

Trimming and Removing Significant Trees

Why are some trees designated significant trees?



San Mateo County's trees enhance its natural beauty and provide such environmental benefits as landslide prevention, wildlife protection, and maintenance of a favorable climate. The County has designated some trees as significant trees to prevent their indiscriminate removal.

Which trees are significant trees?



A significant tree is any live woody plant, whether located on private or public property, with a circumference of at least 38 inches measured either at 4-1/2 feet above the ground or immediately below the lowest branch, whichever is lower.

If I have significant trees on my property, how does the designation affect me?

You need a permit to cut down, destroy, or remove significant trees anywhere in unincorporated San Mateo County. You also need a permit to cut down, destroy, or remove the following:

- ✓ In the Emerald Lake Hills Design Review district, any tree with a diameter of at least 6 inches and a circumference of at least 19 inches measured either at 4-1/2 feet above the ground or immediately below the lowest branch, whichever is lower.
- ✓ In Resource Management districts (RM or RM-CZ), any tree with a circumference of more than 55 inches measured either at 4-1/2 feet above the ground or immediately below the lowest branch, whichever is lower. Such removal requires an RM Permit, not a Tree Removal Permit.

You do not need a significant tree permit under the following circumstances:

- ✓ Timber harvesting when you have a valid timber harvesting permit.
- ✓ Tree cutting in any Timberland Preserve Zone (TPZ or TPZ-CZ), or Planned Agricultural District (PAD), unless it is within 100 feet of a County or State Scenic road or highway, when you have a valid permit for one of these districts.
- ✓ Emergency tree removal when a tree is a threat to life or property. You are still required to legalize the removal by submitting an application after you remove the tree.
- ✓ Tree cutting that is part of an established tree management program.
- ✓ Tree cutting that has already been approved by the Planning Commission, Design Review Committee, or Planning Director as part of another permit application.
- ✓ Tree cutting involving only dead trees.

NOTE: All Tree Removal Permits must be submitted in person. Mail-in application are not accepted.

How do I apply for a tree cutting permit?



Submit a tree removal application in person to Planning indicating the diameter, height, and type of the tree. With your application, submit the following:

- ✓ A map or sketch showing your property lines, the location of any trees, shrubs, buildings, or proposed buildings within 25 feet "on or off the parcel" of the trees to be cut.
- ✓ Whether you or a tree service will be removing the tree(s).
- ✓ How you intend to dispose of the tree trimmings/debris.
- ✓ Your plans for tree planting or replacement and irrigation, if required.

- ✓ Your reasons for removing or trimming the tree.
- ✓ Street address of the tree's location.
- ✓ The general health of the tree as documented by a licensed tree surgeon or arborist.

What happens after I apply?

To give the public an opportunity to comment, you are required to post a public notice for 10 days on each tree that you intend to cut. You can get these notices from the Planning staff at the DRC counter. Also, all property owners within 100 feet will be notified as well as any local community councils or other recognized organizations.

Who approves the permit?



The Planning staff or, in the case of trees in a scenic corridor, the Planning Commission. In addition to granting approval, the staff or commission may attach certain conditions such as planting replacement trees to prevent soil erosion. All such decisions are appealable to the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisor.

What criteria determine whether my request will be approved?

Criteria include whether the tree is diseased; poses a risk to property, health, or safety; is a fire hazard; conflicts with proposed structures; interferes with vital public utilities; or will be replaced by approved plantings.

How long does it take to process an application?

Normally, it takes about a month. However, if the decision is appealed, the final decision will be delayed.

Can I appeal the decision?

Within 10 days of the decision's announcement, you or any other interested party can appeal Planning's decision to the Planning Commission and the Commission's decision to the Board of Supervisors.

What should I do in an emergency for example, if a tree is in such a dangerous state that it is a threat to my home or someone else's property?

If possible, request verbal permission from Planning. If the situation is urgent, notify Planning within a reasonable time after you have taken action.

What fees must I pay?



Your fees will be based on the number of trees you remove, and includes a fee for surrounding property owner notification.

What's the next step in this process?



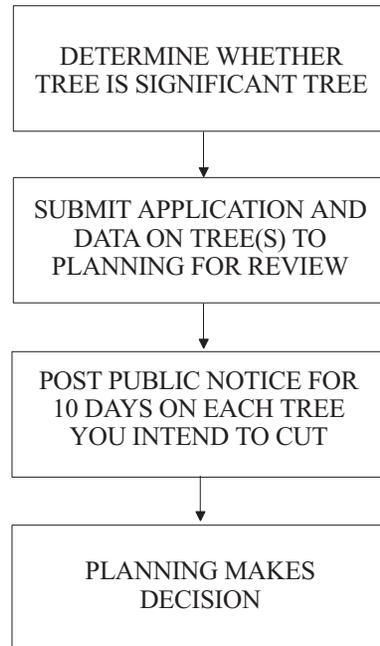
Read the pamphlet *General Procedures When You Apply for a Planning or Building Permit*. This pamphlet explains the general procedures for applying for a permit, paying fees, calling for inspections, and other related matters. Then you should also review the following document, which contain other information that you may need:

- Trimming and Removing Heritage Trees
- How to Appeal a Decision

After you have become familiar with these documents, we recommend that you prepare some very preliminary plans and bring them to the DRC counter so that we can review them. An informal meeting at this stage may save you considerable time and money later on.

If you are new to San Mateo County, you may also wish to make an appointment to meet with staff as part of the County's Early Assistance Meeting Program. Early assistance meetings are designed to acquaint owner/builders, contractors, architects, and other professionals who are new to the area or are unfamiliar with our permit system, with the different agencies involved and the various costs and requirements. There is no charge for the meeting, which you can schedule by calling (650) 363-4161.

Permit Process to Trim and Remove Significant Trees



PUBLIC SERVICE EXCELLENCE



San Mateo County
Planning and Building Division

Trimming and Removing Significant Trees

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