

RE: Testimony for Hearing on 23 July 2024: Title 11 Large Tree Amendment Extension

Thank you for holding this hearing. Please recommend extending the Title 11 Amendment that establishes mitigation for each inch of diameter for trees whose trunks measure 20 inches and greater. At twenty years of age, an oak like the one pictured below was likely 20 inches in diameter and on the way to becoming four feet in diameter. Significant mitigation fees provide an incentive to preserve both trees that will grow on to reach their full potential as well as existing mature large-form trees that are today the backbone of high-quality canopy.

Public health depends on a life-giving context for housing, commerce, transportation, and industry. The biggest trees make the biggest difference in our lives and livelihoods. Such trees on private property have an especially big impact in neighborhoods where developing housing is not presently balanced by designing new kinds of nearby public space for big trees and where existing space for public trees in the rights of way is limiting the size of trees.

Consider Creston-Kenilworth, an eastside neighborhood. Small and medium planting sites for street trees predominate, with “83% of right-of-way planting strips limiting trees to small and medium sizes.” The Urban Forestry Inventory Report on this neighborhood continues to explain, “although it is important to plant all available spaces, in some areas this may not be enough to equitably distribute canopy in Creston – Kenilworth. Creative expansion of planting sites or increased planting on private property may be the only ways to meet canopy goals.”

The “creative expansion of planting sites” is not happening citywide, nor in Creston-Kenilworth.



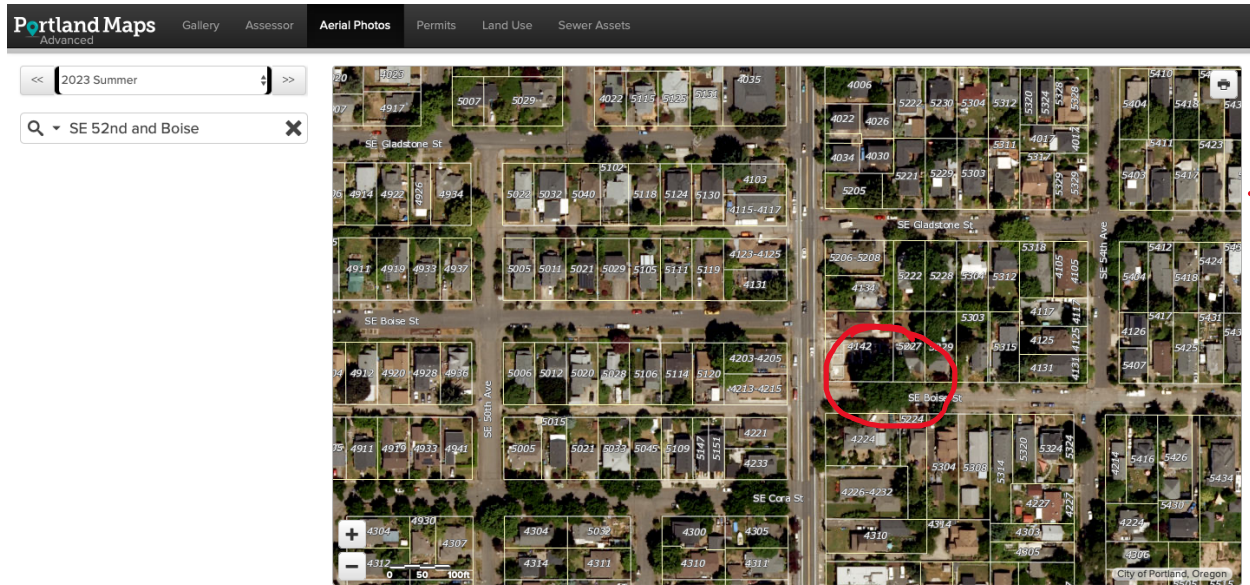
Yet, big tree preservation on private lots is making a difference.

A difference to owners of the lot, to neighbors, to the neighborhood. All because at SE 52nd and Boise Street the developer of 8 condominiums carefully preserved the oak on site throughout the construction process.

The result? At a minimum, this tree provides morning shade for the new condominium residents and afternoon shade for neighbors. To this must be added its importance to wildlife, especially birds, and its contribution to cooling a large volume of air and cleaning it of particulate pollution.

Arboreal contributions to healthy living spaces are magnified by the size of trees.

The canopy of this oak stands out in comparison to an array of small to medium trees in this 2023 aerial photo--reminding us of its importance, and reminding us it alone is not enough:



Once we understand the value of each specific private tree, we cannot help but see the value of the forest. Of course, big trees now growing on private property, especially mature trees that fully embody the value of accrued time and preserved space, are essential to our current health and sanity. Crucially, they also hold a vital place in our imaginations, enabling us to envision a future where big trees not only make specific places whole in the private realm, but where a connecting and connected forest has transformed the public realm everywhere in the city. Seeing single, iconic private trees in their neighborhood contexts enables us to imagine what the equitable distribution of canopy would require where current public tree spaces are too small or non-existent adjacent to the places where we live, work, and play—enabling us to imagine and invest in the “creative expansion of planting sites”: newly formed, shared public spaces with wide curb bump-outs that allow for big trees in our rights of way; and micro-parks that create frequent, intimate, calm canopy reservoirs in our increasingly crowded city. While each lot’s 20-inch and greater private tree equips us for living in the present, they help us see the further design steps necessary to ensure a future and healthier public realm. We can hope the big private trees we continue to protect in Title 11 now will inspire us to invest in an equitably distributed urban forest and just future for everyone--a better future.

Please recommend extending the Title 11 Large Tree Amendment that sets mitigation fees per inch for trees 20 inches and greater.

Sincerely,
Catherine Mushel
6319 SE 34th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97202
cmushel@comcast.net