

Treekeeper's Checklist

Questions to Ask About a Development Proposal

One of the most effective ways to influence development is to understand the site before the trees are removed. Developers and planners rely on maps, surveys, engineering reports, and environmental studies. Residents often have something equally valuable: firsthand knowledge of the neighborhood and its trees.

This checklist can help identify issues that deserve closer review.

Existing Trees

Washington County's forests and mature trees provide shade, wildlife habitat, cleaner air, carbon storage, stormwater management, and neighborhood character. Before a development is approved, consider whether the trees have been fully identified and adequately protected.

See our [Treekeeper's Tree Investigation Checklist](#) for questions to ask concerning trees when reviewing a development proposal

Wildlife Habitat

Trees are habitat, not simply landscaping.

Ask:

- Are cavity trees present?
- Are snags being removed?
- Are nesting birds using the site?
- Are squirrels, owls, woodpeckers, bats, or other wildlife regularly observed?
- Does the property connect larger habitat areas?

Photographs and wildlife observations from neighbors can become useful documentation.

Streams, Wetlands & Water

Determine whether the property contains or borders:

- wetlands
- streams
- springs
- seeps
- seasonal drainage channels

Many small waterways are unmapped.

Also ask:

- Will trees near streams be removed?
 - Are riparian buffers being maintained?
 - Could tree removal increase erosion or water temperatures?
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Stormwater

Trees intercept rainfall and reduce runoff. Ask:

- How much tree canopy will be lost?
 - Will runoff increase?
 - Will nearby properties experience more flooding?
 - Is enough soil volume being preserved for replacement trees?
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Heat and Climate

Tree removal changes neighborhood temperatures. Consider:

- Will sidewalks become hotter?
 - Will homes lose summer shade?
 - Will paved areas expand?
 - Will replacement trees realistically provide equivalent canopy within the next several decades?
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Neighborhood Character

Ask whether the proposal will:

- remove the neighborhood's largest trees
- eliminate wooded views
- reduce privacy
- increase noise
- reduce bird activity
- change the character of the street

Although neighborhood character alone may not determine a land use decision, these changes often support broader discussions about planning policies.

Review the Plans Carefully

Do not rely solely on artist renderings.

Instead, examine:

- grading plans
- utility plans
- road alignments
- stormwater facilities
- retaining walls
- construction access routes

Sometimes trees disappear because of underground utilities rather than buildings themselves.

Questions to Ask the Developer

Developers often have flexibility before permits are finalized.

Consider asking:

- Can roads, driveways, or utilities be shifted to preserve mature trees?
- Can homes be repositioned?
- Can shared driveways reduce tree removal?
- Can parking areas be redesigned?
- Can construction fencing be moved farther from tree roots?
- Were multiple site designs evaluated?

Many developers are more willing to make changes early in the design process than after engineering is complete.

Build Your Evidence

The strongest comments are supported by evidence.

Collect:

- dated photographs
- maps
- aerial imagery
- measurements
- wildlife observations
- historical photographs
- copies of county documents
- references to applicable code sections

Whenever possible, cite specific development standards rather than relying on general objections.
