Hi Mona,

I enjoyed the discussions about tree retention at the open house last week. I left a two page list of suggestions in the Comment Box, but wanted to submit it electronically also. The attached document is slightly amended, with an additional item about incentives for retention under Compliance.

I understand that there is a delicate balance between development and nature. I also understand private property rights. But there are some cases where allowing certain land uses on certain properties endangers the property of others. One spectacular case in point is the recent landslide in Oso. There are suggestions that over-zealous logging at the top of the slope removed critical slope-stabilizing vegetation, resulting in the slide. Perhaps the slide would have occurred anyway, without the logging, perhaps it would have been less massive without the logging. But the lesson is that other property owners were severely impacted by the actions of uphill owners. This is true of streams and rivers where upstream activity can degrade or reroute water flow. It's true of lake and ocean shores where one owner's bulkhead results in shoreline changes for other residents. It's true when one homeowner in a neighborhood is negligent in maintenance of yard and house, depressing property values of neighbors. I submit that the same is true for tree removal because it impacts neighbors' air quality, property value (from loss of aesthetics and screening), and satisfaction with life in Sammamish.

How can it be right for the needs of one property owner to do what they please when the needs of many other property owners are compromised? We have many such conflicts in Sammamish due to the steep slopes surrounding us, the wetlands and streams among us, and the shoreline bordering us. I hope the update to the tree retention policy can find a better balance than the current one.

Thank you for arranging the open house and letting residents provide input.

Katherine Low
Sammamish Tree Retention Ordinance Update

Recommendations from Katherine Low
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Baseline Assessment and Management Plans

1. There is a strong need for a comprehensive tree survey so the city can catalog the current status of trees in the city. A public tree inventory is a first step toward proper management of our trees. The data collected during an inventory is essential to developing a long-term management strategy that leads to a safe, healthy and sustainable community tree resource that provides a multitude of benefits. The purpose of this project is to create an inventory of public trees that will be used as a baseline for managing a community’s urban forest.

2. Consider adopting the measurement of "urban tree canopy" as an indicator for success of the tree retention policy. From the Center for Watershed Protection:

   Urban tree canopy (UTC) is the layer of leaves, branches, and stems of trees that cover the ground when viewed from above. In urban areas, the UTC provides an important stormwater management function by intercepting rainfall that would otherwise run off of paved surfaces and be transported into local waters though the storm drainage system, picking up various pollutants along the way. UTC also reduces the urban heat island effect, reduces heating/cooling costs, lowers air temperatures, reduces air pollution, increases property values, provides wildlife habitat, and provides aesthetic and community benefits such as improved quality of life. http://www.forestsforwatersheds.org/urban-tree-canopy/

3. The City needs an Urban Forest Management Plan, based on the tree survey and urban tree canopy assessments mentioned above. The plan would provide guidance on how to protect, establish, and manage trees, forests, and related resources. The outcome is to restore and sustain the health and quality of the natural and human environments in urban areas.

4. Consider becoming an Arbor Day Foundation Tree City which supports the above tree protections and gives guidance for tree protection and management.

5. The City should consider applying for Community Forestry Assistance Grants which can be used to do a tree survey and develop a forestry plan: http://www.dnr.wa.gov/ResearchScience/Topics/UrbanForestry/Pages/rp_urban_grant_resources.aspx

6. Create a canopy coverage goal for various sized lots and require that trees be replaced for those removed for properties that are below the coverage goal (See Lake Forest Park Tree ordinance p. 12 (http://www.cityoffp.com/DocumentCenter/Home/View/368)
Standards for Significant Trees Retained in All Developments

7. Align City standards with those of neighboring cities, such as Redmond:

In all new developments, including additions to existing non-single-family buildings and parking areas, a minimum of 35 percent of all significant trees shall be retained. Trees that are located within Native Growth Protection Areas, critical areas, and their associated buffers as provided in RZC 21.64, Critical Areas, or that have otherwise been designated for protection shall not be removed. Exceptions to this standard shall be requested and reviewed in accordance with RZC 21.72.090, Exceptions.

8. Consider adding tight controls for removal of a "heritage tree" or "landmark tree" to the municipal code. Such a status should protect these special trees from being removed indiscriminately, whether they are on public or private land.

From the Redmond Zoning Code:

Landmark Trees. Landmark trees shall not be removed unless an exception has been applied for and granted.

Replanting

9. Consider offering developers the option of tree mitigation in other parts of the city if mitigation on the actual property involved is problematic, with the understanding that replacement on the actual property is the preference.

10. Require a maintenance bond and watering requirements (as Issaquah does) for developers in order to ensure the viability of replacement trees.

11. The City should maintain a list of approved trees for replacement, with strong preference for native species.

12. Homeowners should be strongly encouraged to replant with native vegetation when removing trees from their property, and given resources for information. The volunteers from the Washington Native Plant Society would be excellent resources for this educational function.

Tree Retention for Existing Single-family Lots

13. Replace the current practice of near-automatic tree removal permit approval with stronger requirements for proof of necessity for the removal.

14. The City should have a certified tree professional on contract who can assist with reviewing the trees that homeowners and developers want to remove.
15. Adopt tiered permit fees related to size of the trees and environmental impact of their removal, i.e. the bigger the tree, the higher the fee; the more trees to be removed, the higher the fee; the closer to critical areas, the higher the fees. Reserve the highest fees for removal of landmark trees and those within the critical area setbacks.

16. The City should develop a web page similar to Lake Forest Park to provide information on the tree retention code, the value of trees to the community, how to obtain a permit for removing a tree, and educational resources on suitable native vegetation for replacement.

Compliance

17. Require contractors and arborists to sign a document stating they are aware of the city's tree ordinance and will bear responsibility to abide by it along with the homeowner in order to do business in the city (See Lake Forest Park tree ordinance http://www.cityoflfp.com/DocumentCenter/Home/View/368 p. 18.)

18. For developers, adopt ordinances similar to the tiered permit described above. Permit fees should be related to size of the trees and environmental impact of their removal, i.e. the bigger the tree, the higher the fee; the more trees to be removed, the higher the fee; the closer to critical areas, the higher the fees. Reserve the highest fees for removal of landmark trees and those within the critical area setbacks.

19. Offer incentives for property owners and developers to preserve trees and understory when building. This would encourage creative thinking for development that would protect habitats and leave pockets as close to natural as possible. If strong enough, these incentives would discourage the current practices of cutting and bulldozing wide swaths then replacing small portions with immature, non-native vegetation.

20. Strengthen the code restrictions regarding tree removal during wildlife breeding season.

21. Significantly increase the penalties for illegal cutting especially for repeat-offender developers who should know better, based on their previous activity in the City. An adoption of 3-strikes-and-you're-out could also work to discourage aggressive clearing. After three instances and payment of resulting fines, the offender would not be allowed to apply for another permit for a specific number of years, preferably more than three. If any fines are not paid, regardless of how any "strikes" accrued, the offender should be similarly discouraged.