

Urban Forest Community Brief #1

Tree Protection Gaps and Policy Alignment in Coquitlam

Supporting a healthy, resilient, and livable community through informed dialogue on urban forest management.

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Residents have raised important concerns about how effectively trees—especially healthy, mature ones—are protected in Coquitlam. While the current Tree Bylaw provides flexibility for property owners, there is growing recognition that it may not fully support the community’s long-term environmental goals.

What the Current Rules Allow

- Property owners may remove **up to two protected trees per year without a permit**
 - **No justification is required** (trees do not need to be hazardous, diseased, or damaged)
 - Replacement planting is **not always required** in these cases
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A Key Concern: Minimal Protection for Mature Trees

The current bylaw is considered **permissive**, meaning:

Healthy, mature trees can be removed without review, justification, or guaranteed replacement

This creates a significant gap in protection because:

- Mature trees provide the **highest ecological and community value**
 - Their removal can occur **without oversight or mitigation**
 - Losses can accumulate over time across neighborhoods
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Misalignment with Long-Term Planning Goals

Like many cities, Coquitlam has broader goals outlined in its **Official Community Plan (OCP)**—such as:

- Increasing urban tree canopy
- Enhancing climate resilience
- Improving livability and environmental health

However:

The current Tree Bylaw does not strongly align with these goals

In practice, this means:

- Policies intended to **grow and protect the urban forest** may be undermined
 - Tree loss on private property can occur **faster than it can be replaced**
 - There is **no consistent mechanism** to safeguard high-value trees
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Why This Matters

Healthy mature trees:

- Provide significantly more **shade and cooling**
- Improve **air quality and stormwater management**
- Support **biodiversity**
- Take **decades to replace**

Without stronger protections, these benefits can gradually decline—even if new trees are planted.

Balancing Flexibility and Protection

Council and Staff have also pointed out a valid concern:

People may hesitate to plant trees if they fear they cannot remove them later.

A more balanced, widely used approach includes:

- **Flexible removal rules for young/small trees**
- **Stronger protections for large, healthy trees**
- Clear guidance on **planting the right tree in the right place**

This ensures:

- Residents feel comfortable planting
 - Long-term canopy is preserved
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Potential Improvements to Consider

To better align with long-term goals and best practices, the following could be explored:

- Requiring a **valid reason** to remove healthy mature trees
 - Introducing **tree categories** with tiered protection levels
 - Strengthening **replacement requirements**, especially for large trees
 - Incorporating **arborist assessments** for significant removals
 - Aligning the Tree Bylaw more closely with OCP canopy and climate targets
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Key Takeaway

Coquitlam's current Tree Bylaw provides flexibility, but this comes with a trade-off:

There is currently limited protection for healthy, mature trees, and a lack of strong alignment with long-term urban forest objectives

A more balanced approach could:

- Maintain homeowner flexibility
- While better protecting the trees that deliver the greatest long-term benefits

Residents are encouraged to stay informed and participate in discussions about how Coquitlam's urban forest can be managed to support both private property rights and shared environmental goals.

A thoughtful, balanced approach can help ensure a greener, healthier community for the future.

This brief has been prepared by the TCUF Working Group as a resource for the community. It is shared in good faith to support informed discussion and to highlight considerations that contribute to a healthy, livable, and sustainable Coquitlam.