



MUNICIPALITY OF PRINCETON

Department of Infrastructure
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MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and Council
From: Deanna Stockton, *Deputy Administrator*
Subject: Ordinance to Amend Chapter 22 and 10B Subsection 227A Regarding Trees and Shrubs
Date: November 14, 2025

Princeton has proudly been a Tree City USA for 29 years, demonstrating the community's ongoing commitment to responsible tree management, environmental stewardship, and meeting national standards for urban forestry. This dedication to a healthy, sustainable urban forest for the benefit of our residents translated into Princeton's commissioning of a tree canopy assessment in 2024 to characterize its tree canopy cover and gain recommendations to maintain, conserve, and protect it.

The Tree Canopy Report shows that Princeton has lost approximately 6% of its canopy over thirteen years and now has approximately 60% coverage. Besides preserving forested open space tracts and planting more trees, it is recommended that Princeton preserve more of its existing canopy by reviewing and revising its ordinances, and educating the public on tree awareness and stewardship. Council created an ad hoc Tree Canopy Committee in 2024 in recognition of the community concerns regarding the loss of tree canopy. The proposed ordinance to amend Chapter 22 Trees and Shrubs and Chapter 10B subsection 227A regarding Tree Preservation, Protection and Mitigation for site plans subject to land use board approvals is the result of a collaboration of the Shade Tree Commission; Engineering, Zoning, Public Works, and Planning staff; and the Ad Hoc Tree Canopy Committee of Council. Tree removal regulations detailed in Chapter 22 currently include an exemption for removals as a part of an application to the Zoning or Planning Board; Chapter 10B subsection 227A provides the regulations for tree removals as a part of a board application. Previous ordinance amendments inadvertently failed to update the regulations in Chapter 10B which resulted in disparity of requirements. The proposed ordinance addresses this issue.

The substantive changes to the current regulations are detailed below:

- The threshold to submit a tree removal permit application is lowered from 8" diameter at breast height (DBH) to 6" DBH.
- The tree replacement ratios have been edited to result in more replacement trees required for the largest DBH tree removals. In the current ordinance, trees larger than 39" DBH have a four tree replacement requirement; the proposed amendment decreases the DBH to 33" for this requirement.
- Definitions have been added or edited for endangered species, ornamental tree, Princeton Shade Tree Trust Reserve, significant tree, and specimen tree.
- The exceptions in Section 22-12 have been reduced. While the current ordinance does not require applications for dead / dying tree and ash tree removals, applications have been submitted with fees and replacement tree requirements waived. The proposed amendment would codify this scenario. The exception for tree removals related to land use board applications is also being removed. Instead, these applications are required to submit a tree removal permit application under Chapter 22.
- Replacement tree species shall not include invasive species listed on the New Jersey Invasive Species Strike Team's Do Not Plant List.

- The application fee is being increased from \$40 to \$100 to more fully encompass the operational costs to administer this permit program.
- The 20-day automatic permit approval provision is proposed to be removed from Section 22-14. This provision has not been activated in the last five years and is detrimental to the goals of maintaining, conserving and protecting the canopy.
- The informal resolution procedure in Section 22-16 has been enhanced to codify the current activities by the Municipal Arborist in enforcing the Trees and Shrubs regulations.
- The annual reporting process in Section 22-17 is being updated to reflect current practice. The Arborist prepares the report in consultation with the Shade Tree Commission.
- The tree preservation and protection requirements for a development in Chapter 10B-227A are proposed to be strengthened to reflect the language in Chapter 22.
- The tree replacement table in Chapter 10B-227A is being replaced with a redirection to the tree replacement table in Chapter 22.
- The shade tree escrow fund referenced in Chapter 10B-227A is proposed to be updated in this amendment. The correct terminology for this fund is the Shade Tree Trust Reserve, as defined in Chapter 22. The use and reporting requirements codified in land use code section and are being removed and can be formalized by resolution.

If adopted, the new regulations would go into effect on January 1, 2026.

We appreciate Mayor and Council's continued commitment to tree preservation and maintenance of the community's tree canopy. If you have any questions, please contact me.