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**COMMUNITY PLANNING &  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

*Creating Solutions for Our Future*

Joshua Cummings, Director

**ATTACHMENT A**

**TO:** Board of County Commissioners

**FROM:** Ashley Arai, Associate Planner

**DATE:** February 3, 2022

**SUBJECT:** Docket Item A-25, Update Forest Lands Conversion Ordinance and Review  
Tree Protection Standards: Scope of Tree Protection Review

**Strategic Plan Goals**

This project supports Thurston County Strategic Plan Initiatives 7, 9, and 13 through its focus on rural character, the support of environmental health and climate stabilization, and emphasis on community input.

**Background**

This item has been included on previous official and preliminary dockets between 2009 to present. The forest lands conversion item has been officially docketed since 2018. In 2020, the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) combined this item with a review of the County's tree protection standards. In 2022, Docket Item A-25 was clarified to focus on Forest Lands Conversion Ordinance updates and review of rural tree protection standards. The urban tree protection standards and policies will be reviewed and updated through the County's joint plan review and updates, which are docketed separately as items CPA-1, and JP-2, JP-3 and JP-4.

For context, a canopy coverage analysis for the Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) was completed in 2011, titled *The Urban Forest Data Report*. Following this analysis, the County embarked on an urban forest management planning effort that resulted in a draft plan being completed in 2013. In subsequent years the County has adopted policies for no net forest loss and has established targets for tree planting to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Preliminary research on this docket item was restarted in early 2021 and staff began engaging community stakeholders in fall 2021 to gain broader input on existing County policies and programs related to forest conversions and tree protection. Of the priority issues identified by stakeholders, one is to update the County's 2011 *Urban Forest Data Report* to better understand

any changes in canopy coverage. Another priority is to establish a stewardship program that supports small forest landowners in their tree conservation and replanting efforts.

### **Existing Provisions**

Thurston County currently regulates tree protection through several ordinances in different locations in Thurston County Code.

- Thurston County Forest Lands Conversion Ordinance (TCC Chapter 17.25), adopted in 1997, was designed to carry out the provisions of the WA Forest Practices Act, State Environmental Policy Act, and the Thurston County Comprehensive Plan through the proper regulation of forest lands converting to other non-forestry uses.
- Thurston County Critical Area Ordinance and Shoreline Master Program (Titles 24 and 19 respectively) regulate trees in critical areas and along shorelines to help protect the value and function of unique environmental elements.
- Thurston County Zoning and Development Standards (Titles 20, 21, 22, 23) contain landscaping and open space requirements that are administered at the time of development.

Within Thurston County, four cities have adopted urban forestry plans and corresponding tree protection regulations, and an additional two cities have adopted public street tree plans to maintain and grow their urban canopy.

### **Scope of Work Options**

Staff has developed three options for scope of work on this project that aim to further the County's tree protection goals, while clarifying and streamlining the permitting process.

#### **Scope of Work Option 1: Update Tree Protection Provisions for Clarity and Consistency** *(Estimated late-2022)*

Option 1 would update the Forest Conversion Ordinance (TCC 17.25) to clarify existing tree protection provisions, streamline the permitting processes and address inconsistencies between various code sections. This collection of code updates would simplify the County's existing tree protection provisions, making them easier for the public to understand and for the County to implement. It would also help to further the county's tree protection goals in rural areas. Tree protection provisions for the North County UGAs will be reviewed and updated as part of the upcoming Joint Code Update (expected to begin in late-2022 or 2023 as part of the Joint Plan Code Updates under the development code docket items JP-2, JP-3, and JP-4).

Staff anticipates it taking at least until late-2022 for the BoCC to review and take final action on a package of code updates.

#### **Scope of Work Option 2: Update Canopy Assessment to Guide Updates in Rural Tree Protection Provisions** *(Estimated early-2023)*

In addition to the code updates included in Option 1, Option 2 would include working with our regional partners to complete a countywide canopy assessment. This assessment would provide insight into changes in canopy coverage since 2009 and help identify areas vulnerable to forest conversion in the future. This information could then be used to establish canopy goals and/or

guide additional updates to rural tree protection provisions.

Completion of a countywide canopy analysis would also inform other ongoing planning efforts such as the Climate Mitigation Plan, Shoreline Master Program, Voluntary Stewardship Program, and Habitat Conservation Plan.

Staff would return to the BoCC for further direction on a package of tree protection provisions once the canopy inventory is complete. This briefing would occur prior to engaging the broader community and beginning the legislative review process with the Planning Commission.

Staff anticipates it taking at least a year to finalize the canopy assessment given the additional data analysis and regional coordination that are required. This timeline may impact other docket projects in the short-term depending on BoCC priorities.

**Scope of Work Option 3: Update Tree Protection Provisions and Establish Forest Stewardship Program to Support Small Forest Landowners** *(Estimated late-2023)*

Option 3 would complement the code updates under Option 1 with an incentive-based program that supports small forest landowners in their tree conservation and replanting efforts. This option would leverage state grant funds and investments in reforestation to design a sustainable outreach and education program around rural tree preservation. Staff time would be focused on working with regional partners, including Department of natural Resources, Thurston Conservation District, WSU Extension, and the local land trusts to identify innovative ways to expand existing resources and/or secure new ones. This work would also dovetail with the agricultural updates to County conservation programs, which are currently underway.

Staff anticipates a timeframe of at least two years of working with regional partners and professional consultants to establish the infrastructure for a forest stewardship program. Lack of state grant funding may increase timing of this option. Allocating staff time to develop programmatic elements for tree preservation may also impact future availability to work on other docket projects.

The Board could also include work under Option 2 in this scope. However, this could extend the length of the project beyond late-2023, but this addition would address both issues identified by initial stakeholder input.