



City of Tampa

Jane Castor, Mayor

City Planning Department

1400 North Boulevard
Tampa, Florida 33607

Office: (813) 274-3100

MEMORANDUM

DATE: August 9, 2021

TO: The Honorable Chair and Members of Tampa City Council

THRU: John Bennett, Chief of Staff

THRU: Carole Post, Administrator of Development and Economic Opportunity *Carole Post*

FROM: Randy Goers, Director of City Planning *RG*

RE: Transmittal of Tree Removal Zone Report

Chapter 27-284 requires the Natural Resources Coordinator to prepare a report to City Council on the impact of the Tree Removal Zone (TRZ) on Tampa's grand trees. According to Section 27-284.2.5(h), the Semi-Annual Impact Report shall include:

The number of applications acted upon by the **Variance Review Board (VRB)** and **Natural Resources Coordinator** to remove grand trees by month, including the number of grand trees granted and denied a permit to be removed and the number of grand trees removed by, size, species and location of each tree.

The City Planning Department is transmitting this report to City Council and can be available for questions.

xc: Shirley Foxx-Knowles, City Clerk's Office
Suling Lucas, Deputy City Clerk
Martin Shelby, City Council Attorney
Gina Grimes, City Attorney
Simone Savino, Assistant City Attorney

Attachment



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Tree Removal Zone Report

Prepared by Brian Knox, Natural Resources Coordinator
City of Tampa Planning Department
August 9, 2021

Executive Summary

In 2019, the Tampa City Council approved a major revision to Chapter 27-284, creating the City of Tampa Tree, Landscape, and Natural Resources Code. One of the provisions of Chapter 27-284, called the Tree Removal Zone (TRZ), expedites the process in which property owners can remove a tree that is affected by the construction of a structure within a specified area on their property. Section 27-284.2.5(i) requires the Natural Resources Coordinator to prepare a report to City Council every six months on the impact of the Tree Removal Zone on Tampa's grand trees. According to Section 27-284.2.5(i), the Semi-Annual Impact Report shall include:

[t]he number of applications acted upon by the **Variance Review Board (VRB)** and **Natural Resources Coordinator** to remove grand trees by month...including the number of grand trees granted and denied a permit to be removed and the number of grand trees removed by, size, species and location of each tree.

The schedule for producing the report has been delayed by Covid-19 and staff reassignments. This report covers the period of January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2020. A summary of the major findings related to the Tree Removal Zone and associated policies are:

- Twenty-six grand trees were removed in 2020 through the TRZ process. All requests were accepted and approved administratively, consistent with the provisions of Chapter 27-284. Of those 26 trees, 72% were either hazardous or dangerous.
- Generally, applicants using the TRZ process are removing trees that would be recommended for removal had an arborist visited the site. In this respect, the objective of streamlining the process is working.
- Nine non-hazardous or non-dangerous trees were also removed through the TRZ process. Under the previous regulations, these requests would have been referred to the VRB.
- Outside of the Tree Removal Zone, thirteen requests to remove a grand tree were made to the VRB. All requests were approved.

- In terms of the type of tree removed, overall, Laurel Oaks were the most common tree removed with 68% of grand tree Laurel Oaks removed. Ninety-six percent (96%) of the requests to the VRB involved the removal of a Live Oak. It is not known why Live Oaks are so prevalent in VRB cases.
- The number of TRZ applications received in 2020 is nearly equal to the number of Grand Trees removed in the last six months of 2019. This may reflect a reduction in the number of requests to remove trees in the TRZ; however, it is too early to establish a trend.

Executive Summary Recommendations

Because the TRZ process is still relatively new, the City Planning Department recommends continuing to monitor trends and compiling additional data on the requests to remove hazardous and non-hazardous trees within the tree removal zone. The Department also recommends seeking technical assistance grants to complete more detailed analysis on the types of trees removed in the TRZ and citywide (via the VRB process).

1. Key Terms

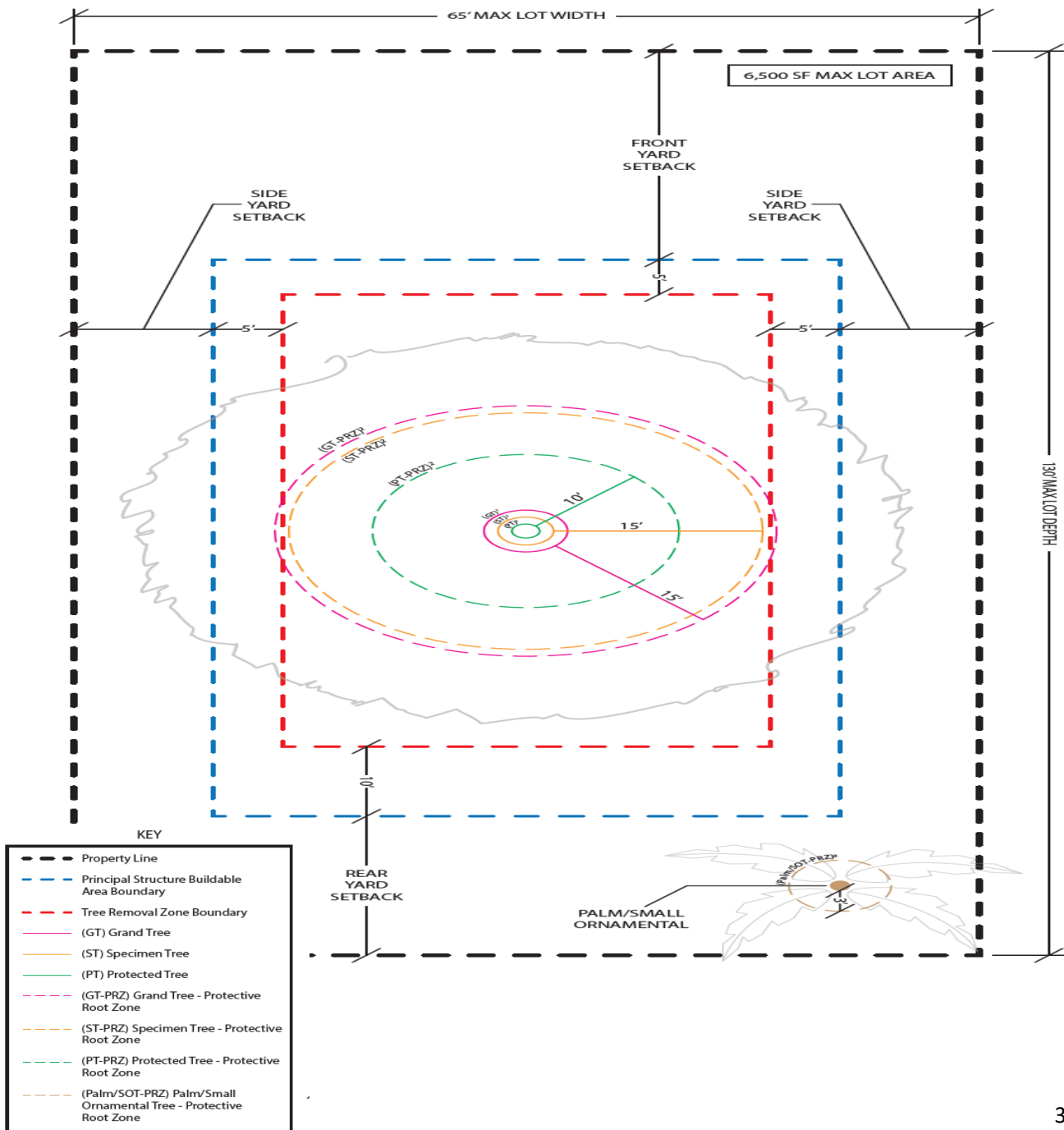
The following terms are used in this report and are referenced in Section 27-284 relating to the Tree and Landscape Code.

- Grand tree:** A species of tree and its root system, with crown spread, and DBH of at least thirty-two (32) inches. Any tree designated as a Challenger or Champion tree by the State of Florida is considered a grand tree.
- Hazardous tree:** Any tree that rates at ‘C-9’ or higher, on the city’s tree condition and risk evaluation form, with a ‘failure potential’ rating of at least ‘high,’ relative to its location, species, condition, risk assessment, and size.
- Dangerous tree:** Any tree that rates ‘severe’ for failure potential with a ‘constant-use’ for target rating on the city’s tree condition and risk evaluation form relative to its location, species, condition, risk assessment, and size.
- Tree Removal Zone (TRZ):** From Chapter 27-43 of the Tampa City Code, a Tree Removal Zone (TRZ) is defined as,

“That portion of a zoning lot, which remains after the principal structure yards (setbacks), plus five (5) feet on the front, side, side street, and corner yards, and ten (10) feet on the rear yard, have been deducted.”

See next page for illustration.

- e. **Protected tree:** Any mitigation tree; any mangrove species; any cypress species; and, any non-'exempt' tree species that measures five (5) inches or greater DBH.
- f. **Specimen tree:** A species of tree and its root system, with crown spread, and DBH of at least twenty-four (24) inches.
- g. **Exempt plant species** ("exempt trees"): Any Category I or II species, as listed on the *Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council's 2017 List of Invasive Plant Species*. Exempt plant species also include any species on the State of Florida's Noxious Weed List.



2. Grand Trees Removed (Overall)

In 2020, the Natural Resources Section reviewed 790 construction building permits (3.2% of all construction services center permit applications). Seventy-one grand trees were removed (resulting in a rate of 0.09% grand tree removed per building permit). Of the 71 grand trees, 32 (45%) were removed because they were hazardous grand trees and 30 trees (42%) were dangerous grand trees. Nine grand trees (13%) were classified as neither hazardous nor dangerous but were removed.

Tree Removal Requests Citywide			
	Previous 6/1/19–12/31/19	Current Period 1/1/20 – 12/31/20	Total 6/1/19 – 12/31/20
Number of Reviews	393	790	1,183
Trees Removed	52	71	123
Reason for Tree Removal			
Hazardous	N/A*	32	32
Dangerous	N/A*	30	30
Neither Hazardous nor Dangerous	N/A*	9	9
*N/A – Information was not available for this initial reporting period			

3. Grand Tree Removal on TRZ / Non-TRZ Lots

The TRZ denotes an area in which grand trees and specimen trees can be removed administratively and do not require a variance for removal regardless of condition. In order to qualify as a lot having a TRZ, the lot must be a lot of record, in any zoning district (except special districts), that meets all the following dimensional standards:

1. Lot width: ≤ 65 feet;
2. Lot depth: ≤ 130 feet; and
3. Lot area: ≤ 6,500 square feet.

Section 27-284.2.4(d) states, “The natural resources coordinator, or designee, shall grant a tree removal permit for all trees with the majority of the trunk within the tree removal zone when the proposed principal building(s), structure(s), and/or addition(s) thereto, cannot be placed within the buildable area without encroaching on protective root zone(s) of protected trees(s).”

On non-TRZ lots, protected and specimen trees can be removed in the same manner as a TRZ lot. Non-hazardous grand trees, however, require a variance for removal. Grand trees can be removed administratively in the TRZ lot.

- a) **TRZ Eligible Lots.** In 2020, 228 building permit requests were on lots that met the criteria as having a Tree Removal Zone. Twenty-six (26) grand trees were removed, of which, 13 were

hazardous, 10 were dangerous and 3 were neither hazardous nor dangerous. Per City Code, all requests were approved administratively.

- b) **Non-TRZ Eligible Lots.** In 2020, 562 building permit requests were on lots that did not qualify as having a TRZ. Nineteen (19) Grand Trees were deemed hazardous by staff and allowed an administrative removal. Twenty (20) Grand Trees were rated dangerous and received an approval to be removed. Five (5) non-hazardous/non-dangerous trees were removed via the VRB process.

Grand Trees Removed on TRZ / Non-TRZ Lots			
	Previous 6/1/19 – 12/31/19	Current Period 1/1/20 – 12/31/20	Total 6/1/19 – 12/31/20
Total Reviews	393	790	1,183
TRZ Lots	188	228	416
Non-TRZ Lots	205	562	767
Trees Removed			
Grand Trees	52	71	123
Removal Condition			
Hazardous	N/A*	32	32
Dangerous	N/A*	30	30
Non-Hazardous	N/A*	9	9
*N/A – Information was not available for this initial reporting period			

4. Variance Review Board Tree Removal Requests & Approvals

- **VRB Tree Removal Requests:** Between June 1, 2019 and December 31, 2020, there have been 16 requests to the VRB to remove a grand tree. All 16 requests were granted. The table on the following page provides a summary of the tree removed via the VRB process. The spike in cases for the September 2020 hearing is likely due the fact that the variance review board did not meet every month because of COVID-19.

Tree Removal Requests by the VRB		
	2019	2020
January		1
February		1
March		2
April		0
May		0
June	1	1
July	0	1
August	2	0
September	0	5
October	0	1
November	0	0
December	0	1
Total	3	13

- VRB Cases by location, size, and type:** Between June 1, 2019 and December 31, 2020, there were 20 trees approved for removal for the 16 requests noted above. Nineteen were live oaks and one was a laurel oak. The size of the trees ranged from 33” – 61”, with an overall average being 40”.

Tree Removal Cases to the VRB				
ADDRESS	SITE LOCATION	SIZE	SPECIES	VRB DECISION
2019				
5117 W. Neptune	REAR	41	LIVE OAK	Granted
215 W. Emily	W. SIDE	40	LIVE OAK	Granted
3603 S. Omar	FRONT	36	LIVE OAK	Granted
2020				
5421 Lykes Ln	Center	48	LIVE OAK	Granted
9310 N. Willow	Center	47	LIVE OAK	Granted
3112 W. Wyoming Ave.	W. SIDE	34	LIVE OAK	Granted
3028 W. Van Buren Dr.	Center	33	LIVE OAK	Granted
5002 E. Fowler	W. SIDE	36	LIVE OAK	Granted
3514 W. Leona	W. SIDE	34	LIVE OAK	Granted
1110 W. Union	Center	33	LIVE OAK	Granted
1110 W. Union	Center	52	LIVE OAK	Granted
3420 W. San Pedro	REAR	45	LIVE OAK	Granted
3412 W. Dorchester	Center	33	LIVE OAK	Granted

Tree Removal Cases to the VRB				
ADDRESS	SITE LOCATION	SIZE	SPECIES	VRB DECISION
1914 E. Sligh	Center	43	LIVE OAK	Granted
1914 E. Sligh	Center	40	LIVE OAK	Granted
1914 E. Sligh	Center	61	LIVE OAK	Granted
1914 E. Sligh	Center	43	LIVE OAK	Granted
1914 E. Sligh	Center	45	LIVE OAK	Granted
1914 E. Sligh	Center	35	LIVE OAK	Granted
7215 N. 30 th	Center	34	Laurel Oak	Granted

5. Grand Tree Removal by Species

Laurel Oaks represent the most common grand tree removed in the City. In 2020, 48 laurel oaks were removed, representing 68% of all trees removed. Live Oaks accounted for 20%, with Camphor and other trees taking up the remaining 12%. Out of a total of 48 laurel oaks, 45% (22 trees) were rated hazardous while 54% (26) were deemed dangerous by Natural Resources. For Live Oaks, 42% (6 trees) were hazardous, 21% (3) were rated dangerous, 36% (5) were non-hazardous or non-dangerous grand trees.

Trees Removed by Type 2020				
	Hazardous	Dangerous	Non-hazardous	Total
Live Oak	6	3	5	14
Laurel Oak	22	26	0	48
Camphor	2	0	3	5
Other	2	1	1	4
Total	32	30	9	70
Trees removed by type were not recorded in 2019				