

Part 2 - Urban Tree Program - Input Appreciated

Question: Which approach for tree preservation during development do you feel would be best for Camas?

Answer: The City should not require preservation of existing trees on development land.

To whom it may concern,

Growth Management Act

Cities are areas of land that are set aside for people to live and to work in higher densities than outlying areas. In fact, the City is mandated by the State through the Growth Management Act to achieve certain densities for residential growth. One premise of the Growth Management Act is to more efficiently utilize the space in our population centers in an effort to reduce "sprawl" into the rural areas. Naturally, we can expect that where a higher density population is required that accommodating mature trees becomes more difficult. With a comprehensive landscaping policy, however, these areas can still be pleasant places to live.

Trees are already protected in critical areas.

Camas is located in the foothills of the Cascades which provides us with a unique geographic setting. The consequence of this is that Camas possesses more than its share of critical areas in the form of steep slopes and wetlands. We end up with a great deal of unbuildable land where trees are already protected. Speaking specifically about the Northshore area (530 acres located north of Lacamas Lake) it has been documented that at least half of the gross acreage out there will be unbuildable due to steep slopes and wetlands. With so much land tied up in critical areas this makes the buildable land all the more important to our City's future. The city needs buildable land to continue to grow and prosper. This cannot be overstated.

Let developers build the best plan.

Developers should be allowed to design the best, most efficient layout for a particular parcel. Forcing the alteration of a workable plan to accommodate existing trees could drastically impact the functional and financial viability of a project and could even affect whether a project moves forward. Developers do a lot already. Developers are expected to install segments of utility infrastructure, to build roads, to provide park and open space to projects. Adding a complex tree preservation/mitigation policy could be viewed as a posture that is unfriendly to development. If the City continues to add layers of regulation to developable land developers may begin looking elsewhere for projects.

Isolating single or small groups of mature trees can have an obvious negative impact. These isolated trees become more vulnerable to future wind damage creating a danger to both people and property. This may not be the best fit in a new housing development.

Inequity

If a tree preservation policy on development land is adopted the landowners who have chosen to maintain a forest cover on their property (in most cases for decades) will be immediately penalized as compared to a landowner who has chosen to clear their land of trees long ago. A good example would be the future residential areas north of Lacamas Lake. Fewer buildable acres and more design constraints translate into less development interest and lower land value.

Sincerely,

Lynn Johnston
Member, Urban Tree Program Ad Hoc Committee