

# Don't go out on a limb!

## Know the rules.

### Frequently Asked Questions about Tree Pruning and Removal

For Bellevue, "City in a park" is more than just a marketing slogan. Abundant trees and landscaping make the city healthy and beautiful. The pride that Bellevue's neighborhoods take in their landscapes is a prime example. To clear up misconceptions regarding the rules around maintenance of trees and shrubs on private property, the following are answers to some commonly asked questions.

#### Do I need a permit to prune trees on my property?

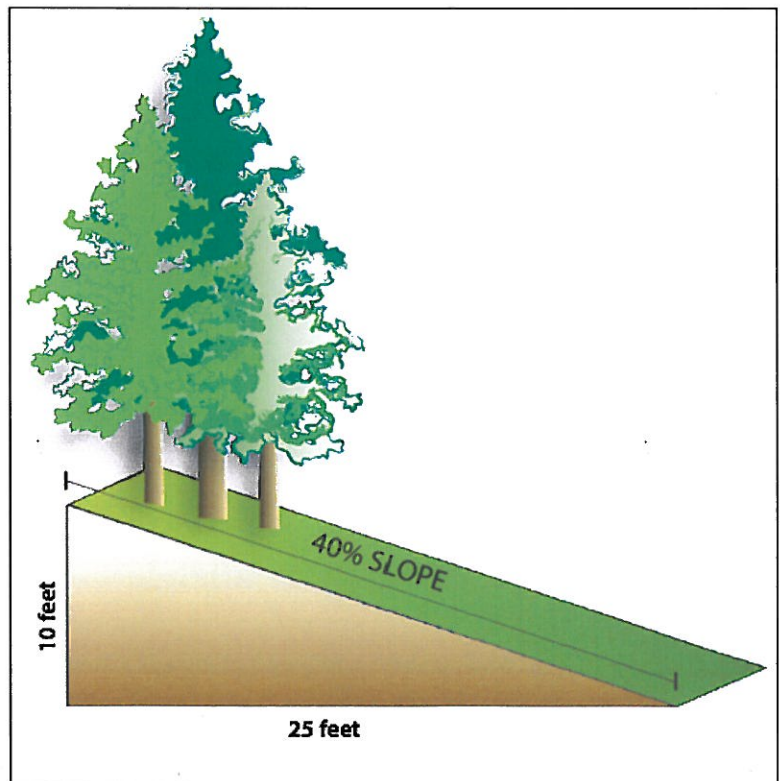
On most residential properties, the answer is NO, with a few exceptions. When the City Council approved the Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) in 2006, the management of vegetation on steep slope critical areas within view neighborhoods was written into the city's regulations. Typically, any disturbance within a critical area or critical area buffer would require a permit, but specific pruning techniques are allowed without permits except in areas already designated Native Growth Protection Areas or Native Growth Protection Easements. Trees can even be "re-topped" if there is a historical record or consistent evidence over time of past topping. The exceptions mentioned above apply to trees near streams or wetlands.

Pruning and topping allowed in steep slope critical areas must meet the following conditions:

- Prune trees in accordance with the *City of Bellevue's Tree Pruning Guidelines*. Electronic versions are available at [http://www.bellevuewa.gov/pdf/Development%20Services/Tree\\_Pruning\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.bellevuewa.gov/pdf/Development%20Services/Tree_Pruning_Guidelines.pdf). Hardcopies are available at the Development Services Center at City Hall.
- Prevent erosion by protecting undergrowth as much as possible.
- Top only trees that can be confirmed to have been topped prior to adoption of the CAO in August 2006.

#### What is considered a steep slope critical area?

Steep slope critical areas are defined as slopes of 40% or more that have an elevation change of 10 feet or more and cover 1,000 square feet or more. City staff are available at [landusereview@bellevuewa.gov](mailto:landusereview@bellevuewa.gov) or 425-452-4188 to answer questions.



### **Do I need a permit to remove one or more trees from my property?**

Most of the time, the answer is NO. However, a permit is required if any of the following conditions are true:

- Tree removal results in more than 1,000 square feet of disturbance of the ground. The removal of one average-sized tree usually results in 50 square feet of ground disturbance.
- The property is part of a designated critical area or critical buffer. Land use professionals can check city maps to help make this determination.
- The tree is in a Native Growth Protection Area, a Retained Vegetation Area, or was retained as part of a prior land use approval, such as land subdivision.
- The tree is on the city's right of way adjacent to your property.

### **Who can I contact to see if I need a permit?**

Before pruning, removing or topping any tree, contact the Land Use desk in Development Services (425-452-4188 or [landusereview@Bellevuewa.gov](mailto:landusereview@Bellevuewa.gov)) for assistance in determining whether you need a permit or what restrictions may prevent you from pruning or removing trees. Staff are on call to answer questions between the hours of 8 am to 4 pm Monday-Friday and from 10 am to 4 pm on Wednesday.

### **What are "critical" areas?**

The City of Bellevue regulates six types of critical areas in its Land Use Code:

- Streams and riparian areas
- Wetlands
- Habitats for species of local importance
- Geological hazard areas
- Flood hazard areas
- Shorelines

These areas are given special protection because they provide unique environmental functions that are difficult, if not impossible, to replace and because they ensure public health, safety and welfare. The city has developed a series of informational handouts. They are available under the Environmental Stewardship tab on the city's homepage at [http://www.bellevuewa.gov/critical\\_areas\\_update.htm](http://www.bellevuewa.gov/critical_areas_update.htm)

### **What if I am concerned about the health or safety of my trees?**

With wild Northwest winter weather right around the corner, one of the leading causes for concern is tree safety. To ensure you are not needlessly removing otherwise healthy trees, it pays to talk with a qualified tree professional, like a Certified Arborist or Certified Forester. Here are two websites that can help locate these professionals: The International Society of Arboriculture at [www.treesaregood.org](http://www.treesaregood.org) or The Society of American Foresters at [www.safnet.org](http://www.safnet.org)

**If I have a tree in a critical area that is a safety risk, do I need a permit to remove it?**

YES. The removal of “hazard trees” in critical areas and critical area buffers requires a clearing and grading permit and documentation from an arborist or forester qualified in tree risk assessment. However, trees that pose an imminent hazard may be removed prior to obtaining the permit, provided that a qualified tree professional collects all pertinent documentation to be submitted within two weeks of the removal.

**What if I have trees in a critical area on my property that aren't a safety risk, but still I want to remove them?**

The CAO anticipated this situation and created the Critical Areas Land Use Permit – Vegetation Management Plan, to allow property owners to document their short- and long-term objectives and follow them up with management actions to achieve these goals. The Critical Areas Handbook was developed to help property owners draw up their own plans. It is available on the City's website at [http://www.bellevuewa.gov/critical\\_areas\\_update.htm](http://www.bellevuewa.gov/critical_areas_update.htm)

## **Regarding trees on public property**

**May I remove trees adjacent to my property, either in a public right of way or a park?**

NO. The public is not authorized to prune or remove any vegetation – including trees – from any public property. Please e-mail either [rightofwayuse@bellevuewa.gov](mailto:rightofwayuse@bellevuewa.gov) or [parksweb@bellevuewa.gov](mailto:parksweb@bellevuewa.gov) to help determine whether a tree is on public or private property.

**I noticed that some public trees look unhealthy. What can I do?**

City staff will respond to your concerns. To report a potentially unhealthy tree on park property, call 425-452-6855 or e-mail [parksweb@bellevuewa.gov](mailto:parksweb@bellevuewa.gov). To report a potentially unhealthy tree in the public right of way, call 425-452-7840.

**What happens if I remove, top or otherwise prune a tree on city property without permission?**

You may face civil penalties, including fines up to *three times* the assessed value of the trees involved. Depending on the circumstances, criminal charges may also be brought.