

Trees in Petaluma

The Petaluma City [Tree Advisory Committee](#) is charged with advising the city on tree resources and management issues. The committee serves as a forum for city departments and citizens on tree related policies. The Tree Advisory Committee meets the third Wednesday of every month at 3:30 P.M., Council Chambers, City Hall, 11 English Street, Petaluma. Citizens are welcome to give their input and make requests concerning trees along streets and in city parks and in new construction areas.

Petaluma has a policy of protecting environmentally and historically important trees through its heritage tree program and also protects certain trees from removal in construction areas.

Property owners are responsible for the care and maintenance of street trees adjacent to their property in city-right-of-way, which includes pruning to specified heights for pedestrians and vehicles, and fixing sidewalks raised up by tree roots. Tree removal in these areas requires a city permit. There is a list of approved street trees. We are now asking citizens to help observe city owned trees in parks and street medians and report damaged trees or hazardous situations through [engagEPetaluma](#) program.

Benefits of trees to the city

Healthy street trees provide many benefits and environmental services to immediate homeowners and business, neighborhoods, and city. Trees take in and store carbon dioxide, clean the air of pollutants, produce oxygen, provide shade, reduce home energy bills, increase property values, lower city temperatures, buffer urban noise, provide green buffers and ambiance to neighbors, absorb rain water and thereby reduce runoff and flooding, and provide habitat for wildlife.

The City is committed to planting new trees, as well as protecting existing trees to the greatest extent possible. [Chapter 17](#) provides regulations for the protection, preservation, and maintenance of groves and stands of mature trees, and mature trees in general. The City's objective is to establish regulations that will result in no net loss of tree canopy in the community. It is also the intent of [Chapter 17](#) to promote and perpetuate the urban forest through the replacement of trees removed as a result of a new development. Protected trees include all native oak, buckeye, bay, and redwood trees and also trees located in riparian corridors and any significant stand of trees. The design of every development project (that which requires a discretionary approval or other development permit) shall recognize the desirability of preserving protected trees to the greatest extent possible. A [permit](#) is required to remove a "protected tree".

2008 was Petaluma's Sesquicentennial (150 yr.) celebration year and there was a California ReLeaf grant program to plant 150 street trees in Petaluma by citizens. Many citizens applied. Tamara Norman, landscape architect, donated hundreds of hours to the project ([Press Democrat](#)). Several neighborhoods planted street trees ([Press Democrat](#)).

Heritage Trees

One of our continuing efforts has been working to protect some of our community's trees by giving them a [Heritage/Landmark status](#). View the [Registry of Heritage and Landmark Trees](#). To protect tree(s) on your property by assigning them Heritage/Landmark status you can fill out this [application form](#). Should you choose to complete the application, your tree(s) will be entered into the City Register and information and a photo of your tree(s) may be included on the City's website. Should you choose to sell or will your property in the future, any registered trees would be associated with the deed to your property and protected from removal or alteration by the new owner or heir, as set forth in [Petaluma Municipal Code Chapter 8.28](#). When completing the application, please include any significant details about the tree and/or the planting of the tree. The application can be mailed to: Tree Advisory Committee c/o City of Petaluma 11 English Street, Petaluma, CA 94975-0536.

Responsibilities of property owners (Laws and ordinances involving trees)

Many citizens are not aware that they or private businesses are responsible for the trees in the sidewalk or between the sidewalk and street and must be maintained at property owners expense ([Chapter 13.10](#)). There is a minimum 8-foot vertical pedestrian clearance from the top of the sidewalk and minimum 13-foot vertical vehicular clearance from the top of the curb, to any part of a street tree. Maintenance of trees, shrubs, hedges and other landscaping includes, but is not limit to: deep root watering, root pruning, install root barriers, clearance of structural trimming, fertilizing, pest control and removal of branches, leaves, and other debris. Also, the property owners are responsible for repairing and maintaining the sidewalks, curbs, and gutters between their property and the street. Many trees have uplifted sidewalks to create hazardous conditions. Property owners are liable if someone suffers injury due to the lack of maintaining the sidewalk in a non-dangerous condition. Many street trees have outgrown their living space in street planter areas. The City Council recently amended 13.10 regarding sidewalk responsibilities; refer to Ordinance #2571.

The city has a list of [landscape design standards](#) to provide design criteria for the installation of landscaping and irrigation systems in all commercial, industrial, residential and multi-family residential developments. There have been studies done on [line of site from 3 story buildings](#).

The "**Tree Technical Manual**" mentioned in Chapter 17.035, was not produced at the time of the writing of the ordinance. It would contain the standards, guidelines and best management practices and include: (1) protection of trees during construction; (2) replacement of protected trees; (3) maintenance of protected trees; (4) format and content of tree plans/reports. One of the goals of the current Tree Advisory Committee is to create this manual. In the meantime, there are two Tree Technical Manuals written for nearby cities with similar planting zones that are valuable references for these types of specifications:

- 1) [City of San Jose Tree Technical Manual](#)
- 2) [City of Palo Alto Tree Technical Manual](#)

Other good resources for tree maintenance are:

- 1) [Re-Leaf California](#)
- 2) [UC Master Gardener Program](#)
- 3) [California Forest Pest Council Training Manual](#)
- 4) [USDA Forestry Service Tree Owner's Manual for Northeastern and Midwestern US](#)

Street trees have less access to water than field trees due to the amount of asphalt and cement surrounding their root systems. These **trees need occasional deep watering in the summer time**. If you removed your lawn and/or cut back on watering, then occasional deep watering is even more important for tree health.

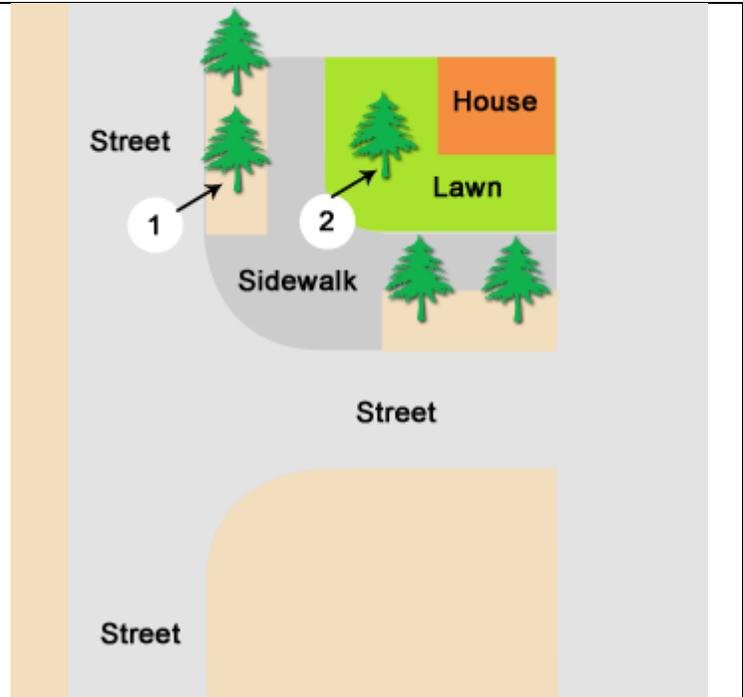
Trees hanging over a property line, problematic trees that do not pose an immediate threat to the public right of way, property line disputes, and other civil matters among property owners are the responsibility of the affected property owners. The Code Enforcement Division does not get involved with civil matters between property owners. We advise you to seek your own legal advice.

Christmas Trees can cause fire hazards when they show signs of drying out. The Fire Department asks that the homeowners never put the tree or branches in a fireplace or wood burning stove. There are alternative [disposal methods](#). Volunteer organizations pick up trees with a requested donation, trees can be cut to fit in green waste bins, whole trees can be dropped off at designated Christmas Tree Disposal Sites, or picked up by current waste company per their instructions for curbside removal.

Tree Removal and Replacement

A [City Tree Removal Permit](#) must be obtained prior to removal of trees located within City rights-of-way (i.e., public street tree planter strips, parks) or other City-owned land. (PMC Sect. 13.08.070)

The City requires an [Encroachment Permit](#) to trim and/or remove trees in the public right-of-way (usually trees in the planter strip between the curb and sidewalk). See #1 in the sketch below. Tree trim/removal permits are available from the Public Works & Utilities Department, 11 English St. Trees in locations such as #2 in the sketch below are the property owner's responsibility but do not require a permit for trimming or removal.



Replacing Street Trees - List of Approved Trees

The city has a list of recommended trees for street medians and strips, [Approved Petaluma City Street Tree Replacement List](#). Several different Tree Advisory Committees have maintained and updated this list over several years. Recently we have updated the tree list spreadsheet with category of water conservation. Ornamental pear trees have been removed from the list due to the severity of fire blight disease observed in most of them around the city and because they grow large roots that lift up sidewalks.

Dead and Dying Trees and Trees with Dying Limbs are a Current Concern of many of Our City Citizens.

Currently, many trees are suffering and dying from drought, disease (especially fire blight on ornamental pear trees, and sudden oak disease on oak trees), and insect attack (especially bark beetles in pine trees). Due to the drought, disease, and insects, many street trees are distressed and dying with many limbs already dead. An informational web site on Fire Blight is: "[Fireblight – Identification and Damage](#)". UC IPM Program has a web site on [Sudden Oak Disease](#). UC Agricultural and Natural Resources has a publication on [Protecting Trees from Sudden Oak Disease](#). UC IPM Program has a publication on [Bark Beetles](#).

Dead limbs and trees can fall on people, cars, and other property and can be unsightly. Diseased and insect infested trees can be a source of spread to other trees. Diseased leaves need to be removed off site and can be put in the green waste bins for composting. Damaged limbs and dead trees need to be removed safely and properly.

Need help to identify and treat unhealthy tree? We recommend you contact a certified Arborist. Many local professionals are listed as Tree Surgeons in the multimedia search lists.

The City of Petaluma Smartphone app ([engagEPetaluma](#)) can be used to communicate location of unhealthy city owned trees to the city.

Note: All street trees removals or plantings must be permitted ([Tree Preservation Ordinance – Chapter 17](#))