Improvement Committee Tree Removal Request Guidelines

Background:

The Surfland CCR’s amended 1995 directs that prior to the removal of trees greater than 20 inches in circumference at 48” above the ground, property owners need permission from the Improvement Committee (IC). The general process is that owners submit a request to the IC that outlines how many trees are requested for removal, where they are located and why they wish to remove them. The IC members evaluate the request, conduct a site visit to assess the trees (marked by the owner) and then decide to either approve or disapprove the request. If the property owner is not satisfied with the IC decision, there is an appeals process also outlined in the CCR’s. This document is intended to provide the IC members with guidance on whether or not to approve a specific request. This is intended only general guidance and may not cover all circumstances. In order to maintain the wooded character of Surfland, owners should be strongly encouraged to replace or replant native trees on the property.

General considerations

Although each case is likely to be unique, there are several general considerations that should be taken into account during the site visit assessment.

* How many trees are requested for removal and overall number of trees on the property.
* Is the tree alive or dead
* How big is the tree and is it an obvious hazard, condition of the root system, signs of heart rot.
* How close is the tree to the house or garage structures? (sheds are not a concern)

The CCR’s state that the wooded nature of Surfland needs to be preserved. If there are a lot of trees on the property and the owner requests only a couple for removal, theses should generally be allowed. Trees that are dead, an obvious hazard (e.g. rotten heart wood), loose roots or that exhibit these symptoms and are close to a structure should be approved for removal. One rule of thumb would be to ask yourself “Would I want that tree next to my house or in my yard?”

New Construction/ additions to existing structures/septic

The IC is also responsible for approval of plans for lot development and major modifications to existing structures as outlined in the CCR’s. The IC should not impede lot development, but ensure that plans have county approval (e.g. County signatures, building permits, etc.). Construction activities will likely require removal of trees within the footprint of the structure and around that structure. Approval to remove trees within the footprint and around the structure should be granted; however, the IC should work with the owners to maintain a wooded character on as much of the lot as possible. This may include after construction landscaping to replant native tree and brush species. The general clear cutting of an entire lot should not be approved. Removal of large numbers of trees for convenience should be handled as restrictive as possible while trying to compromise with the owners. Attempt to inform owners of the consequences of excessive removal (weakening the canopy structure, damage to neighbors trees, etc.). Trees approved for removal should be marked with bright spray paint in order to avoid “confusion”.

Potential/Existing Damage to structures

In general, if there is acute damage readily visible during the site visit, the removal should be authorized. If this request is a preventative measure (roots growing toward house, tree “leaning” towards the structure, pine needles clogging gutters, moss on roof, etc.) deny request and ask for written justification from a licensed arborist (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arborist> for definition). Discuss potential alternative options with property owner such as limbing, root removal. In case of liability threats from property owners, please disengage and consult with the Surfland RA board.

Convenience removals/fire hazards/dead trees/utilities

In general convenience removals of individual trees can be approved, unless there is a pattern of persistent removal requests that substantially depletes the tree population of an individual lot. Large numbers of removal requests should not be approved. Fire hazards on the coast are generally low due to proximity to the ocean and generally should not be approved. Clearing of dead branches and undergrowth are generally sufficient to minimize risk, especially with fire station across highway 101 and proximity to multiple hydrants. Dead trees should generally be approved, especially when they represent a hazard. Large numbers of dead trees should be cut over a period of time. Utility companies are responsible to maintenance and clearing of utility lines (power lines, cable, phone lines, etc.) and home owners are NOT responsible for removal of trees with respect to the utilities. In general, topping of trees for view purposes should not be permitted.

Replanting

Regardless of the reason for the removal, all owners should be encouraged to replant native tree species to replace trees that are removed.