

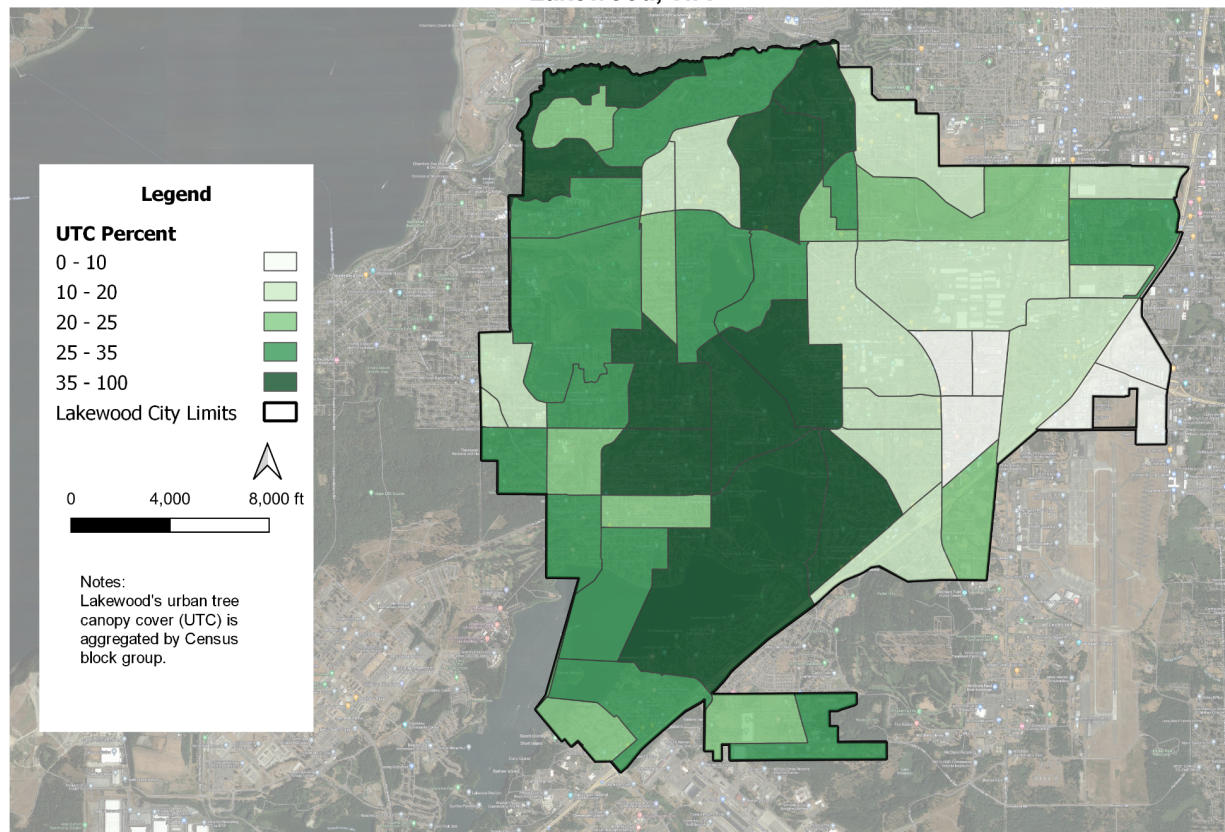
April 2023: Trees and Tree Code Updates

The Importance of Urban Tree Canopy

Trees are one of Lakewood's most valuable resources. As the city strives to become more resilient and sustainable, the conservation of trees is paramount to success. Trees are sources of great natural beauty and contribute many practical benefits to healthy cities. When discussing trees, people often talk about urban tree canopy or increasing urban tree canopy. The urban tree canopy is the overall footprint of trees in a given area. Trees on all types of land within an urban area both public and private are included. Urban tree canopy is simply trees and other vegetation in close proximity with people and urban developments.

The Citywide urban tree canopy in Lakewood was measured to be 26% of urban lands by PLANIT GEO in 2022. American Forests, a non-profit organization dedicated to maintaining healthy forests, suggests that forested areas such as Lakewood should strive for an urban tree canopy of 40-60%. They also note the ability of trees to provide passive stormwater management in areas with heavy rainfall like the Pacific Northwest.

**Urban Tree Canopy Cover Distribution
Lakewood, WA**



The most basic benefit that trees provide is converting greenhouse gasses to clean, breathable air. Cities that fail to retain significant urban tree canopy have reduced air quality, increased rates of respiratory disease, and lower average lifespans than cities with significant urban tree canopies. Tree cover also provides shade which, in turn, helps to regulate temperature within a city, reducing energy costs. Trees along streets and in parking lots provide a place for pedestrians to walk more comfortably in a wider range of weather. While a small component of overall mental health, time spent in green space with trees provides a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing. People seem to understand this intuitively, as trees and green spaces both tend to increase property values. In addition to providing benefits to humans, trees help to provide biodiversity and a habitat for many forms of urban wildlife.

Urban Tree Canopy (UTC) Cover

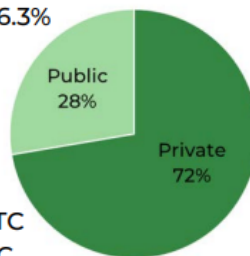
Lakewood's citywide UTC = 26.3%

Of the citywide UTC:

- 72% is on private land
- 28% is on public land

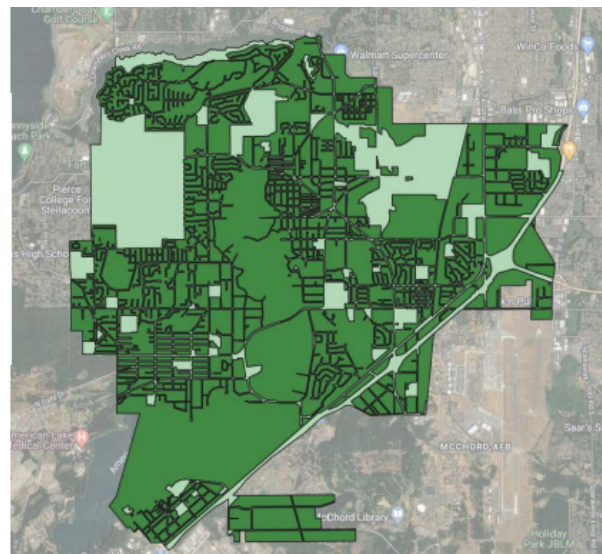
In total:

- 28% of private land has UTC
- 22% of public land has UTC

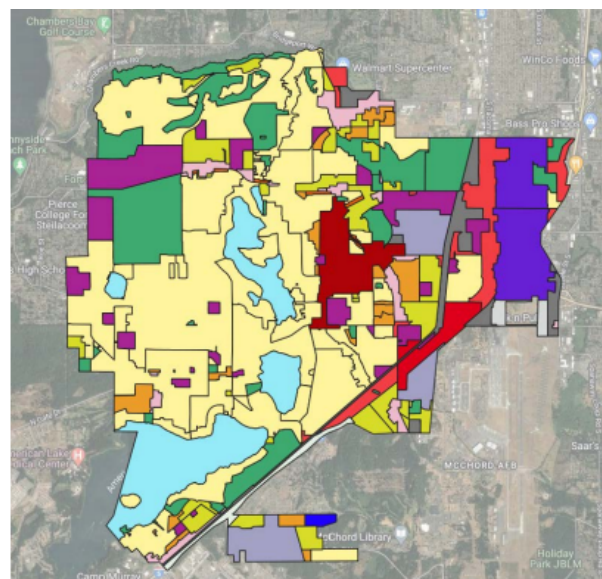
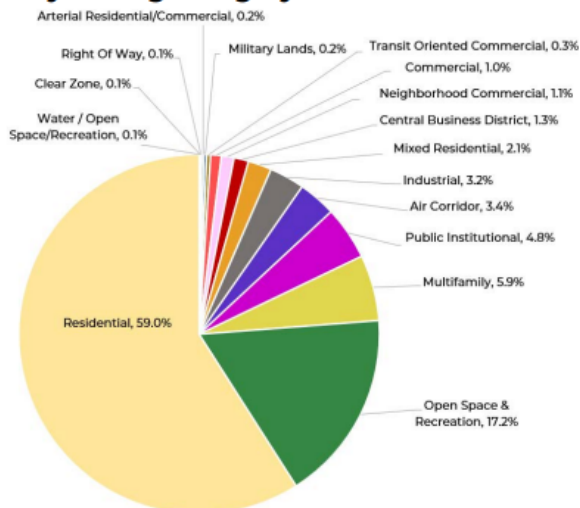


Lakewood's canopy has grown (2011-2019)!

- UTC gain = 53.5 acres or 0.5%



UTC by Zoning Category



Conservation & Commitment to Trees

Trees in Lakewood are regulated by the Lakewood Municipal Code and Washington State Shoreline Management Act, Growth Management Act Critical Areas, and State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) guidelines. These regulations work together to form the legal foundation to protect the City's urban tree canopy. Legal protections are essential for tree conservation since urban tree protections often conflict with property rights. Though this can be a contentious issue among property owners who find they are not allowed to remove trees from their property at will, the City understands that overall tree canopy will not increase without protections put in place for significant trees.

"We understand the need for an equally distributed urban tree canopy across all neighborhoods so every resident, business and visitor to Lakewood can benefit from a healthy and vibrant urban forest..."

- Mayor Jason Whalen

The City has taken many steps recently to support trees and the expansion of urban tree canopy in Lakewood. In 2022, Lakewood partnered with the UW Evans School of Public Policy to develop the structure of an Urban Forestry Program in service to the City's efforts towards both climate change and tree code regulation by 2023. At the end of 2022, Lakewood City Council adopted Resolution 2022-13 designating the Oregon White Oak (Garry Oak) as the Official Tree of the City of Lakewood. The Urban Forestry Program goes before the Lakewood City Council in May, 2023.

Lakewood's Ad Hoc Tree Advisory Committee convened seven times in 2022 to discuss issues related to trees, tree code, urban tree canopy, and the conservation of significant trees. The committee presented a report to the Planning Commission in May 2022. The report touches on twelve key issues and provides recommendations for changes to Lakewood's tree code and other related codes.

Updated Tree Code

Informed by the community outreach performed by students of the UW Evans School of Public Policy and the recommendations made by Lakewood's Ad Hoc Tree Committee, Lakewood's tree code updates went into effect on March 1, 2023. These updates are intended to move Lakewood toward a goal of 40% urban tree canopy by 2050.

Tree Removal:

Single-family lots over 10,000 square feet, multifamily, and non-residential lots now require a tree removal permit for the removal of significant trees. Single-family lots up to 10,000 square feet are exempted from tree preservation requirements. There are several categories of trees which are considered significant for the purposes of the tree code:

1. Evergreen trees and deciduous trees with a minimum diameter of nine (9) inches when measured at four and one-half (4.5) feet above ground.
2. Oregon White Oaks (Garry Oaks) with a minimum diameter of four (4) inches when measured at four and one-half (4.5) feet above ground.
3. A tree of any diameter which is determined to be significant by the Director due to the uniqueness of the species or provision of important wildlife habitat.

Trees will not be considered significant in cases where a tree is a safety hazard or is damaged or diseased. Trees removed in this way must have an inspection and written report by a registered landscape architect, certified nursery professional, or certified arborist.

Commonly Asked Questions:

Do I need a permit to cut down any tree?

Significant tree preservation is required for any project permit. Any work that increases the square footage of a building must include a tree retention plan, and must identify and protect significant trees.

When construction threatens significant trees or encroaches upon the dripline of existing canopy, LMC 18A.70.320 describes potential mitigations.

Removals by utilities or under emergency circumstances are allowable if conditions of LMC 18A.70.310 are satisfied. Removal on single-family residential lots less than 17,000 square feet is also generally unregulated, although the city may regulate removal if a tree is located in a priority habitat area.

Will the city actually enforce the tree code?

Yes.

The City of Lakewood intends to expand its urban tree canopy from 26% to 40% by 2050. Changes to the tree code are intended to achieve that goal.

The City has enforced its tree code in the past and will continue to do so in the future. Violations of tree preservation code are punishable by fines and legal action. Recent violators were fined \$55,200 in 2015, \$30,000 in 2018, \$73,467 in 2020, and \$28,700 in 2021. Another violator is pending litigation. Funds collected from tree code enforcement are applied towards tree preservation and maintenance programs.

“When a tree is cut down illegally, the responsible party will answer for it. We will stop work, we will issue fines, and we will take you to court. Sometimes the process takes time, but we do not go away. The city is not opposed to civil litigation beyond the issuance of infractions. We mean business.”

- Dave Bugher, Director of C&ED Department

How can I report the destruction of significant trees in Lakewood?

You can report any unauthorized tree removal on the [MyLakewood311 app](#) or by contacting permits@cityoflakewood.us. A member of our team will notify our code enforcement officers of the potential violation.

Where can I find more information about the tree code?

General information about trees, tree code, and tree preservation can be found on the City's [trees](#) page.

Tree Permitting

- [Tree Removal Permitting Guide Handout](#)
- [Online Permits Dashboard](#)
- [2023 Fee Schedule](#)

Relevant Statutes:

- [Lakewood Tree Preservation Code](#)
- [Lakewood Tree Removal Applicability/Exemptions](#)
- [Shoreline Management Act](#)
- [Growth Management Act Critical Areas](#)
- [State Environmental Protection Act](#)

Ordinances

- Lakewood Ordinance [776](#)
- Lakewood Ordinance [775](#) - went into effect March 1, 2023