

Tree Owner Approval Guide

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Table of Contents

1. Purpose	3
2. What is the public tree asset?	3
3. What is a Tree Owner Approval?	3
4. When you need Tree Owner Approval	4
5. How to apply for Tree Owner Approval	4
6. What we cannot approve.....	4
7. How we assess your request	4
8. Timeframes	5
9. Fee	6
10. Activity information requirements	6
11. Additional activity-specific information	7
11.1. Working within a tree's root zone area.....	7
11.2. Tree pruning	7
11.3. Tree relocation - transplanting	8

1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline the process Auckland Council uses when assessing requests for Tree Owner Approval (TOA) and to provide guidance for applicants.

2. What is the public tree asset?

Auckland Council's urban forest is a vital asset for the region and its protection is essential for Aucklanders. Although the entirety of Auckland's urban forest is comprised of all trees in the region, Auckland Council manages the trees and palms on public land, including street trees and park trees.¹ A tree is defined as a perennial plant with a woody main stem.

Trees contribute greatly towards Auckland being a desirable place to live and are an important part of Auckland's natural heritage and identity. Trees provide a multitude of important benefits to the public.

We can all benefit from Auckland's urban forest. The social, environmental, economic and cultural benefits make our streets, neighbourhoods and region more liveable by storing carbon, improving air quality, intercepting rainfall from stormwater, absorbing pollutants, urban heat-island cooling, and ultraviolet ray (UV radiation) protection. Trees also provide food and habitat for wildlife.

For more information on the benefits of trees and vegetation see pages 14-19 of Auckland's Urban Ngahere (Forest) Strategy. <https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/plans-projects-policies-reports-bylaws/our-plans-strategies/topic-based-plans-strategies/environmental-plans-strategies/Documents/urban-ngahere-forest-strategy.pdf>

3. What is a Tree Owner Approval?

As a landowner, Council also owns the trees that reside within that land. Approval must be given to carry out any modification to a public tree by Auckland Council's Urban Forest team. This includes all its parts, its root zone, and the immediate growing environment.

Auckland Council requires that all activities impacting trees on Council-owned land meet the approval of a Council Urban Forest Specialist. Your application for tree owner approval is processed by the Urban Forest team.

The tree owner approval provides a written and signed agreement between a party carrying out work that may affect a public tree and Auckland Council as the owner. The process confirms a person or group's understanding of the methods, conditions, and procedures necessary for compliance with Council tree management objectives.

¹ The AC Urban Forest Specialists do not manage trees on Maunga, Panuku Development Auckland, Department of Conservation land, or Regional Park land.

4. When you need Tree Owner Approval

Activities that may affect a tree on Council land must not take place without a signed Auckland Council Tree Owner Approval (TOA). If in doubt, please enquire. Some activities which require approval include:

- tree pruning
- tree removal
- transplanting
- root disturbance
- activities with potential to damage any part of a Council tree

5. How to apply for Tree Owner Approval

Complete a [Tree Owner Approval](#) application form on our website including supporting documents and email these to treemanager@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz. A detailed description of what information is typically needed per activity can be found beginning on page 4 of this document.

If you have any questions about the approval process, email us at the above address or call us on 09 301 0101 and ask to speak to a Community Facilities Urban Forest Specialist.

6. What we cannot approve

The urban forest team does not process applications for:

- resource consents required under planning documents
- park land-use approvals
- privately owned trees
- trees located on DOC, Panuku, Maunga, and Regional Park land

7. How we assess your request

Applying for approval does not guarantee that it will be granted.

We will weigh up our responsibilities as kaitiaki (guardians) of public trees; to consider what's in the best interest of the public and the applicant in alignment with the urban forest objectives outlined in *Auckland's Urban Ngahere (Forest) Strategy*.²

Approvals may have a range of conditions that you will need to agree to in writing.

The following matters must be considered by Auckland Council when making the decision:

- Visual tree assessment
- Risk

² <https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/plans-projects-policies-reports-bylaws/our-plans-strategies/topic-based-plans-strategies/environmental-plans-strategies/Pages/urban-ngahere-forest-strategy.aspx>

- Arboriculture and ecological evaluation
- Tikanga (customary practices)
- Engagement of interest groups
- Management and/or remediation of effects
- Auckland Council's Urban Ngahere (Forest) Strategy
- Auckland Council's climate action and carbon reduction commitments
- Arbor Day Foundation Tree Cities of the World
- New Zealand's Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Act (2019)

Applications will be reviewed and may be returned if accurate information is not provided.

The purpose of the TOA process is to protect public trees from unnecessary and unsupported damage and loss, as well as ensuring appropriate methodology, mitigation and value are applied to trees as an asset.

Decisions regarding removal of healthy, functioning street trees are made on a case-by-case basis by an Urban Forest Specialist. In determining whether the removal of a healthy tree is warranted, Council will consider:

- The significance of the vegetation
- Whether the species of tree is appropriate for its location, and whether it is a nuisance species tree.
- Whether the tree's crown, stem or root growth habit has developed in a manner that would prevent continued healthy growth or is negatively impacting on other tree(s).
- The impact of removal and replanting on the neighbourhood streetscape and the public benefit.

The TOA process provides an opportunity for development planners to engage early with Council's Urban Forest Specialist in the design process (i.e. during the preliminary design stage). This allows for canvassing feedback in respect to:

- the constraints and restrictions of working in the vicinity of a public tree,
- measures or methods that might be adopted to successfully accommodate the identified tree/s, and the extent to which such measures are practicable; and
- opportunities for replacement tree planting in/near to the affected public space.

8. Timeframes

We aim to respond within three working days to outline the next steps and approximate timing. We endeavour to process your application within 10 working days where thorough information has been provided. Lengthy or complex applications may require longer timeframes.

9. Fee

There is no fee for the application itself. However, if trees are to be removed the TOA will typically include a condition that requires the applicant to make a payment to Council.

If trees are accepted for removal the TOA will typically require the applicant to make a payment to Council in consideration of Council's costs for compensation for the loss of the existing tree asset and re-greening on public land. The Urban Forest Specialist will determine the type, number, size and location of new trees to be planted.

The total amount of the compensation payment will be stated in the TOA. The amount must be paid by the applicant in full to Council prior to the applicant initiating any works that affect the tree(s).

The applicant is responsible for any approved tree removal including the stump, and reinstatement of the affected ground and grass.

All physical works on Council land must be carried out in accordance with Best Practice Guide for Safety Requirements in New Zealand Arboricultural Operations³ and Safety and Health in Arboriculture.⁴

If a tree is also within a regulated overlay zone or plan, there may be additional planning requirements or restrictions to comply with. To learn about these requirements, you may view the Auckland Unitary Plan on the Council website. Chapters D, E15, E16, E17 and E26 contain some of the planning guidelines or rules relating to trees.

10. Activity information requirements

Each application form requires the following standard information:

- a. Location details of the tree
- b. Tree details
- c. Activity proposed that may affect the tree
- d. Review of alternatives to tree disruption
- e. Applicant details for contact and invoicing, where required
- f. Conditions for approval; tree protection, remediation, H&S, standards, and other (completed by Urban Forest Specialist)
- g. Approval signature from an authorised Auckland Council Urban Forest Specialist.

³ https://472b49bf-256c-49bf-a16a-b76a5e58c2ad.filesusr.com/ugd/fffdca_1511befd9618431eafbb3ab3c5556440.pdf

⁴ <https://worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/forestry/safety-and-health-in-forest-operations/>

11. Additional activity-specific information

11.1. Working within a tree's root zone area

When conducting work in the root zone area of public trees, all applications for TOA need to include the following.

1. A scaled tree location plan showing tree location (surveyed trunk centres), root zone projections (see below) and overlaid development plans
2. A tree inventory detailing the following:
 - a. Tree species
 - b. Age class
 - c. Vitality
 - d. Structural condition
 - e. Root zone radii
3. A description of the activities proposed for each affected tree
4. Any methods proposed through design and / or construction with the goal of preserving trees and tree health

The following root zones are to be established for each tree and projected on the supplied plans as a circle, centred around the tree centre.

- a. Structural root zone area (SRZ)

$$SRZ_{(m)} = 0.27 \times DBH_{(cm)}^{0.56}$$

- b. Tree protection zone (TPZ)

$$TPZ_{(m)} = DBH_{(m)} \times 12$$

Where pre-existing site conditions or other factors indicate that rooting has occurred asymmetrically, a polygon of equivalent area should be produced. Modifications to the shape of the TPZ should reflect a soundly based arboricultural assessment of likely root distribution.

For multi-stemmed trees, DBH is established using the following method:

$$DBH = \sqrt{((DBH1^2) + (DBH2^2) + \dots + (DBHn^2))}$$

11.2. Tree pruning

For pruning requests please include the following in addition to the standard application detail:

- a. annotated photo or diagram of requested pruning
- b. approximate percent of proposed live growth loss
- c. diameter of branches requested for removal

11.3. Tree relocation - transplanting

Transplanting must be carried out to arboriculture industry standards, and by an experienced expert in tree relocation.

To ensure a successful outcome, a transplanting feasibility report and plan must be provided for prior approval and should include all details of the transplant methodology to be carried out. This includes:

- a. documentation of existing utilities and conflicts (for existing tree and new proposed location)
- b. watering or irrigation plan
- c. location of receptor or holding site
- d. an activity timeline
- e. size of retained root ball
- f. root ball containment method
- g. equipment and tools used
- h. lifting method
- i. supervision
- j. post-transplanting aftercare and monitoring plan
- k. Acceptance for a bond requirement in some cases

The transplanting must be undertaken during the autumn/winter planting season (May-August).

Tree transplanting contractor details must be provided to the Council Urban Forest Specialist prior to any work commencing.

Find out more: phone **09 301 0101**
or visit **aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/**