

"How to Understand the Tree Protection Regulations of Atlanta"
Information for NPU-F Residents Applying for a Building Permit

The Atlanta Tree Protection Ordinance states, "It is the policy of the city that there shall be no net loss of trees within the boundaries of the city." Beside natural beauty and shade, protecting and preserving existing trees is necessary to help ameliorate Atlanta's two biggest environmental problems: air pollution and storm-water run-off. If you keep this in mind as you prepare your building plans, you will understand the reasons for the added changes to the law.

In order to receive a building permit for new construction or renovation, a site plan must indicate the following items.

- * trees on the property (species, size, location) \geq 6' diameter at breast height
- * boundary trees
- * topography at 2' contour intervals
- * buildings and structures
- * driveways and parking areas
- * drainage structures
- * water detention areas
- * utilities

Your site plan must also indicate the following proposed structures and construction-related items.

- * tree protection fences for trees on site
- * tree protection for boundary trees
- * proposed topography
- * proposed buildings and structures
- * proposed driveways and parking areas
- * proposed drainage structures
- * proposed water detention areas
- * construction plan for utilities placement
- * construction material staging grounds
- * construction limit line

Listed on the next page are the Tree Ordinance's definitions of some terms used above. You can access a full copy of the law on the city's website, <http://www.atlantaga.gov/government/planning/newarborist012706.aspx>

If you have additional questions, contact any of the following individuals:
Frank Mobley, City of Atlanta Arborist (404) 330-6874
Charlotte Gillis, NPU-F Tree Chair: (404-876-4021, gillis53@comcast.net)

Sec. 158-26. Definitions. (selected)

Boundary tree means a tree on adjacent property whose tree save area introduces across the property line of the site under consideration.

Buildable area means that area of the lot available for the construction of a dwelling and permissible accessory uses after having provided the required front, side, rear [setbacks] and any other special yards required by part 15 or part 16 of the city code.

Destroy means any intentional or negligent act which will cause a tree to die within a period of five years, as determined by the city forester or city arborist. Such acts include, but are not limited to, cut or fill grade changes that affect more than 20 percent of the tree save area; severing or exposing of the roots in more than 20 percent of the tree save area; trenching across or otherwise severing more than 20 percent of the structural root plate; cutting, girdling, or inflicting other severe mechanical injury to the trunk, roots, or other vital sections of the tree; removal in excess of 20 percent of the live crown of the tree; damage inflicted upon the root system of a tree by the application of toxic substances, including solvents, oils, gasoline and diesel fuel; damage cause by the operation of heavy machinery; damage caused by the storage of materials and damages from injury or from fire inflicted on trees which results in pest infestation.

Diameter at breast height means the diameter of the main stem of a tree or the combined diameters of a multi-stemmed tree as measured 4.5 feet above the natural grade at the base. The top diameter of a stump less than 4.5 feet tall shall be considered the "DBH" of an illegally destroyed tree for the purpose of calculating recompense.

Lost tree means any tree that is destroyed, injured, or otherwise not protected according to the provisions of this ordinance.

Tree save area means the area surrounding a tree that is essential to that tree's health and survival. At a minimum, the tree save area shall consist of a circle having a radius of one foot for each one inch diameter at breast height of the tree.