Hi, Mary...thank you so much for your comments on tree retention! I enjoyed discussing the current policies with you and appreciate you making the extra effort to provide a very thorough explanation in response to the questionnaire provided at the open house. You raised some great points that I will include in my presentations to the Planning Commission and City Council at future meetings. I hope that you will continue to be involved and participate in future meetings. Your input is very valuable and I appreciate the recommendations you provided to improve our current code! Thanks again...

Mona

Mona Davis, Senior Planner
City of Sammamish
Community Development Department
801 228th Avenue SE
Sammamish, WA 98075

NEW EMAIL ADDRESS as of March 1, 2013: mdavis@sammamish.us
Direct: 425-295-0529

Hi Mona,

I enjoyed meeting you a couple of weeks ago and learning more about the tree retention policy. Attached are some of the thoughts I have, which align with the questionnaire you provided at the meeting.

I realize that there is always a compromise between retaining trees on a development site and the economic imperatives of land development and that striking a balance is difficult and subjective. But I hope that my comments as well as those you receive from other concerned citizens will help you and other city officials work toward achieving a better balanced tree retention policy.

Thanks for holding the open house and letting us provide input.

Best regards,
Mary Johnson

MJohnson Communications
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Mary Johnson

M.Johnson Communications
Mary Johnson, Writer & Editor
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TREE RETENTION IN SAMMAMISH

Input from:
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The wooded and pastoral nature of Sammamish is changing rapidly. This quality that attracts people to the city and imbues it with a unique sense of place is in danger of disappearing as a result.

Trees are resources that need to be managed. They provide environmental services, which include making our community cleaner, healthier, and a better place to live and work. And they provide necessary habitat for wildlife. Trees, along with native vegetation, help stabilize slopes, which are prevalent in Sammamish, and control erosion. Continued removal of such a large amount of tree canopy in our city will greatly increase stormwater runoff and reduce the amount of CO₂ absorption.

Comments pertaining to what is currently in place for tree retention
The city needs to conduct a tree survey to establish a baseline of the composition, condition, and distribution of trees throughout Sammamish. This survey will provide a context for strategic decision making and for developing a long-term management plan of the city’s urban forest. Going forward, it will also help track the changes that have occurred in the city’s urban forest, as well as estimate future needs and overall trends. For example, with the ability to track changes, the city will be able to tell how much the tree canopy has decreased (or even increased).

The urban forest is an important building block in the city’s sustainability efforts, helping to reduce the urban heat index, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, absorb stormwater runoff and improve air quality.

Recommendations to improve the current code
I think there need to be stronger, enforceable penalties in place when a developer removes trees or vegetation they are supposed to preserve. I also think there should be zero tolerance for repeat offenders of such removal.

Requiring the offender to just replant with saplings (especially non-native ones) does not restore the environmental services, including the critical ability to absorb stormwater runoff and provide bird habitat, that were destroyed by the felling of the larger, older trees. (In many cases, I wonder if developer would probably rather cut down the big trees “accidentally,” go about their grading work more easily, and then accept the penalty of having to replant with cheap saplings.) We are talking about irreplaceable losses here that cannot be mitigated by replacement trees, particularly if these trees are street trees, which usually won’t reach maturity anyway.

As an example of this scenario, a Sammamish Review article on October 2, 2013 (http://sammamishreview.com/2013/10/02/city-issues-stop-work-order-after-pair-of-trees-felled) cited a developer who in the course of developing the property put up inadequate fencing to contain erosion (why wasn’t this caught earlier in the permit process, I wonder?) and had gone beyond the limits of clearing, taking out vegetation that was supposed to preserve, including a pair of significant trees.
(conflicting information said it was five second-growth cedar trees). The article goes on to say that the developer had already been involved in 30-40 developments in Sammamish and was a repeat offender.

Yet the city allowed this person to continue building houses.

Developers have no vested interest in their properties, aesthetics-wise or ecologically speaking, or the surrounding community other than to build and sell the houses, make a profit, and go on to the next project. They need to be held accountable when they don’t adhere to the policies. (Otherwise, the perception can arise that the city isn’t serious about enforcement.)

Thus the city needs to adopt stronger measures than what is currently specified in 21A.35.240 of the code. And when trees are replanted, the developer needs to submit a maintenance program outlining how the trees will be cared for until they can survive on their own. They then need to be held accountable to ensuring the trees do survive.

In addition to stronger penalties, I think the percentage of trees being retained needs to be increased to 30 percent.

**Should certain types of trees (such as cottonwoods) be eliminated from counting as significant?**
No, I don’t think they should be eliminated from being counted as significant. While cottonwoods and other so-called nuisance trees can be problematic when planted too close to houses or septic and other underground infrastructure, many of these trees provide significant wildlife value, for example, hosting insects which attract predatory birds and mammals, and providing nesting sites.

**What should be the tree retention requirements for existing single-family lots?**
This is a difficult scenario because lot lines are often tight, but I think that whenever possible as many trees, as well as the existing native vegetation, should be saved as part of the new home’s permanent landscape. Clear-cutting is not an option.

Many trees are tolerant to construction activities as long as the activities take place outside of the protected root zone, which is usually defined as the dripline but may extend further. I don’t know the particulars, but I’m sure there is a wealth of literature already written and published about this process and others that help make retaining trees a more viable option.

When trees must be taken, I think native trees and vegetation should be considered as replacements.

**What should be the tree retention requirements for new development?**
See my comments under “Recommendations to improve the current code.”
City issues stop work order after pair of trees felled

October 2, 2013

By Ari Cetron

What started as a bit of confusion over parking led to the city of Sammamish issuing a stop work order for a property under construction on 207th Avenue.

Construction vehicles had parked on a road marked as a private street, Development Director Kamuron Gurol told the City Council Sept. 16. Neighbors had complained about the situation and the city went to investigate. Eventually, officials determined the road was actually a public road — and the city had erroneously put up a sign saying it was private — but also noticed other problems.

In the course of developing the property, construction crews had put up inadequate fencing to contain erosion, and they’d gone beyond the limits of clearing, taking out vegetation they were supposed to preserve, including a pair of significant trees, Gurol said.

http://sammamishreview.com/2013/10/02/city-issues-stop-work-order-after-pair-of-trees-felled
He noted that the property is a difficult one to develop, and he does not think he’ll be issuing any other building permits in the area.

Gurol issued a stop work order. The city is working with the applicant, Paul Northwest, to fix the issues.

“We want them to get in and complete the work on site. We just want him to do it in a proper fashion,” Gurol said.

Stop work orders are fairly rare in Sammamish. The city first engages in a practice called “knock-and-talk.” In most cases, building officials notice a violation of building codes and works with builders to fix them.

Stop work orders only come in more serious situations.

“They are issued when all efforts to compliance have been exhausted or the violation is so egregious that there will be many requirements to be met before work can start back up again,” wrote Kurt Aldworth, a Sammamish building official.

Aldworth said Sammamish generally has four to five stop work orders over the course of a year.

At the Sept. 16 meeting, Gurol went on to explain the city will be imposing the stiffest penalties permitted under city code, noting Paul Northwest is a repeat offender.

Aldworth said Paul has had two other similar instances of clearing violations within the past five years. He also said there had been seven other cases in Sammamish involving Paul.

The city will require Paul Northwest to replant the trees. While Gurol had yet to determine the ratio, he said it could go as high as planting eight trees for each one cut down.

Jyoti Paul, managing member of Paul Northwest, downplayed the problem. He said he has respect for the neighbors, the city and the regulations.

He acknowledged that the builder might have gone over the lines.

“There might have been a little work outside of the clearing limits,” Paul said in an interview.

Paul said he’s been involved in 30-40 developments in Sammamish over about the past five years. He said he’s had a low number of problematic incidents.

Since the meeting, the issues have been resolved, Paul said, and construction has begun again. He hopes it will be complete in the next four to six months. He does not yet have a buyer lined up, he said.

Other Stories of Interest: Sammamish Government, trees

Written by Ari Cetron · Filed Under Local News

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Comments

One Response to “City issues stop work order after pair of trees felled”

1. Leslie Lardie on October 3rd, 2013 3:01 pm
Interesting – the pair of so called call trees were about 5, 2nd growth cedar trees. This is when our communication with the city began. This is also when we found out the city proclaimed that our private road was public. After many emails and documentation findings we as of today are back to having a private road. If you would like the full story watch the City of Sammamish video from the City Council meeting dated October 1, 2013.

**Got something to say?**

Before you comment, please note:

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