



# CITY OF CHANHASSEN

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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Planning Commission

**FROM:** MacKenzie Young-Walters, Associate Planner

**DATE:** March 2, 2021

**SUBJ:** Tree Diversity Standards and Inventory Expiration

### **PROPOSED MOTION:**

“The Chanhassen Planning Commission recommends that the City Council adopt the proposed ordinance amending City Code Chapter 18 concerning tree surveys and Chapter 20 concerning landscaping standards.”

### **ISSUES**

While the subdivision ordinance was amended in 2019 to reflect the 2040 Comprehensive Plan’s tree diversity standards, the portion of the ordinance that governs general landscaping standards was not amended to incorporate these standards.

The city’s subdivision ordinance requires that a tree survey be submitted as part of the subdivision process, but does not require that the survey be current.

### **SUMMARY**

Goal six of the city’s 2040 Comprehensive Plan’s Natural Resources Section is to “maintain a healthy and diverse urban forest”. One of the four policies enumerated to support this goal is “Continue to maintain a diversity of species in all public tree planting projects. At a minimum, use the 30-20-10 rule to select trees for projects.” The 30-20-10 rule is the principle that no more than 30 percent of trees should come from any one family, no more than 20 percent of trees should come from any one genus, and no more than 10 percent of trees should come from any one species. This minimum level of diversity helps to limit the amount of damage that a single disease, pest, or event can do to the city’s urban forest. While the city’s subdivision ordinance was amended to incorporate this standard in 2019, the city’s general landscaping standards were not amended to include a tree diversity requirement. Staff proposes amending the City Code to extend this standard to the general landscaping requirements in order to ensure that site plans and other projects align with 2040 Comprehensive Plan’s goals and policies.

The city’s subdivision ordinance requires that applicants submit a tree survey in order to allow staff to evaluate the development’s impact on the natural environment and ensure compliance

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with the city's tree preservation and canopy coverage requirements; however, unlike other environmental studies required by the city, there is no requirement that the tree survey be current. In some cases tree studies done many years prior to the subdivision application are submitted to meet this requirement. Since natural features like trees and forests change over time, this can lead to situations where the conditions represented by the submitted survey no longer reflect the conditions on the site. In order to ensure that the city has accurate information from which to determine a project's compliance with the city's tree preservation requirements, staff recommends amending the City Code to require that the submitted tree survey be no more than two years old.

### **RELEVANT CITY CODE**

Sec. 18-61 – This section outlines the subdivision ordinance's landscaping and tree preservation requirements, including the 30-20-10 rule and tree survey requirement.

Sec. 20-1183 – This section lists the landscaping requirements that are applied to site plan reviews.

### **ANALYSIS**

#### ***Issue 1: Landscape Standards***

The city recently adopted the 2040 Comprehensive Plan which contains a new policy related to the city's goal of maintaining a healthy and diverse urban forest. As part of the comprehensive planning process, the city is required to update its code of ordinances to align with the policies of the Comprehensive Plan. The city updated the subdivision ordinance to reflect these policies in May of 2019; however, the city's landscaping requirements do not currently contain any tree diversity requirement. These landscaping requirements come into play during site plan reviews, and adding a diversity requirement will help ensure that a development's landscaping plans have the mix of trees needed to create a resilient urban forest.

The importance of a diverse urban forest has been highlighted by the devastating effects of Dutch elm disease and emerald ash borer. In these cases, a single disease or insect killed millions of trees in cities, the effects worsened due to a lack of tree diversity. Diversity is key to a healthy urban forest. To put it simply, different trees are susceptible to different pests, different kinds of weather and different kinds of damage so by consciously choosing a variety of trees, an urban forest becomes less vulnerable to outbreaks, climate change and severe weather. When there is a loss in a city's tree cover, it represents not just the loss of money entailed in removing and replacing the stricken trees, but also the loss of shade, water management, aesthetics, and air quality improvements associated with community canopy cover.

Having a high density of a single type of tree makes it easier for pests and diseases to spread and harder to manage an outbreak. It also means that a single pest or disease can have devastating effects on neighborhoods with an overabundance of a single species. When a developer or a city relies too heavily on a single species, genus or family, it creates a vulnerability within that