sand pine and any tree on a vacant single family or duplex residential zoned property, greater than one (1) acre, with a DBH of at least eighteen (18) inches.

Tree Protection Zone: An area around a tree extending fifteen (15) inches per inch of tree DBH in all directions from the trunk. In no case shall the tree protection zone be less than ten (10) feet.

Sec. 7-153 Exemptions.

The following activities are exempted from the regulations of this ordinance:

1. Tree removal on vacant or single family or duplex lots less than one (1) acre in size.
2. Tree removal on all developed single family and duplex lots.
3. Tree removal on a single family or duplex lot by which a building permit has been issued approving construction.
4. Incidental trimming or pruning of a protected tree located on private property by the owner of the property or the owner's agent.

Sec. 7-154. Tree permit.

Any person wishing to remove, relocate, destroy, or otherwise injure a protected tree shall, under the provisions of this section, shall make written application to the CDD. Application fees for Tree Removal Permits shall be set by resolution of the council. The city will approve or deny the application, with or without conditions, within fourteen (14) working days following receipt of the application and, if approved, issue a tree permit authorizing the proposed activity. Failure of the city to act upon an application within such time period shall constitute approval of the application and permission to proceed with the requested activity.

Section 7-155. Tree Protection Plan.

Prior to the issuance of a Building, Land Disturbing Activity, or other City Permit that would destroy, injure or otherwise have an adverse affect on existing vegetation, a Tree Protection Plan identifying preservation methods for Protected Trees shall be submitted to the CDD for review and approval.

The Tree Protection Plan shall contain at a minimum the following:

1. The name and phone number for the party responsible for each action and property owner shall be identified.
2. The location, DBH and common name of all protected trees on the property;
3. Indication whether individual trees are proposed to be preserved or removed;
4. Tree Protection Zones shall be identified and the method for preserving Protected Trees in the field (fencing, etc.) throughout all phases of construction;
5. The location of tree protection signage. Signage shall be a minimum 6 square feet and read, "Tree Protection Zone, Do Not Enter".

The following provisions are to be incorporated into the site preparation and construction methods utilized on the site:

1. Tree Protection Zones must remain unpaved and open. The use of perforated pavers or grates may be allowed subject to written approval;

2. No vehicles shall be parked or driven over the Tree Protection Zone, nor shall any construction material be stored or any substances poured, disposed or placed within the Tree Protection Zone at any time during clearing or construction;
3. No change of Grade within the Tree Protection Zone shall be allowed around existing trees except for a maximum of two (2) inches of Mulch or Sod unless otherwise approved by the City;
4. Tree protection fencing, a minimum four (4) feet in height, shall be placed to the exterior of the tree protection zone of all protected trees. Installation of protective tree fencing shall not destroy or harm the root system of protected trees;
5. Where grade changes affect tree protection zones, protective dry wells or retaining walls shall be provided;
6. All roots to be removed during site clearing and/or construction shall be severed clean at the perimeter of the Tree Protection Zone.

Sec. 7-156. Criteria for Issuance of a Tree Removal Permit.

A tree permit for the requested activity shall be issued if:

1. The tree is located in an area where a structure or improvement is to be placed according to a site plan or building permit approved by the city; or
2. The determination by the City a tree is diseased, injured, in danger of falling close to existing or proposed structures, interferes with existing or proposed essential utility services, creates unsafe vision clearance or conflicts with other ordinances or regulations of the city. The City may waive the permit fee in these instances; or
3. Removal of the tree will not result in any adverse material affect to the appearance of the site, since other protected trees of similar age, height, and species are present on the site and/or a sufficient number of replacement trees are proposed to be planted on the site in appropriate locations and of sufficient size to prevent such adverse affect; or
4. The tree is to be removed and relocated as part of (1) the bona fide harvesting or thinning of timber from land currently assessed and managed as forest property; (2) the bona fide thinning of growth from undeveloped property for the purpose of the maintenance of the overall health of the trees and growth on such property; (3) the release from nursery inventory of trees commercially cultivated for the purpose of resale; or (4) the preservation of such tree in connection with the expansion of agricultural operations in the vicinity of such tree.

Section 7-157 Effective Date and Expiration of a Tree Removal Permit

Approval of an application to remove a protected tree is effective immediately. An approval to remove a protected tree expires ninety (90) year after its effective date, provided that the mitigation conditions in the permit remain in effect until the conditions are met.

Section 7-158 Appeals.

If in the determination of the city the application does not meet the above criteria, it will be denied and the reasons communicated to the applicant who may appeal the decision to the City Council within ten (10) working days by filing a written request with the CDD in a format or on a form as specified by the department.

Sec. 7-159. Enforcement and penalties.

Whenever the Zoning Official, or his designee, determines that a violation of this article has occurred, one of the following actions shall be initiated singly or in combination:

1. Any person and /or property owner who performs tree removal or site clearing without City approval shall be required to pay two times the cost of the permit for the work performed without a permit.
2. A cease and desist order, warning citation or formal citation shall be immediately issued to the contractor and/ or property owner when it is determined violations of this ordinance have occurred. The order shall specify the nature of the violation and require that any work not permitted under this article immediately stop. The property owner shall, within two (2) weeks, submit a tree replacement and remediation plan in accordance with Section 7-160 to the city for rectifying the violation.
3. Any person violating any of the provisions of this article shall be guilty of an offense against the city and shall, upon conviction, be punished for each violation as provided in section 7-160 and section 1-8 (a) of this Code as now in force or as hereafter amended. The City shall suspend or revoke all city development permits for a property found in violation of this ordinance until a tree replacement and remediation plan is submitted and approved by the City in accordance with Section 7-160.

Sec. 7-160. Tree Replacement & Remediation

Any protected trees removed by an owner or developer shall be replaced at the expense of the owner /developer or the owner/developer shall make a monetary contribution to the Tree Protection and Landscaping Fund. Each removed tree shall be replaced with a new tree or trees having a total tree DBH equivalent to that of the DBH of the tree(s) removed.

1. Single-trunk replacement trees shall have a minimum of three-inch DBH and be a minimum of twelve feet in overall height.
2. If in the judgment of the director the site cannot accommodate the total number of required replacement trees as a result of insufficient planting area, the applicant shall make a monetary contribution to the Tree Protection and Landscape Fund. The amount of such contribution shall be determined as follows:
 - a. For every diameter inch of replacement trees required, the contribution shall be equal to the retail value of a three-inch DBH, twelve foot tall nursery-grown tree of similar species plus the cost of planting. The retail value and

planting cost per diameter inch shall be calculated by the city by taking the average published price of container-grown or balled and burlapped trees.

3. For properties for which all of the trees have been removed without a permit and the city cannot determine the size and species of tree the owner of the property shall be charged a \$500 fee for every 10,000 square feet of property clear cut.
4. Any replacement tree, planted for credit, which dies within two years of planting, shall be replaced by a tree having not less than a three-inch DBH minimum height of twelve feet at the time of planting, at the expense of the owner / developer responsible for the replacement of the tree removed.
5. No replacement trees with the potential to reach a height of 18 feet or greater shall be planted or otherwise located under or within ten feet on either side of overhead utility lines.
6. All tree debris shall be removed within 30 days of lot clearance and the property shall be maintained in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 14-2 of the Code of Ordinances otherwise a citation shall be issued by the City of Gulf Shores.

SAMPLE TREE PROTECTION ZONE DETAIL

