



Press Release

City of Edmonds

Mayor David O. Earling

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City Recommends Rejecting Proposed Edmonds Tree Ordinance

Mayor Credits Tree Board Members' Effort, But Says Proposal Is Over-Reaching

Edmonds, WA - A proposed tree ordinance to require an extensive permitting system for removing trees from private residential property and other tree standards in Edmonds appears to be headed for rejection. The City of Edmonds Planning Board is recommending the City Council reject the proposed tree code. The issue is on the City Council's agenda for June 9th.

The Planning Board voted to recommend against the proposal after studying it over the last three months and holding a public hearing on May 27th. About 175 people came to the hearing, mostly to express their frustration with the proposal. In addition to requiring an extensive permitting system for removing trees from private residential property, the proposed tree code also would have required a minimum tree density for most properties within the city and set other standards that were seen as onerous by property owners and residents.

"Trees are an emotional issue," said Mayor Dave Earling. "Most people love trees in the right places, but they hate anyone telling them they need to go through a difficult process to decide what trees they can remove or plant on their property."

Developing a tree ordinance had been tasked by the City Council to a group of local citizens appointed to form the Tree Board. The Tree Board selected a consultant in early 2014, held public meetings, and worked on ideas for a new tree code. The members finalized a proposal and sent it to the Planning Board, a different group of citizens that advise the City Council on various planning and development issues.

"We had been hearing concerns from people about the Tree Board's proposal," stated Council President Adrienne Fraley-Monillas, "but it wasn't something that had come to us yet." Proposals for changing the land use code typically go to the Planning Board for a recommendation before being sent to the City Council.

Fraley-Monillas says she has heard about the Planning Board’s recommendation. “But now,” she adds, “it’s time for the Council to get the formal report so we can put people’s concerns to rest. Trees are great, but property rights are important, too.”

According to the city’s Development Services Director, Shane Hope, the Planning Board’s recommendation has three main parts: first, rejecting the proposed tree code; second, considering minor changes to the existing code that would add clarity or make information easier to find; and third, developing a management plan with goals and policies for trees that the public can support. Hope’s department had also recommended rejecting the proposed tree code.

“The Planning Board wants to have a well-thought-out policy framework before considering any significant rule changes,” says Hope, noting that the framework could recognize the value of views and solar access, as well as good tree management, and identify how trees on public property should be maintained. It could focus on education and community priorities.

“Look,” said Mayor Earling recently. “The tree code proposal was far over-reaching. But I don’t fault the Tree Board members. They worked hard on drafting a code and didn’t have clear policy guidance to build from. I think we have all learned lessons from this process and I’m glad it doesn’t have to go any further or be repeated. Meanwhile, we appreciate the public’s message about the tree choices they want to continue making themselves.”

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