

# Tree Canopy Code Amendments

## Study Session

Nick Whipple, Assistant Director  
Kristina Gallant, Senior Planner  
Development Services Department

December 13, 2023





# Planning Commission Direction

Provide direction on the recommended tree retention approach, significant tree diameter, and any additional guidance



# Agenda

1. Project Goals
2. LUCA & BCCA Overview
3. Significant Tree Diameter
4. Tree Retention Alternatives
5. Next Steps



# Project Goals

## Strategy N.1. Increase Tree Canopy Citywide

- 40% goal
- Ensure sufficient code provisions
- Incentivize the right tree in the right place
- Identify opportunities for tracking data



# Project Goals

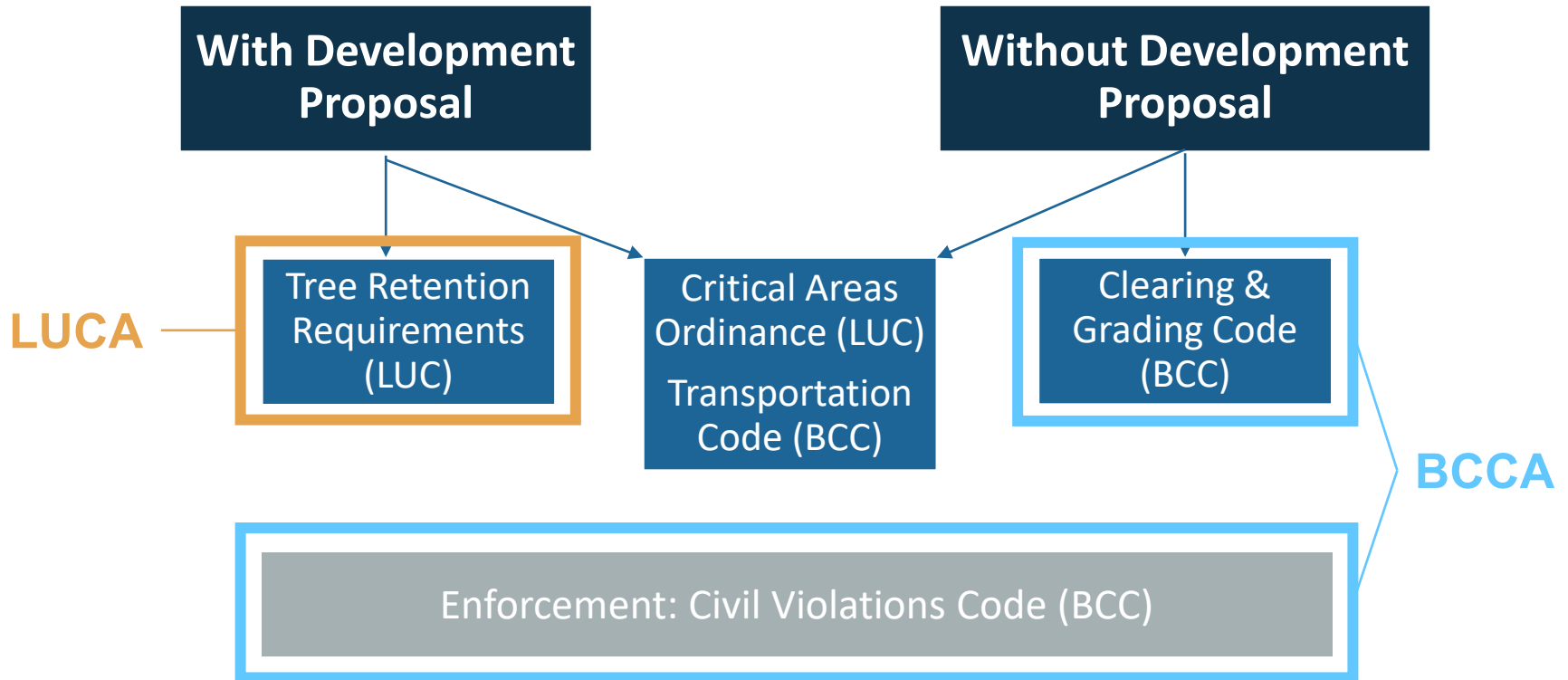
---

- **Comprehensive** code review
- Support tree **preservation, retention, replacement,** and **protection**
- **Balance** housing production needs
- Improve the function and **clarity** of code
- Capture better **data**



# Existing Code

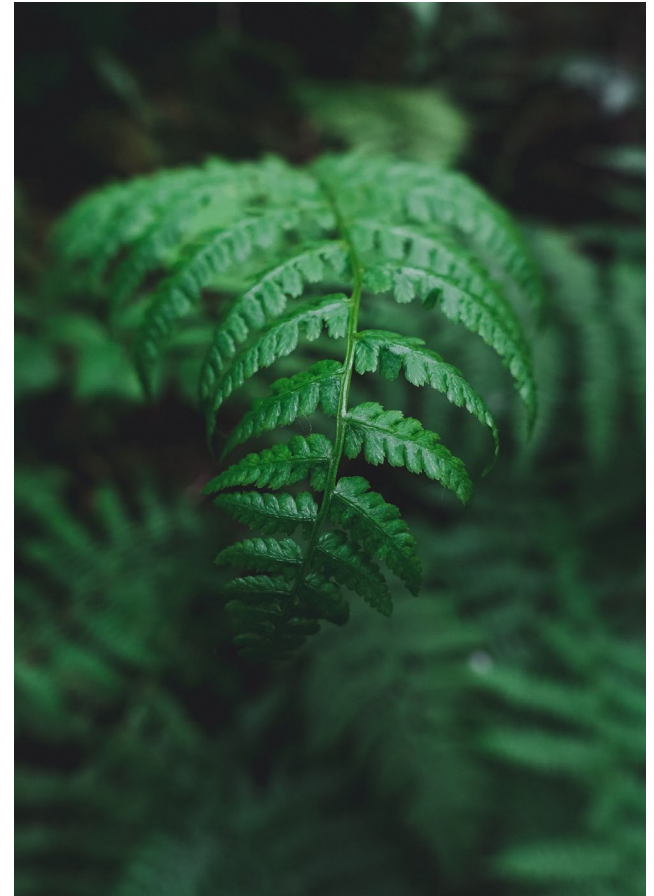
How do we regulate significant trees?



# LUCA Overview

## Definitions

- Update **significant tree** definition
  - Reduce to **6” diameter**
  - Replace **subjective language**
- Implement permanent definition for **landmark trees**
- Define **hazardous trees**



# LUCA Overview

## Tree Retention

- Implement new **minimum tree credit approach**
  - Update retention **criteria**
  - **In-lieu fee** as limited, last resort option
- **Clarify duration** for retained trees
- Codify **key protections** during construction





# BCCA Overview

---

## Tree Removal and Code Enforcement

To be reviewed by City Council:

- **Permit** to remove any significant tree
- Evaluate expanding **replacement requirements** for removal outside development
- Evaluate **inspection** requirements
- Evaluate imposing **financial penalties** for violations



# Significant Tree Diameter

---

- Current minimum **8” diameter**
- Minimum **6” diameter** most common in Puget Sound cities
- To date, no statistically valid study of canopy impacts reducing threshold
- Benefit in expanding range of regulated trees:
  - Provide protections for recently planted trees
  - Allow younger, smaller trees to provide credit for retention



# Tree Retention Alternatives

---

## What is Tree Retention?

- Process for identifying existing significant and landmark trees which cannot be removed with development
- Requirements imposed with any permit, approval, or review including land alteration or development, change in lot coverage, or change in parking area



# Tree Retention Alternatives

---

## Current Tree Retention Approach

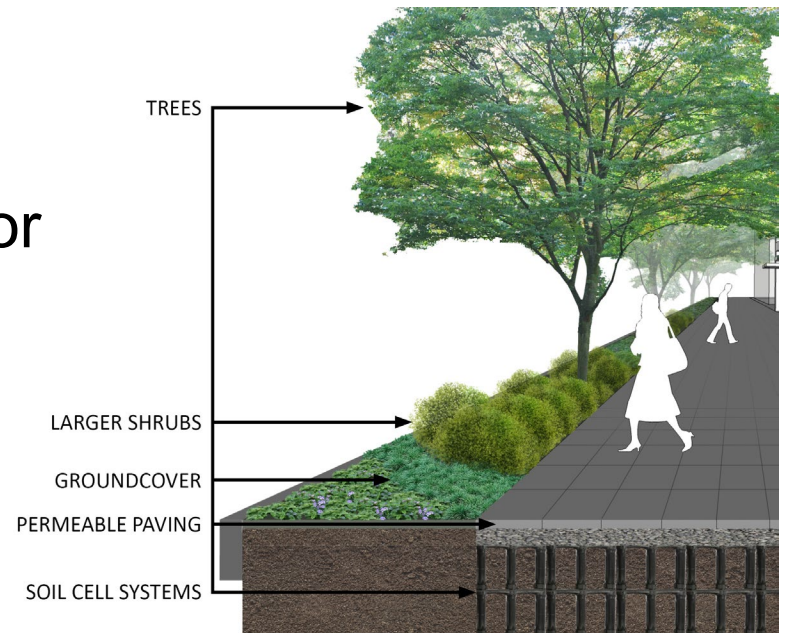
- Applies to significant trees in place when permit is reviewed
  - No authority to look backward
- Must retain a percentage of total diameter inches of existing significant trees
  - Alder and Cottonwoods discounted
  - No minimum outside Bridle Trails, specific landscaping requirements



# Tree Retention Alternatives

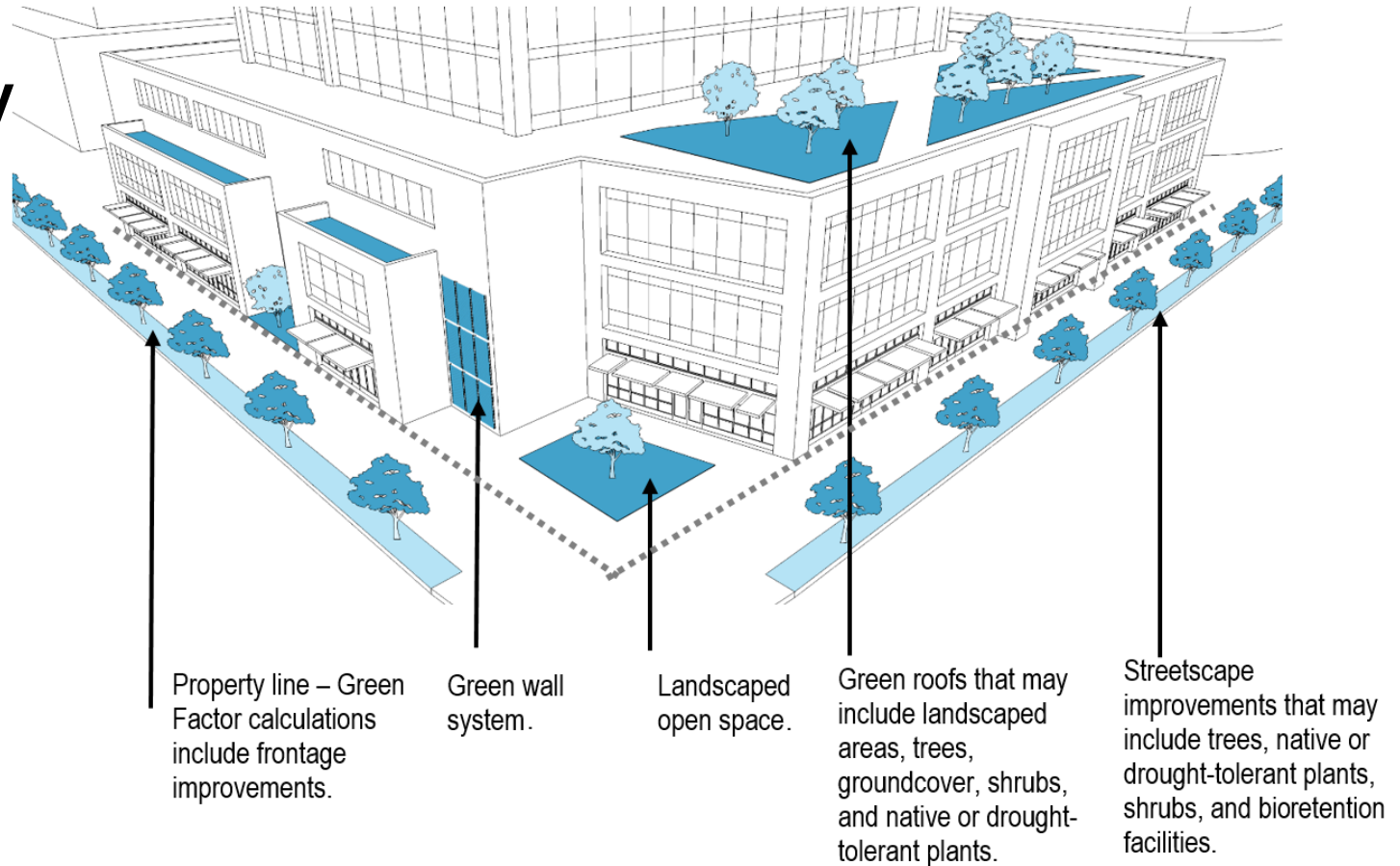
## Current Approach Exceptions - Downtown

- Street trees and landscaping required
- Green and Sustainability Factor (2017)
- Must achieve minimum score, multiple options
- Developed specifically for Downtown
- Promising canopy growth



# Tree Retention Alternatives

## Green & Sustainability Factor in Practice





# Tree Retention Alternatives

## Alternatives Reviewed

1. Percent of Total Diameter Inches (**Existing**)
2. Percent of Total Significant Trees
3. Minimum Tree Canopy
4. Minimum Tree Density Credits (**Recommended**)



# Tree Retention Alternatives

## Minimum Tree Canopy

- Must provide minimum % canopy coverage
- Can be achieved through retention and planting
- Coverage includes existing trees to be retained and projected coverage by new trees in 30 years

### Currently Used By:

- Lake Forest Park
- Issaquah
- Snohomish County





# Tree Retention Alternatives

## Minimum Tree Density Credits (Recommended)

- Must provide minimum tree credits
- Minimum scaled by lot size and development type
- Can be achieved through retention and planting
- Credits calculated based on tree diameter (existing trees) or expected size at maturity (new plantings)

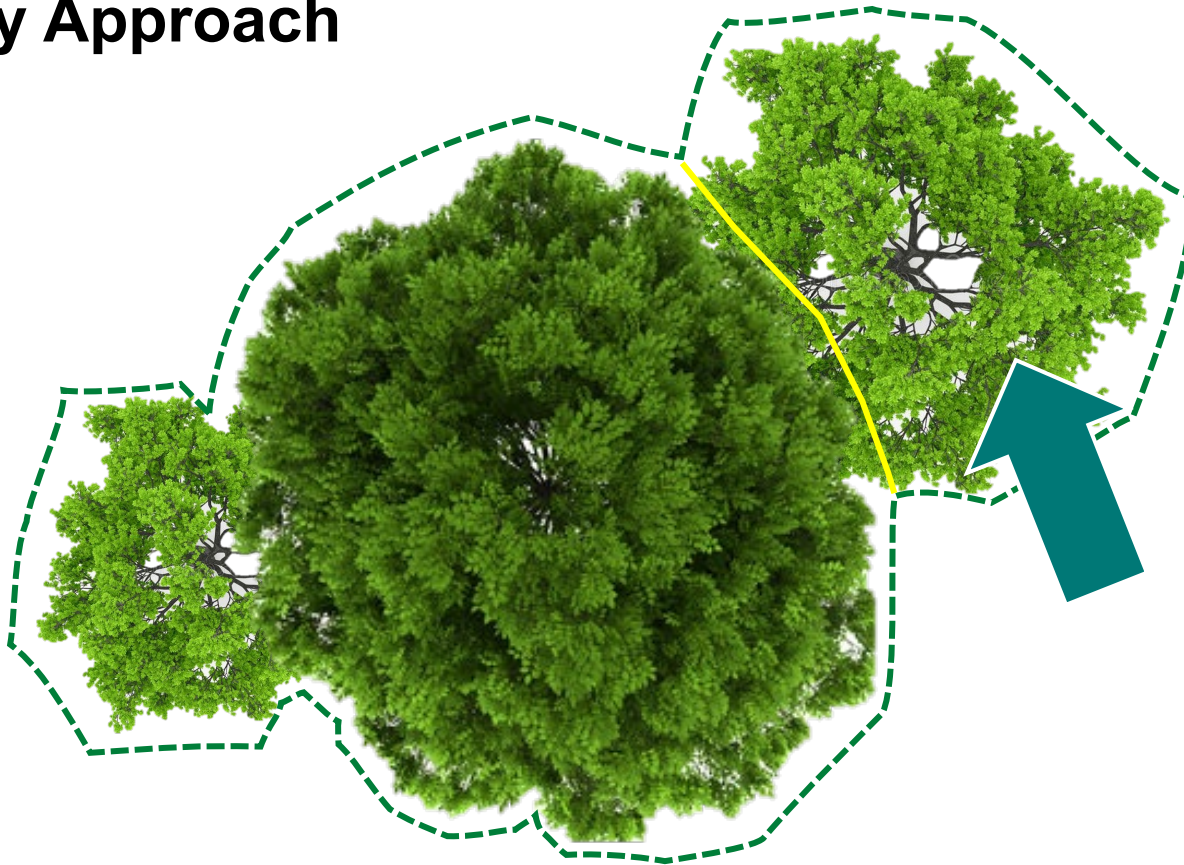
### Currently Used By:

- Kirkland
- Burien
- Renton
- Olympia
- Woodinville



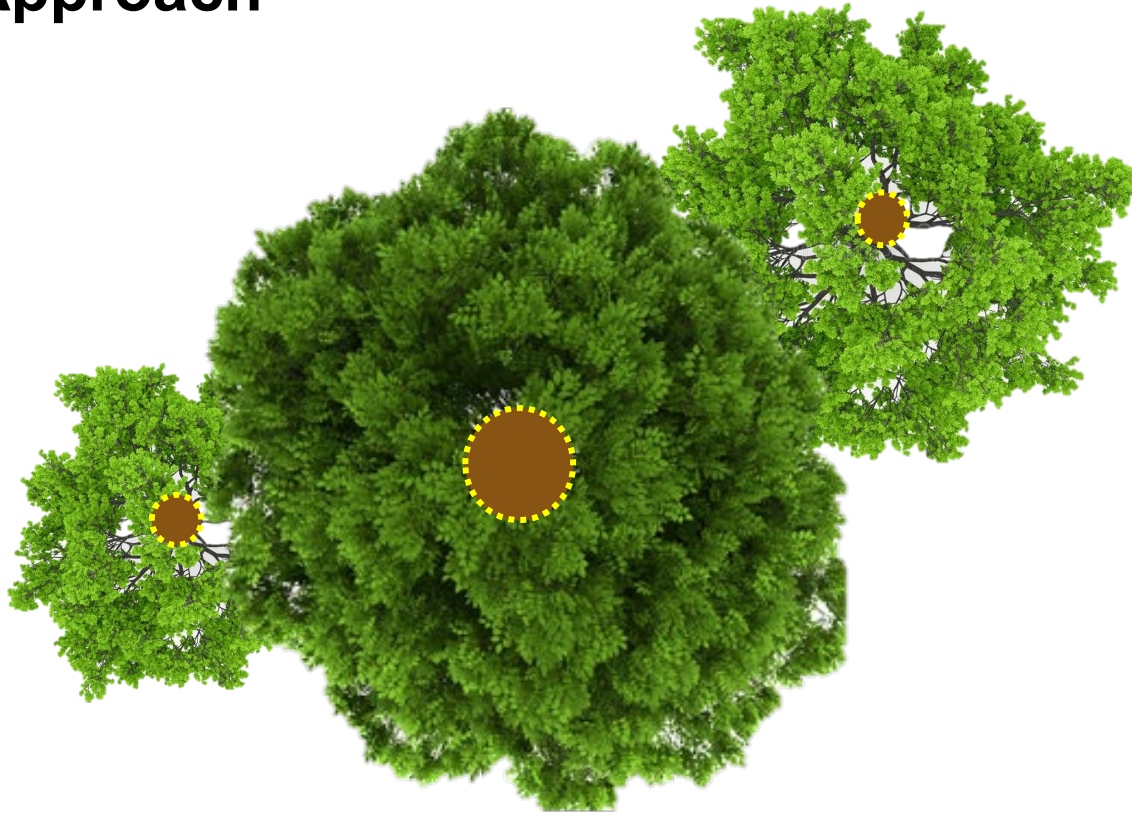
# Tree Retention Alternatives

## Canopy Approach



# Tree Retention Alternatives

## Credit Approach



# Tree Retention Alternatives

## Minimum Canopy Approach

- Can align directly with canopy goals
- Complex calculation, expert review required
- Greater ambiguity, potential for conflict with applicant

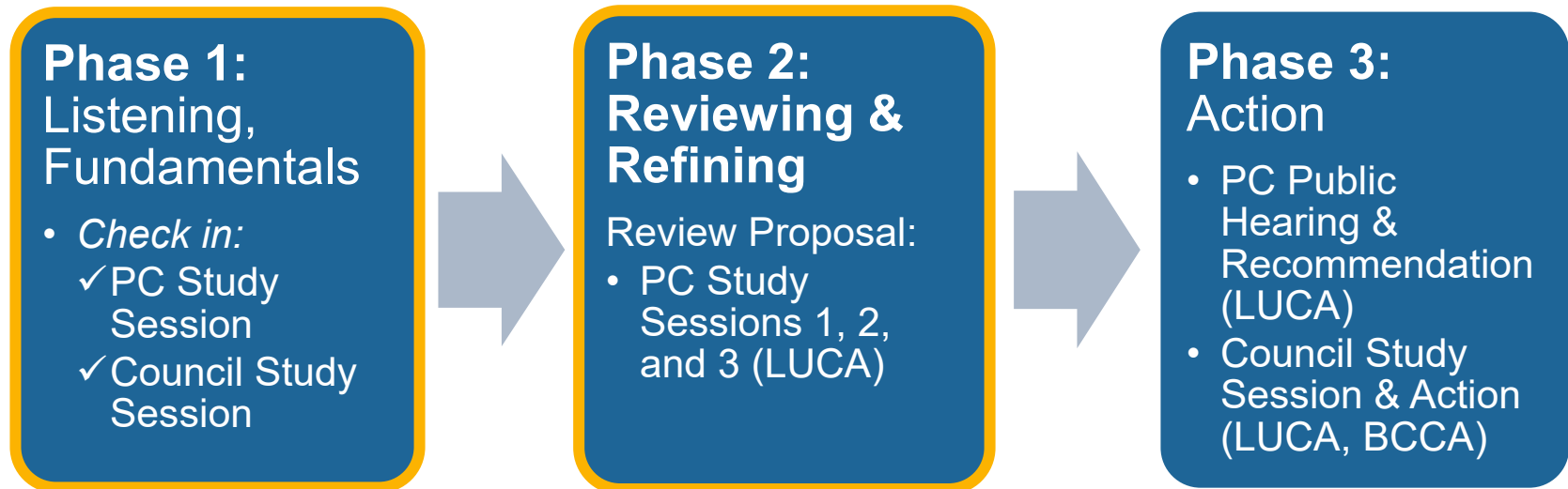
vs

## Minimum Credit Approach

- More complex to develop minimums for regulation
- Simple calculation
- Ability to target individual trees for incentives
- **Staff recommendation**



# Next Steps



Public Info  
Sessions ★  
6/8

★  
1/11



Bellevue Development Committee (BDC) 1/10





# Planning Commission Direction

Provide direction on the recommended tree retention approach, significant tree diameter, and any additional guidance

