

**Spokane City Plan Commission
Findings of Fact, Conclusions, and Recommendations
Proposed Amendment to Landscaping and Screening
Spokane Municipal Code Section 17C.200.090 Completion and Bonding**

A Recommendation from the City Plan Commission to the City Council to approve the proposed amendment to the Unified Development Code. The proposal adds the requirement for a site inspection to be completed by the landscape design professional prior to certificate of occupancy by making changes to Spokane Municipal Code (SMC) Chapter 17C.200.090 Completion and Bonding.

Findings of Fact:

- A.** The Plan Commission has been asked to consider and make recommendations to the City Council on a proposed amendment to chapter 17C.200.090 of the Spokane Municipal Code relating to completion inspections for landscaping requirements.
- B.** Staff worked with City Council Member Mike Allen to develop and present a draft proposal to the Plan Commission. Plan Commission workshops were held on this topic to review interim drafts on March 11 and May 13, 2015.
- C.** Public comments were solicited from industry professionals and the public between March 12, 2015 and May 13, 2015, to receive public feedback on the proposed amendment to the Landscape Chapter. The City provided multiple email notices of the proposed changes to industry and community members. The City also advertised on local industry newsletters, social media channels and its website.
- D.** The proposal is consistent with and implements provisions of the City of Spokane's Comprehensive Plan. There are many references to landscaping, here is a selection:

LU 2.1 Public Realm Features

Encourage features that improve the appearance of development, paying attention to how projects function to encourage social interaction and relate to and enhance the surrounding urban and natural environment.

Discussion: *The "public realm" is the public or private area where people interact with their surroundings or other people. The "public realm" is affected by the appearance, use, and attractiveness of development and how it functions. It is important to design buildings to maintain compatibility with surrounding development, and to design sites that provide for pathways, attractive and functional landscaping, properly proportioned open spaces, and other connecting features that facilitate easy access between public and private places.*

LU 5.1 Built and Natural Environment

Ensure that developments are sensitive to and provide adequate impact mitigation so that they maintain and enhance the quality of the built and natural

environment (e.g., air and water quality, noise, traffic congestion, and public utilities and services).

LU 5.2 Environmental Quality Enhancement

Encourage site locations and design features that enhance environmental quality and compatibility with surrounding land uses.

Discussion: Ensure the provision of adequate landscaping and other site design features that enhance the compatibility of development with the surrounding area.

TR 7.3 Street Trees

Plant Street trees wherever possible to enhance the transportation environment.

Discussion: A healthy "urban forest" is one of the greatest assets a city can have. It is also one of the few infrastructure elements that appreciate in value with age. For transportation purposes, street trees have many benefits; they provide a traffic calming effect, help orient motorists, provide shade and habitat, reduce glare, noise, erosion, and wind, and absorb carbon monoxide.

Large trees with overhanging canopies of branches are especially desirable. Streets with a cathedral of trees overhead are an important aesthetic element that fosters community pride and identity. One concern in planning for street trees is to ensure that public safety is protected by preventing sidewalks and curbs from being damaged by tree roots. This problem can be addressed through the design of the pedestrian buffer strip and the selection of the appropriate tree type for the planting site. In addition, planting techniques such as root barriers, "structural soil," and irrigation practices are helpful mechanisms in preventing tree roots from damaging sidewalks and curbs.

Poorly selected or poorly maintained trees can present other problems, including interfering with overhead utility lines, underground utilities, neighboring properties, and other plants and minimizing sight distances. Due to these potential problems, it is important that the appropriate type of tree be selected for each location and that trees are properly maintained. This is particularly true since trees are living organisms that grow larger each year, increasing in height, canopy width, and size of root system. It is important to consider what the size and shape of trees will be when they are mature. The Parks and Recreation Department's urban forestry program maintains a list of appropriate trees for planting in different environments. A permit is required to plant a tree in the right-of-way.

DP 2.2 Zoning and Design Standards

Utilize zoning and design standards that have flexibility and incentives to ensure that development is compatible with surrounding land uses.

Discussion: Maintaining or enhancing the neighborhood's character, livability, and property value is a benefit to the residents of an area and provides business owners with some assurance of community stability. Adopted standards that are adhered to, even when some flexibility is included, offer protection and instill confidence in established and prospective residents and business owners. The standards should address traffic, parking, loading control, structural mass, open space, green areas, lighting, landscaping and buffering, and safety of persons and property, as well as the impacts of noise, vibration, dust, and odors.

NE 2.2 Landscaping Requirements

Use incentives in landscape requirements that encourage application of drought tolerant native trees and plants.

SMP 4.5 Native Plant Retention and Landscaping

Provide ongoing education and incentives that emphasize the retention of or landscaping with native plant communities in non-impaired or blighted areas as new development and redevelopment occurs.

- E. On June 4, 2015 staff requested Washington State Department of Commerce grant expedited review from the Growth Management Services Division.
- F. This proposal was found to be exempt from SEPA under WAC 197-11-800(19)(b).
- G. Appropriate notice of the Plan Commission hearing was published in the Spokesman Review on June 10, 2015 and June 17, 2015.
- H. The City Plan Commission held a public hearing on June 24, 2015 to obtain public comments on the proposed amendment.

Conclusions:

- A. The Plan Commission has reviewed all public testimony received during the public hearings.
- B. The Plan Commission has found that the proposed amendments meet the approval criteria for text amendments to the Unified Development Code:
SMC 17G.025.010 (F) Approval Criteria:
 - 1. The proposed amendments are consistent with the applicable provisions of the comprehensive plan; and
 - 2. The proposed amendments bear a substantial relation to public health, safety, welfare, and protection of the environment.
- C. The proposed amendments have been reviewed by the City Plan Commission and found to be in conformance with the goals and policies of the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Recommendations:

By a vote of 7 to 0, the Plan Commission recommends to the City Council the approval of the proposed amendments to the Unified Development Code.



**Dennis Dellwo, President
Spokane Plan Commission
June 24, 2015**