

City of Peachtree Corners Tree Program

Tree Benefits

Trees provide many direct and indirect benefits in the urban and suburban landscape. These benefits include environmental improvements, aesthetic enhancements, economic savings, and social health and well-being advancements. Trees provide shade and a place to play, a piece of mind, and a sense of ownership and pride. It is vital that communities properly manage their trees to maximize these benefits. Tree management can take on many forms, from property owner planting and maintenance to regulatory codes; and it takes the entire community to realize these benefits and put forth the effort to keep these magnificent living species as healthy as possible. Since trees in our forests are assets, just a small amount of knowledge can be important for generations of enjoyment. However, when not properly cared for and managed, trees can become liabilities.

The environmental benefits of trees are numerous. Trees can improve air quality, sequester carbon, conserve energy, and reduce stormwater runoff and erosion. Trees release oxygen through photosynthesis as well as collect and filter airborne pollutants. Trees reduce surrounding temperatures by providing shade and through transpiration, which releases over 95% of water back into the environment. Trees also provide food and cover for many types of wildlife, and the diversity of wildlife tends to increase in parks, greenbelts, and larger areas of contiguous forests.

The economic benefits of trees include reduced cooling expenses, increased property values, and attraction of residences and businesses to an area. Heating and cooling costs can be significantly reduced when trees are properly located around buildings. Residential areas with trees typically command higher appraisal and sales values and city streets lined with trees tend to attract more businesses and shoppers.

The social and psychological benefits of trees are also numerous. People are generally drawn to areas that have trees and often the cultural heritage of trees goes back centuries and becomes a part of local area lore. Stress is reduced by trees and hospital recovery times and behavioral improvements in children are among the many benefits. Trees boost mental health, enhance community pride, and increase recreational opportunities.



Trees in the City



Trees play a large role in the City of Peachtree Corners and important rules, regulations, and policies have been put in place to ensure that current and future generations of residents and businesses can continue to enjoy these abundant benefits. The city regulates trees by requiring preservation, planting, and proper tree management on public and private properties. Both developing and existing properties have tree standards that must be met and maintained, or enforcement action could be initiated.

It is important to note that all property owners have a responsibility for managing trees. Get to know the different species on your property and learn a bit about common hazards, tree risk assessments, and the benefits of pruning to keep trees safe and healthy. Property owners are also responsible for removing dead or hazardous trees that could cause problems including power outages, property damage, and injury. Although we strive to preserve as many trees as possible, the city can provide guidance on risk assessments and the tree removal process, which in most cases requires a permit.

Most of the regulations regarding trees come from the city's Buffer, Landscape, and Tree Ordinance which is found in [chapter 50 of the city code](#). The purpose of the regulations is to preserve and enhance the natural environment through the protection and planting of trees and maintaining natural buffers and establishing planted buffers between dissimilar land uses and waterbodies. A summary of the city's tree and landscape rules is below.

Tree Ordinance Summary

Definitions

Most ordinances start with a definitions section and the city's tree ordinance is no exception. There are over 40 definitions, and anyone looking to learn and understand the tree rules should be familiar with these terms. Whether you are looking up the meaning of Critical Root Zone or Tree Density Unit, you will find a wealth of knowledge in just this first crucial ordinance section.



Buffers, Landscape Strips, and Parking Lots

A general buffer is an area of land left undisturbed or supplementary planted, to visibly separate one use from another through screening and distance to shield or block noise, light, or other similar conditions. A state water buffer is an undisturbed area of land left adjacent to a stream, river, or lake to protect water quality and aquatic habitat. All buffers should be preserved to the extent possible and should be protected from encroachment during land disturbing activities.



A landscape strip, on the other hand, is an area of land located within the boundary of a lot that is required to be set aside and used for landscaping. Landscape strips throughout the city are typically ten feet wide and are required to be planted with a diversity of trees and shrubs, every 25 feet, to create a vegetative aesthetic along the frontages of a property. While most developments typically clear much of the existing frontage vegetation and then replant a landscape strip, properties under development within Technology Park are required to preserve and not remove the mature trees and shrubs along the frontage.

Parking lots are also required to have trees as a visual aid to break up the large asphalt areas as well as to provide shade to parking spaces. Every parking space is required to be within 60 feet of a tree and there should be at least one tree for every seven spaces.

Tree Preservation and Replacement

Most projects requiring a land disturbance permit or building permit are subject to the preservation and replanting provisions of the tree ordinance. There is a tree density standard that these properties must meet, and that standard is defined by a specific number and size of trees per acre that are preserved and replanted. The city places an emphasis and premium on preservation so trees that are kept on-site and not removed count more than a planted tree of the same size. Many properties have a tree density unit requirement of 20 per acre and plans must be submitted that show compliance through a combination of preserved and replanted trees. The city's ordinances include charts that convert tree diameters into tree density units and city staff will confirm that submitted plans accurately reflect existing trees and comply with these minimum density requirements. The city's inspectors ensure that existing trees are properly protected, and the correct number of new trees get added to the site. Preserved trees are required to be surrounded by an orange tree save fence for the life of the projects to clearly delineate areas where tree removal is prohibited.



Specimen Trees



The City of Peachtree Corners recognizes the need to preserve larger, mature trees to enhance the existing canopy and provide immense benefits as only these bigger trees can. Specimen Tree is a term that describes any tree that meets a specific size, type, condition, location, or historical significance. These specimen trees include hardwoods (oaks, maples, hickories, etc.) that have diameters of 28 inches or greater and softwoods (pines, cedars, firs, etc.) that are 30 inches or greater. Some flowering trees with a diameter of 12 inches or more are considered specimens as well.

Properties seeking a rezoning or special use permit need to complete and submit a specimen tree survey as part of their zoning review as well as on their development plans. Staff will regularly recommend that specific specimen trees be preserved and retained on-site at the end of the project. If a specimen tree cannot be preserved due to location, then a replanting schedule, called recompense, is required that lists the equivalent number of trees that must be replanted to make up for the removed specimen. The specimen tree rules apply to every lot within the city, whether under development or not, and there are penalties for removing a specimen tree without prior approval.

Tree Bank

The intent of the tree ordinance is to ensure that a minimum number of trees are replaced and/or preserved on developments. If tree density or specimen recompense requirements are not met due to a documented hardship, like spatial limitations, a monetary compensation is allowed that covers the cost of the tree purchase and installation. The funds in the tree bank can be used by the city to plant trees on city-owned properties and rights of way.

Tree Canopy

Tree canopy is a percentage measurement that encompasses the layer of leaves, branches, and stems of trees that shelter the ground when viewed from above. The canopy is typically thought of as the top of the tree or trees that help shelter and shade habitat below and moderate ground surface temperatures. Tree canopy preservation is also a desired aesthetic for suburban areas to offset some of the tree removals that are common on development projects. Many suburban areas have a canopy between 30% and 60% with the City of Peachtree Corners being higher than average in the high 40s. A tree canopy calculation is required for all new developments by assigning a square footage canopy measurement to each tree preserved and proposed.



Whereas new developments typically do have to remove trees from the buildable areas, the tree canopy is preserved, and often supplemented, in other areas of the site and the city's tree replacement requirements typically result in more trees being replanted than originally existed on the site. When these newly planted trees mature, they actually provide an increase in canopy percentage over what was there prior to the development. As a result, the tree canopy within the city will continue to increase when assessed over time. You can notice this effect when looking at aerial photos over the years from older developments with mature trees and comparing them to the pre-development tree coverage.

Tree Removal Permits



Tree removal permits are available and should be submitted for any trees you want to remove, regardless of tree size, type, or location. City staff is available to meet with you on your property to provide guidance on the tree removal permit process. It is important that the tree type, diameter, and location on the property be noted on the application or on supplementary documents so city staff can easily find and assess the correct trees. Pictures of the tree's condition are also helpful to submit along with the removal applications. Applications typically get reviewed by the city within three to five days. Tree removal permit applications can be found on the city's [Tree Webpage](#).

Metropolitan River Protection Act (MRPA) and “The River Corridor”

The Metropolitan River Protection Act establishes a 2000-foot corridor along both banks of the Chattahoochee River. It requires all local governments to review and approve permits based on the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) findings and certificates, monitor land-disturbing and tree-clearing activity in the corridor, and ensure that finished projects comply with the approved plans. You can visit the city's [Maps Webpage](#) to determine if your property is located within the river corridor. Additional information about the corridor can be found on the city's [River Corridor Webpage](#).

Tree clearing is limited and heavily regulated within the river corridor so all property owners within this area are encouraged to learn about their property on the city's webpages as well as discuss any questions or concerns with city staff.



Tree City USA



The City of Peachtree Corners is a Tree City USA community. The city received this certification seven years ago and is recognized for having a strong tree ordinance, staff dedicated to tree protection, and funds dedicated specifically for the planting of trees. The program is sponsored by the Arbor Day Foundation in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service and the objective is for cities to maintain and grow their tree cover through regulatory, private, and civic efforts. Peachtree Corners will continue to maintain this certification to publicly demonstrate our commitment to the environment, build pride among residents, and continue to position the community as an attractive place to live.

City Tree Resources

The city maintains a [Tree Webpage](#) that includes information on tree identification, tree removal, property owner information, tree checklists for development, the tree ordinance, and frequently asked questions.



City of Peachtree Corners Tree Program - Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need a permit to remove a tree from my property?

Property owners are required to obtain a tree removal permit prior to removing any living trees. Dead trees can be removed without a permit. These permits are free for residential owners, and the applications can be found on the city's [Tree Webpage](#). You will need to provide the size, location, and a picture of any trees you wish to remove. City staff may coordinate a site visit with you. Also check with your homeowner's association, if applicable, to ensure you are complying with your neighborhood covenants regarding tree removal. The city does not enforce private covenants.

Are there areas on my property where trees cannot be removed?

Healthy trees of any size within stream buffers, zoning buffers, tree-save areas, river corridors, etc. may not be removed without permission. Owners should contact the city to determine if trees are in one of these protected areas.

What are specimen trees?

Specimen trees are larger and more mature trees that must be preserved within the city. The specimen tree designation is based on the tree's size, type, condition, location, or historical significance. Hardwoods (oaks, maples, hickories, etc.) that have diameters of 28 inches or greater, and softwoods (pines, cedars, firs, etc.) that are 30 inches or greater are considered specimen size. Some less common flowering trees with a diameter of 12 inches or more are considered specimen size as well. Diameter measurements for existing trees are taken at 4.5 feet above the ground. Other criteria used to determine a specimen tree include a life expectancy of greater than 10 years, no extensive decay or limb damage, and no major insect or pathological problems. There are penalties for removing specimen trees without prior permission.

Do I need a Certified Arborist to assess my trees?

In many cases, a Certified Arborist report is required to justify the removal of trees that are of specimen size. This report should be submitted along with a tree removal or development application and city staff will review and grant the approval or denial. The city cannot provide these reports, so a third-party arborist is required for these assessments. You can find an arborist at www.TreesAreGood.org. Having a certified arborist check out your property is a good idea if you are concerned about hazardous trees or have questions about selecting the right trees to plant. Selective pruning and hazardous and dead tree removal are one of the most proactive efforts you can do to ensure the long-term safety and viability of your property.

Whom should I contact if I see a fallen tree in the road or a hazardous tree in the right of way?

You should contact the City of Peachtree Corners at 678-691-1200 and the city will assess the tree and determine the proper course of action.