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## Seattle's tree-cutting rules to get more strict; advocates hoped for more

By Emily Heffter  
Seattle Times staff reporter

The Seattle City Council voted unanimously Monday to require stricter tree-cutting regulations by May.



Council President Richard Conlin

The vote left details unsettled and tree advocates lukewarm, but the council hailed it as a first step.

Monday's resolution asks the Department of Planning and Development to decide in the next 10 months whether to require permits for tree cutting. Currently, private-property owners can cut down a maximum of three trees a year without permits. The council also wants the department to consider tightening development rules to require people to preserve trees.

The council also voted to establish an Urban Forestry Commission that includes scientists, a developer and tree advocates.

"We are trying to draft policy where urban development and trees can live together," said Council President Richard Conlin.

"Our urban trees are an increasingly valuable resource. We need to take some action if we want to keep them."

The vote was the council's reaction to a city auditor's report in May that said tree protections were disorderly and underfunded. In 2007, the city announced an ambitious plan to increase the urban tree canopy, but the report said the city never even completed a thorough tree inventory.

Two recent disputes over trees in North Seattle prompted dozens of community activists to push for more stringent tree-cutting regulations.

Residents of the Maple Leaf neighborhood spent three years worrying that a planned town-home development would cut down many of the 100-plus trees in Waldo Woods. Last month, a Jewish school bought the property, and agreed to leave the trees intact.

Another dispute over a Seattle Public Schools proposal to cut down trees to make way for a remodel of Ingraham High School is ongoing.

Tree advocates said the council's resolution didn't go far enough, but some said the discussion is a victory on its own.

"I am thrilled," said Cheryl Trivison, co-founder of the Seattle Urban Forest Stakeholders. "We're all talking about trees and the urban forest."

The resolution that passed Monday had the support of the mayor's office and the Greater Seattle Chamber of

Commerce. Sponsors Conlin and City Councilmember Nick Licata called it a first step.

Cass Turnbull, founder and president of PlantAmnesty, said she's not impressed by a first step.

"We never get past the good first step," she said. "Seattle is gutless when it comes to tree preservation, has been for a long time. ... They'll tell you what to do with your banana peel, but you can do whatever you want with your 200-year-old oak."

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