

Q&A – Tree Bylaw project update June 2026

Q: What is a Tree Bylaw?

A. A tree bylaw is a set of rules and regulations determining how trees are regulated, managed and sets rules about why a permit can be issued for their removal. A tree bylaw usually defines what trees are regulated when a tree removal permit may be necessary, what the replacement requirements are sets applicable fees, securities and enforcement mechanisms. Saanich has had a tree bylaw since 1993. Saanich's current bylaw is named the Tree Protection Bylaw.

Q. What are the limitations of a Tree Bylaw?

The Community Charter affords local governments, such as Saanich, the right to regulate trees and, sets limitations on what local governments can require in a tree bylaw.

A. A Tree Bylaw can:

- require permits before cutting or removing protected trees;
- set conditions;
- require replacement planting and maintenance as permit conditions;
- collect securities; and
- support compliance and enforcement through inspections, securities, tickets or court proceedings, and remediation orders.

A Tree Bylaw cannot:

- Regulate trees subject to provincial forestry legislation or activities governed by other provincial statutes.
- Be applied full-strength on lands within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) depending on the nature of the activity and applicable provincial agricultural regulations.
- Stop certain utility works on land owned or held by utilities.
- Prevent a property from being used or developed to the density already permitted by zoning

Q. Why is the Tree Protection Bylaw being updated?

A. The update is driven by two key factors. New provincial housing legislation (Bills 44, 46, and 47) changes how housing is planned and built, which affects how trees can be managed on development sites. The update is proposed to support the goals of the Urban Forest Strategy and Council direction under Saanich's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, connecting tree management with broader municipal goals. Updating the bylaw will support tree retention and replacement as housing policy evolves and aims to streamline bylaw coordination and administration.

Q. What are the Tree Bylaw Update project objectives?

A. The Tree Bylaw update objectives are to

- **Align:** Align with the [Urban Forest Strategy](#) (UFS) and [Official Community Plan](#) (OCP), including a shift toward canopy cover–based outcomes achieving 44% canopy cover by 2064.
- **Clarify:** Clarify and streamline Tree Bylaw administration across land uses and permit types.
- **Prioritize:** Encourage retention of high-value trees and recognize the asset value of public trees.
- **Strengthen:** Identify and address regulatory gaps and enhance enforcement.

Q. Where will the updated Tree Bylaw apply?

A. The bylaw will continue to apply to Saanich owned and private land, including trees in residential and commercial spaces. Farming in the Agricultural Land Reserve, tree farms and provincial or federal land will remain exempt.

Q. How can I review the draft bylaw?

A. Saanich is taking a project status update to Council on June 8, 2026. This includes the engagement results and high-level recommendations proposed. Bylaw drafting, testing and legal review are continuing through the fall of 2026. The full draft Bylaw will be available as part of the Council agenda package when the project moves to that stage.

Q. When did Saanich engage with the community and what were the results?

A. In November and December 2025, community engagement on the Tree Bylaw updates was undertaken with the public via an online open house and questionnaire, and with the development community (developers, arborists and landscape architects) and staff across departments via targeted online engagement sessions.

Themes that emerged throughout engagement include:

- **Administrative Changes for Enhanced Clarity and Efficiency:** Clarify scope, definitions, permit timeframes, and application requirements so the bylaw is easier to interpret and administer.
- **Enhance Tree Protection:** Strengthen retention by updating removal reasons, expanding protection for medium-sized and high-value trees, and use securities to retain trees and compensation to reduce avoidable loss.
- **Effective Replacement Tools:** Modernize replacement options and planting standards, shift development toward canopy-cover based outcomes identified in

the Urban Forest Strategy, and add credits that reward exceeding targets through retention and planting.

- **Improve Compliance and Enforcement:** Improve compliance through clear guidance, defined arborist roles, consistent protection practices, retention securities and update fees and increased penalties to function as a deterrent.

Q. How will the updated Bylaw address invasive tree species?

A. The updated bylaw plans to address challenges associated with invasive and inappropriate tree species, potentially facilitating removal and replacement with a suitable tree species in a streamlined fashion.

Q. Will I still be able to remove a tree on my property?

A. The updated bylaw proposes some enhanced measures to protect trees; however, tree removals will still be allowed when necessary for safety, development and other valid reasons. Until a revised bylaw is passed, the existing Tree Protection Bylaw will continue to apply.

Q. If someone removes a tree, will they need to plant a replacement tree?

A. Yes. Under the current bylaw the number of replacement trees required is determined during the permit process. The updated bylaw will continue to require replacement trees, but may change how many are required to allow more flexible, land-use type solutions.

Q. How will the proposed changes enhance the urban forest in Saanich?

A. The updated Tree Bylaw recognizes that large trees provide more value than small trees. The update proposes to incentivize retaining and planting larger class trees – which also tend to provide more canopy cover.

Q. Where can I learn more about trees in Saanich?

A. Saanich's Urban Forest webpage hosts information on planting programs, permits, tree care tips, and more.

Q. How will canopy cover be measured and applied to building projects?

A. The canopy cover targets are a percentage of property area, based on land use, and stem directly from the Official Community Plan and the Urban Forest Strategy (UFS). The Bylaw updates propose that retained trees will have their actual canopy cover measured, typically from the existing Saanich GIS overhead photos. Planted trees will have a canopy cover assigned to them by species based on an average of their future canopy growth potential. The combination of the retained and planted trees canopy cover in metres will be measured against the total area of a property for the canopy cover percentage for the project.

Q. How will the updates impact rural trees vs urban trees?

A. The updates propose inside the Urban Containment Boundary (UCB), that one of the definitions of what trees are regulated is reduced to 30 cm diameter at breast height (DBH). This aims to incentivize projects to retain trees that have further potential to grow into the canopy of the future.

Outside the UCB the size definition is not proposed to change. To protect the canopy in rural Saanich, the updates propose to discontinue the practice of allowing rural properties to remove some protected trees annually, due to the size of their properties. All the other relevant tree removal clauses such as farming, dead or hazardous trees and the Interface Fire Development Permit Area will still apply.