

Minimum Width Requirements: Friends of Trees Response

Friends of Trees understands some of the reasoning behind the interest in no longer permitting trees to be planted in planting strips between 2.5 and 3 feet, but we feel that this is narrowly focused and does not account for the larger perspective or recognize the inequitable and negative impact it will have on the community.

Portland is a unique, progressive and innovative city

Let's find what is right for Portland, rather than looking to other urban foresters to answer our city's question of whether to plant in small strips. Friends of Trees works in multiple municipalities and Portland has a much higher percentage of small strips compared to the others. The decision to ban small strips therefore has a much greater impact on the overall impact on Portland's tree canopy than it does on the municipalities to which we are comparing ourselves. Finding what is right for Portland and how we can be most equitable to all communities in Portland is key.

- We need to work with the planting sites that we have to meet canopy goals and create an equitable community forest. It's easier for cities with a much greater proportion of larger planting strips to discard smaller planting spaces.
- 2.5-3' strips represents 12% of total planting spaces in Portland and 17% of the available planting spaces.

Equity concerns

Low-canopy and low-income neighborhoods have a greater percentage of 2.5-3' planting strips. By no longer allowing tree planting in these spaces we are depriving these neighborhoods of the opportunity to receive the benefits that these trees could provide.

- 96% of 2.5-3' strips are in low-canopy, low-income neighborhoods and communities of color.
- 25% of available planting spaces in low-canopy and low-income neighborhoods are these small strips and would be banned from planting.
- It's also a missed opportunity to create further tree advocates; a small street tree can be the gateway to the planting of a larger, yard tree and advocacy for trees in their neighborhood.

Small street trees are valuable

Small stature trees may not be equal to large trees in some of the services they provide, but they still provide very beneficial services, including many of those desired benefits noted in Title 11. These benefits greatly outweigh the concerns and are magnified in low-income neighborhoods:

- Traffic calming and providing a streetscape buffer for pedestrians
- Improving air quality by providing oxygen and capturing air pollutants and carbon dioxide
- Visual screening of traffic and buffering vehicle noise
- Reducing crime
- Increasing home market values
- Providing health benefits (social, mental, physical)

Small street trees are valuable, continued

- Providing habitat: small stature trees provide a valuable layer of habitat and often offer berries, fruit and seeds for urban wildlife
- Reducing heat-island effect by shading impervious surfaces
- Screening and buffering from wind, storms and noise
- Stormwater benefits may not be as great as those with large trees, but they still provide benefits. Additionally, there are some great small, evergreen options (Arbutus unedo and Azara microphylla) helping with reducing stormwater runoff when it is needed most.
- Tree care expense is a huge factor in convincing anyone, including low-income homeowners, to plant a tree. They fear the high costs of hiring professionals to maintain and or remove large trees. Smaller trees are much more easily cared for by community groups and the homeowners themselves.

Neighborhood tree leaders are concerned

Volunteer neighborhood tree advocates have expressed concern that no longer planting in 2.5-3 foot planting strips would negatively impact their neighborhood.

- Some neighborhoods would be much more affected than others. These narrow planting strips are a large percent of the planting space in some low income/low canopy neighborhoods (Piedmont, Creston-Kenilworth, Woodlawn, Sabin, Vernon).
- Many neighbors and potential planting locations would be impacted, which would decrease street tree stocking levels and the access to the benefits of street trees.

Street trees and yard trees are not the same

While planting a large growing yard tree provides many benefits, it is not the same as a street tree and is not an argument for not planting a small street tree as well.

- Many people don't have room for a large tree in their yard.
- Street trees require a street tree inspection for planting, pruning and removal, so we can ensure that we are planting the right tree in the right place and that when it is removed, it is replaced. Those guarantees cannot usually be made with yard trees.
- Homeowners are likely to plant in a 2.5-3' strip whether they are banned or not. If they are receiving permits then at least there can be control of what is being planted and it can be ensured that an appropriate tree is being planted for the space.
- Yard trees are more vulnerable than street trees from a regulation perspective.
- Many people prefer smaller trees and would not plant a large growing yard tree, even if unable to plant a small street tree. Even when offering large trees for free it has been very challenging to convince homeowners to plant them.

Thank you for taking the time to read this handout and consider this perspective. *If you would like to contact us with questions or additional information please contact Whitney Dorer, Deputy Director at Friends of Trees. She can be reached at whitneyd@friendsoftrees.org or 503-467-2521.*