



City of Santa Barbara

TREE AND LANDSCAPING REFERENCE GUIDE

The reference guide is designed to assist you in completing the “Tree and Landscaping Checklist”. The section below corresponds to the questions on the checklist. This guide also includes frequently asked questions and instructions on how to submit for a permit for tree and landscape removals and alterations.

Links to useful information such as our design district maps, case history and parcel information are available at our Planning Central webpage at www.SantaBarbaraCa.Gov/PlanningCentral. Planning handouts are available at www.SantaBarbaraCa.Gov/PlanningHandouts. If you need additional assistance in navigating through the City’s website or additional clarification, please call the Planning Counter at (805) 564-5578 or come to the counter at 630 Garden Street during office hours.

A. “Tree and Landscaping Checklist” Related Questions

1. **What is a city right-of-way?** Per SBMC§15.20.110.A and SBMC§28.04.650, this area includes the parkway strip, tree well, and any other grounds found within the legal street right-of-way. The right-of-way may be clearly defined with curbs, gutters and sidewalks and may extend beyond those improvements. In more rural areas, the legal street right-of-way is unimproved and a survey may be required to determine the exact location of the edge of the right-of-way.
2. **What is included in the term “landscaping”?** For the purposes of these ordinances, landscaping refers to any living element such as vegetation, hedges, shrubs, and groundcover, but not including trees, and any other non-living element such as ground cover, water features, rocks, pavers, pathways and drainage. Trees are regulated separately from landscaping.
3. **What is considered a significant alteration of a regulated tree?** Per SBMC§15.24.010.I, it is defined as pruning a regulated tree in such a way that either (i) its natural character is significantly altered, or (ii) the height and/or spread of the tree crown is reduced by more than one-quarter within any twelve-month period.
4. **How do I determine if my property is in the Appealable Jurisdiction of the Coastal Zone?** You can look at the Coastal Map online at the [Planning and Zoning Maps webpage](#).
5. **What is the process to remove a dead, diseased or hazardous tree?** Per SBMC§15.24.030 & -035, a dead, diseased, or hazardous tree may be removed without a permit as long as the Parks and Recreation department is provided adequate notice. In some cases, an arborist letter or report may be required prior to the removal of the tree. Contact the Parks and Recreation Department for more information.
6. **What is a City “Historic” or “Specimen” tree?** Per SBMC§15.20.020.C, a “Historic Tree” is a tree which has been found to be a tree of notable historic interest and has been designated by resolution of the City Council as a "historic tree". Per SBMC§15.20.020.J, a “Specimen Tree” is any tree which has been found by the Parks and Recreation Commission to be of high value because of its type and/or age and which has been designated by resolution of the City Council. This information can be found online on the [Parks and Recreation Forestry Program webpage](#).
7. **What is an “active case”?** An “active case” refers to any building permit, master application, or public works permit, that is still valid and has not expired nor received a final inspection. You can look up the status for any cases for your property online on the [Permit Status Lookup webpage](#).

8. **How can I check if my property is in a historic district (such as, El Pueblo Viejo Part I or II, the Brinkerhoff Avenue Landmark District, the Riviera Campus Historic District) or a designated historic resource (City Landmark or City Structure of Merit)?** Historic districts and historic resources are designated in accordance with SBMC§22.22. You can look up this information for your property online on the [“Parcel Information” webpage](#).
9. **How can I check if my property is located in the Demolition Review Survey Study Area, on the Potential Historic List, or is eligible for designation as a historic resource?** The Demolition Review Study Area is described in SBMC§22.22.035 and the potential historic list is described in SBMC§22.22.037. You can look up this information for your property online on the “Parcel Information” webpage.
10. **What is a front setback tree and how do I check my front setback distance?** A tree is a setback tree if more than 50% of the tree trunk, measured at the highest natural grade adjacent to the trunk, is within the front setback per SBMC§15.24.010.G. The front setback is defined in SBMC§28.04.620 as an area between the front lot line (SBMC§28.04.435) and a line parallel to the front lot line. The distance required is outlined in Title 28 and based on the zone the property is located.
11. **Where can I find more information on the Vegetation Removal Ordinance and how can I check if my property is in the Hillside Design District?** The regulations for vegetation removal are outlined in SBMC§22.10 and can be found on the [Municipal Code webpage](#). You can look up information on your property on the “Parcel Information” webpage. You can also reference the “Vegetation Removal Permit” handout for additional information
12. **What are Planning Commission, Staff Hearing Officer, or City Council conditions of approval and how can I find if there are any that involve my property?** These conditions are placed on properties when they are subdivided or if additional land use approvals are required. The conditions are typically identified in resolutions and can be found in the Planning Files for the property or for the original subdivision. You can look up the city records online on the [LDT Record Archives webpage](#). You can also look up the information for more recent approvals online on the “Parcel Information” webpage. Contact Planning Counter Staff at (805) 564-5578 for assistance researching older resolutions.
13. **What is a parking lot tree?** A tree required pursuant to SBMC§28.90.050.7 and usually situated in a planter required in the Automobile Parking Ordinance (SBMC§28.90).
14. **How do I check if there are approved archive plans on file for my property?** You can check if there are approved archive plans on file for your property by making an appointment with Records and Archives (805) 564-5485.
15. **How do I check if there is a condition of approval to maintain a specific tree or planting on my property?** You can check if there are conditions of approval to maintain a specific tree or planting on your property by reviewing archive plans or reviewing the minutes from a design review meeting. Archive plans may be viewed by making an appointment with Records and Archives at (805) 564-5485. Please contact Planning Counter Staff at (805) 564-5578 for assistance in researching old design review minutes for specific approvals.

B. Additional Commonly Asked Questions

1. **What is an approved landscape plan?** Per SBMC§22.11.020.B, an approved plan on record with the City that shows landscaping or tree improvements on a lot.
2. **Once an approved landscape plan is provided, must it be maintained?** Per SBMC§22.11.0230, it is unlawful for an owner to not maintain the trees, plants, irrigation system and other improvements shown on an approved landscape plan.

3. **What is landscape maintenance?** Per SBMC§22.11.020, “maintenance” includes regular watering, pruning, fertilizing, and clearing of debris and weeds in a manner that promotes and maintains the health and natural growing conditions of the trees and plants, timely and regular removal of dead trees or plants shown to remain or to be installed on the approved landscape plan and the immediate replacement of such dead trees or plants with new trees or plants of substantially similar design, character, and coverage at maturity as the trees or plants shown to remain or to be installed on the approved landscape plan.
4. **What is an “alteration” to an approved landscape plan?** Per SBMC§22.11.020.A, an alteration shall include but not be limited to the addition, placement, replacement, cutting, or removal of trees plants or other improvements as shown on an approved landscape plan.
5. **Do new trees require a permit?** New trees in the parkway strip require a permit by the Parks and Recreation Department.; however, new trees in the required setback do not require a Parks and Recreation permit.
6. **Is a permit required to remove a small tree?** Under most circumstances, you do not need a permit to trim or remove a tree with a trunk diameter less than four inches measured at a point four feet six inches (4’-6”) above the ground. However, trees that are planted pursuant to an approved landscape plan must be maintained and trees located in sensitive areas in the coastal zone are protected.
7. **Does the City require a permit to remove oak trees?** The City does not have an oak tree preservation ordinance. However, oak tree groves may be protect by the vegetation removal ordinance requirements (SBMC Chapter 22.10). Additionally, during environmental review for discretionary projects, impacts to oak trees (removal, significant alteration, grading or trenching within the critical root zone) will be analyzed and may result in oak tree protection or replacement.
8. **Do I need a permit if the Fire Department orders the pruning or removal of trees or landscaping on my property?** If the Fire Department has ordered the tree removed in order to maintain required defensible space on the lot or to comply with the City’s Wildland Fire Plan you do not need a permit to remove it. However, replacement trees may be subject to review.
9. **What is considered a regulated tree?** It is any tree that requires review per the Santa Municipal Code.

C. Permitting Process

1. Complete the “Tree and Landscaping Checklist”.
2. If design review is required, submit the following information to Planning Staff to determine if the proposal is “substantially similar” to the approved landscaping and therefore exempt from further review. Design Review Staff will make the determination using the “Tree and Landscaping Substantially Similar Staff Determination” handout. If Parks and Recreation Dept. approval is required, see “Department Approvals” further below.
 - a. Completed *Tree and Landscaping Checklist*.
 - b. Completed *Tree and Landscaping Submittal Sheet*.
 - c. **Photographs.** Current color photographs of the site. Photographs must be clear, visually legible, in color AND a minimum of 3” x 5” size.
 - d. **Plans for a review determination.** Plans must be to scale OR show appropriate dimensions. Include the project address, scale, zone, APN, and scope of work. For simple projects, legible 8½ x 11” aerial photographs with labels are acceptable. Label any trees to be significantly altered. Indicate any trees or landscaping to be removed with an X. Indicate the location, number, species, and size (trunk diameter and height) of

existing and proposed trees and vegetation. For more complicated proposals, standard landscape plan submittal requirements apply.

3. If the tree or landscape alteration is not “substantially similar” and/or requires a permit per the “Tree and Landscaping Checklist”, submit for design review and a Community Development Permit or for Parks and Recreation Department Approval.

D. Department Approvals

1. **Community Development Department (Planning Division) at 630 Garden Street (805) 564-5578**
 - a. Please refer to the “Design Review Submittal Requirements for Minor Projects” and “Landscape Plan Requirements” handouts for information on submitting an application to the Planning Division.
 - b. Applications will either be reviewed by Staff or presented to the appropriate design review board for review.
 - c. Once an application is approved, the permit will be issued by Design Review Staff.
 - d. Call for an inspection as outlined in the permit once the work is completed.
2. **Parks & Recreation Department (Urban Forestry Program) at 402 E. Ortega Street (805) 564-5433**
 - a. Please complete the appropriate application found on the Forestry Program website at santabarbaraca.gov/gov/depts/parksrec/parks/urbforest/privtreereg/removalapprev.asp and submit it at the Parks & Recreation Dept. counter.
 - b. Applications for tree removal will be presented to the Street Tree Advisory Committee, and the Committee will make a recommendation to the Parks and Recreation Commission. The review process will take approximately up to 60 days.

E. Violations and Enforcement

1. Both the Planning Division and the Parks and Recreation department conduct enforcement for the removal of trees. Violations of SBMC§15.20.115 or SBMC§15.24.020 shall be subject to the following administrative fines. The variable amounts allow flexibility to differentiate between minor violations and more significant or repeated violations.

Action without, or in violation of, a permit	Trunk diameter from 4” to 12”	Trunk diameter over 12” and up to 24”	Trunk diameter over 24”
Significant Alteration	Up to \$500	Up to \$1,000	Up to \$1,000
Tree Removal	Up to \$1,000	Up to \$3,000	Up to \$5,000

2. The Planning Division conducts enforcement for alterations to approved landscape plans. Violations of SBMC Chapters 22.10, 22.11, 22.22, 22.68, and 22.69 shall be subject to administrative fines of \$100.00 per violation. If the violations continue after the first abatement deadline, fines will be assessed at \$100.00 per day, per violation until the violation is abated. Fines for a second offense within 12 months are calculated at \$200.00 per day, per violation, and fines for a third offense within 12 months are calculated at \$250.00 per day, per violation.