City and County of San Francisco
Department of Building Inspection

Daniel Lurie, Mayor
David Kane, S.E., Interim Director

Tree Planting and Protection
Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Do tree protection requirements apply to my construction project?**
   Tree protection requirements may apply if there are trees on or near your project site, including trees on private property or in the public right-of-way. If there are trees, you will need to submit an Existing Tree Disclosure.

2. **What types of trees are protected during construction?**
   San Francisco protects three types of trees that may be located in or adjacent to a construction project:
   - Street trees: Trees of all sizes growing in the public right-of-way, like the sidewalk or planting strips.
   - Significant trees: Trees on private property with their trunk within 10 feet of the public right-of-way that are more than 20 feet tall, have a trunk diameter greater than 12 inches or have a canopy greater than 15 feet.
   - Landmark trees: Individual trees that have been officially designated as a landmark by the Board of Supervisors based on characteristics such as their age, size, species, location, historical association or contribution to the City's character.

   If you are unsure whether a tree is protected, contact San Francisco Public Works at urbanforestrypermits@sfdpw.org before starting construction.

3. **How do I know if my construction project could affect a protected tree?**
   Check whether any construction activity will take place within the dripline of a protected tree, which is the area beneath the tree's outermost branches.

   Construction activity can include work on your property or the adjacent sidewalk, as well as areas where construction equipment or materials will be moved or stored. If any of these activities take place within the dripline, tree protection requirements apply.

4. **What do I need to do if my project could affect a protected tree?**
   If any of your construction activity takes place within the dripline of a protected tree, you will need to submit an Existing Tree Disclosure to Public Works.

   If your project includes excavation or other construction within the dripline that could damage the tree, you will also need to hire a certified arborist to prepare a Tree Protection Plan. The arborist will identify the measures needed to protect the tree during construction.

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Submit the Tree Protection Plan to Public Works for review and approval. Public Works must approve the plan before the Department of Building Inspection can issue your building permit to begin construction.

5. **What information needs to be included in my Tree Protection Plan?**
   You will need to hire a certified arborist to prepare your Tree Protection Plan. The plan should show where protected trees are located in relation to your proposed construction and how they will be protected while work is underway.

   The plan should include:
   - The location of existing trees and proposed construction.
   - Nearby streets, sidewalks, curbs, driveways and buildings.
   - The trunk diameter and canopy of each protected tree.
   - The area around each tree that will be protected during construction.
   - The measures that will be used to prevent damage to each tree.

   No work inside a dripline? Use the Standard Tree Protection Specifications at sfpublicworks.org/treeprotection. They were prepared by a Certified Arborist, so you do not need your own Arborist Report.

6. **What do I need to do to protect the tree during construction?**
   Once your Tree Protection Plan and building permit are approved, follow the plan throughout construction and ensure workers and equipment stay out of protected areas around the tree.

   Avoid storing construction materials near the tree, contaminating the surrounding soil, damaging the trunk or branches or disturbing the roots beyond what is allowed in the approved plan.

   Visit the Tree Protection webpage for tree protection diagrams and other useful information.

   If your project scope changes in a way that could affect the protected tree, contact Public Works at urbanforestrypermits@sfdpw.org.

7. **What happens if a protected tree is damaged during construction?**
   If a protected tree is damaged during construction, contact Public Works staff as soon as possible and they will assess the damage and tell you what steps are needed to protect or restore the tree. If the tree cannot be saved, you may be required to replace it and/or pay its appraised value.

8. **What happens when construction is complete?**
   If your project required a Tree Protection Plan, Public Works staff will need to inspect the protected tree at the end of construction to ensure it was properly protected and remains in good condition. Keep all tree protection measures in place until Public Works staff completes the final inspection or tells you they can be removed.

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9. **Will I need to plant a new street tree as part of my project?**
   You may need to plant a new street tree if your project includes:
   - Constructing a new building.
   - Adding a new housing unit, except an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) through a state or local program.
   - Adding a new curb cut.
   - Adding a new garage.
   - Net addition of 500 gross square feet or more to an existing building. Generally, one street tree is required for every 20 feet of street frontage. Existing street trees along your property may count toward this requirement.

10. **What if I cannot plant a required street tree?**
    For certain projects, you may be able to pay an in-lieu fee instead of planting a street tree. Public Works can confirm whether this option is available for your project and whether you qualify to pay the fee.

11. **What do I need to submit if I am planting a new street tree?**
    If you plan to plant a new street tree as part of your project, submit a Tree Requirement Worksheet to Public Works. You will also need to show where you plan to plant the tree on your project plans.

    Once Public Works approves your worksheet, you can plant the tree in the approved location. Public Works will confirm the tree species and provide any planting requirements you need to follow.

Public Works Code References:

- San Francisco Public Works Code Section 808
- San Francisco Public Works Code Section 810
- San Francisco Public Works Code Section 810A

Questions? We're here to help.

Contact San Francisco Public Works Urban Forestry at urbanforestrypermits@sfdpw.org or 628-652-TREE (8733).

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