

The Luma Amendment to Fix the Current Seattle Tree Ordinance and Create Healthy Housing with Large Trees

The recent passage of Seattle's Trees and Housing ordinance may help us plant more trees over time, especially in neighborhoods with less tree canopy, but it effectively removes protection for large trees during development in every neighborhood, including those same neighborhoods with less tree canopy.

The survival of Seattle's large trees will depend on individuals and neighborhoods stepping up to identify them, monitor them, and protect them when they are under threat. One important step is to restore legal protection for large trees during the development process so that every lot is not cleared of large trees as a first step, and we add housing alongside our big trees.

A majestic western red cedar tree in the Wedgwood neighborhood in Seattle, lovingly named Luma, was designated for destruction by a developer until neighbors, activists and the Snoqualmie Tribe stood up to defend Luma's right to continue to exist. This following proposed amendment is named after Luma and is designed to protect other majestic trees in Seattle like Luma.

We believe that individuals and neighborhoods and environmental protection organizations have the capacity to identify, monitor, and protect 8,000 large trees from being removed by developers, with the assistance of Seattle's Urban Forestry Commission. While more large trees could be protected during the development process with the assistance of the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, we recognize that this is not currently a priority for the leadership of this city department.

We thus propose The Luma Amendment to Fix the Current Seattle Tree Ordinance and Create Healthy Housing with Large Trees.

The Last 6000 Steering Committee, August 2023

The Luma Amendment to Fix the Current Seattle Tree Ordinance and Create Healthy Housing with Large Trees For Adoption by the Next City Council

Whereas virtually all protections for 17,700 Exceptional Trees from being cut down during the development process were removed in the current tree ordinance;

Whereas even the term Exceptional Tree and its definition were removed in the current tree ordinance;

Whereas the 2016 Seattle Canopy Cover Assessment stated that there were only 6,338 Exceptional Trees of trunk diameter of 30 inches and greater left in the city;

Whereas the City of Seattle Hearing Examiner, in the decision to reject the Master Builders' Association appeal to not expand protections to large trees, indicated there were 21,000 large trees between 24 inches and 29 inches in trunk diameter in Seattle's Neighborhood Residential Zones on 7,700 "development sites" identified by the city;

Whereas that same Hearing Examiner Decision ruled that there was no evidence provided by the Master Builders' Association that indicated tree protections raised the cost of housing;

Be it that the tree ordinance be amended to add 8,000 healthy large trees to the current Tier 1 category of trees such that they are protected during the development process. (There are currently only 320 trees in the Tier 1 category.) Those 8,000 trees, many considered Exceptional under the previous tree ordinance, should consist of healthy Evergreen and Deciduous trees that are 24 inches and greater in trunk diameter and reside in the most number on the perimeters of lots. The 8,000 healthy large trees added to the Tier 1 category can be identified through available technologies and should consist of Western Red Cedars, Douglas Firs, Big Leaf Maples, Redwoods, and Deodar Cedars. Select other species and sizes outside of the five species and sizes listed previously can be added also. These will also include all Culturally Modified Trees.

The large trees should be chosen by a specially designated committee that will brief the Urban Forestry Commission for final selection. There should be a special emphasis on selecting large trees in neighborhoods with lesser tree canopy percentages.