

Manor, Courtney

Subject: Tree ordinance for Ann Arbor

From: Chuck Ream

Sent: Monday, August 11, 2025 4:20 PM

To: Akmon, Dharma <DAkmon@a2gov.org>; City Council <CityCouncil@a2gov.org>; Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>; Ryan J Stanton <RStanton@mlive.com>; Jeff Holtzman; William Sverdlik; John Godfrey; Anne Bannister; Sally Haines; Lauren Sargent; Mitchell, Rita

Subject: Re: Tree ordinance for Ann Arbor

Hey, that's just pure evasion. do you think this is news to me?

Did you read it?

What a great service they have provided for Ann Arbor. I knew very well you guys were trying to pull a fast one.

I checked, and every other city who has tried this new urbanism stuff has done it in conjunction with a new tree protection policy.

You guys really are running a big scam and it's all gonna become obvious when you try to reduce the setbacks in your new residential areas so that trees are going to be cut down.

Soon after you will all be gone.

How can you have absolutely no feel for the sense of Ann Arbor voters or the specialness of this great town.

Sent from my iPhone

On Aug 11, 2025, at 4:08 PM, Akmon, Dharma <DAkmon@a2gov.org> wrote:

Hi Chuck,

When you say "ChatGPT says 'I'm onto something,'" it's worth noting that AI chatbots are essentially giant confirmation machines. They don't have independent knowledge or the ability to investigate reality. If you present an idea (for example, that Ann Arbor's comp plan is being developed without adequate tree protections) and ask the AI about it, it will search its learned patterns for information that fits with that premise. It may also compare examples from other places, which can make it sound like it's validating your point. But that's not the same as an external, impartial fact check. It's more like a conversational echo that can be very convincing.

In other words, ChatGPT excels at mirroring your framing and the comparisons it can draw from its training, but any apparent "agreement" is generated from pattern-matching, not from independent evaluation or authority.

Best,

-Dharma

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Dharma Akmon

Council Member, Ward 4

Ann Arbor City Council

View and sign up for my newsletter at <https://www.dharmafora2.com/news>

From: Chuck Ream

Sent: Monday, August 11, 2025 3:55 PM

To: City Council <CityCouncil@a2gov.org>; Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>; Ryan J Stanton <RStanton@mlive.com>; Jeff Holtzman; William Sverdlik; Anne Bannister; John Godfrey; Chuck Ream; Sally Haines; Lauren Sargent

Subject: Fwd: Tree ordinance for Ann Arbor

ChatGPT says “I’m onto something” regarding what is going on in Ann Arbor, with a new master plan being attempted with no tree protection plan, no modern tree ordinance whatsoever.

I could not have said this better than the artificial intelligence.

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Chuck Ream

Date: August 11, 2025 at 3:23:39 PM EDT

To: Chuck Ream

Subject: Tree ordinance four

ChatGPT –

You bring up a thought-provoking point: Ann Arbor’s existing tree ordinance is comparatively modest—mostly centering on right-of-way maintenance, basic clearance, enforcement fines, and street-tree permits. In contrast, cities like Evanston, IL and Cambridge, MA have taken more proactive, modernized approaches that align more closely with new urbanism’s values around canopy preservation, climate resilience, and sustainable development.

Evanston, IL — A Forward-Looking Approach

- In September 2023, Evanston passed a Tree Preservation Ordinance (15-O-23) that went into effect in June 2024. This ordinance regulates tree removal on private property, requiring a \$75 permit for trees with a diameter of 6 inches or more, and also mandates tree-protection for any construction activity within 25 feet of a tree.

- Property owners must submit a Tree Review Application that can trigger arborist review, onsite evaluation, and—and this is key—fees or replanting requirements if removal is approved. These measures are clearly designed to preserve canopy and keep tree protection embedded in land-use decisions.
- Early data suggest that the process is active but not prohibitive—late 2024 reports note that of 187 tree removal requests, 163 were approved, with only 13% denied.

Cambridge, MA — Deep Integration with Urban Forestry Goals

- Cambridge has a longstanding Tree Protection Ordinance (Chapter 8.66) that requires a Tree Study and Mitigation Plan when “Significant” or “Exceptional” trees (typically 6” or more in diameter) are to be removed. Replacement planting or contributions to a Tree Replacement Fund are required.
- The city’s Urban Forestry Master Plan, implemented beginning in 2020, emphasizes canopy preservation through a comprehensive 9-step strategy, ownership by multiple city divisions, planting targets, soil health education, and performance monitoring. From 2014 to 2020, Cambridge saw its overall tree canopy grow from 23% to 25.5%—a significant gain.

How Ann Arbor Compares

By contrast, Ann Arbor’s ordinance primarily addresses maintenance of public right-of-way vegetation and requires permits only when working on public trees—and while it does impose canopy-loss fees, these are largely tied to street tree removals, not private property regulation. There’s minimal emphasis on private-property tree preservation, replacement mandates, or integration with urban forestry planning.

The Verdict

Yes—you’re onto something. Compared to Evanston and Cambridge, Ann Arbor’s ordinance lacks the robust, holistic tools that characterize modern tree protection aligned with new

urbanism principles. Both Evanston and Cambridge have enacted ordinances that:

- Regulate private-property tree removals
- Embed arborist review and mitigation requirements
- Include replanting or financial offsets
- Align tree policy with broader urban forestry or climate goals

These measures ensure that tree canopy isn't an afterthought but a deliberate component of growth, shade, stormwater management, and livability.

Ann Arbor might indeed benefit from revisiting its ordinance to incorporate similar strategies—leveraging tree protection as both environmental and urban design infrastructure.

Let me know if you'd like help comparing specific ordinance language or exploring how other cities have structured their policies!