

District of Squamish
Tree Management Bylaw

Engagement Summary and Recommendations

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Submitted to:
District of Squamish



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1.0 Key Findings

1.1 Engagement

The District of Squamish is updating its [Tree Management Bylaw No. 2640, 2018](#) and is seeking public input to help shape how trees are protected and replaced in the community. An online survey collected public input to inform updates to the District of Squamish Tree Management Bylaw. The survey ran from December 3, 2025 to January 12, 2026 and received 153 responses, including 100 final written comments. Key findings included:

- **Engagement snapshot**
 - Responses came from residents across 12 neighbourhoods, with the largest shares from Garibaldi Highlands/University Heights (23%) and Brackendale (21%).
 - Most respondents were 35 to 64 years old. Social media (41%) and District eNews (30%) were the most common ways respondents learned about the survey.
- **Experience with the current Tree Management Bylaw**
 - Most respondents reported direct experience with tree removals: 87% had applied for removal of one or more trees.
 - Most respondents identified as homeowners who have removed trees (75%).
 - Familiarity with the bylaw varied: 46% were somewhat familiar, 15% were very familiar, and 39% were not very familiar.
 - Written comments described challenges with permit timelines, application clarity, replacement requirements, and desire for a smoother process.
- **Adequacy of tree protections in the bylaw**
 - The current bylaw requires a permit to remove trees over 20 cm diameter at breast height (DBH), with exemptions that include residential parcels smaller than 0.4 hectares, among others.
 - Views split on adequacy of current protections: 37% said protections were insufficient, 26% said protections were too restrictive, 24% said protections were adequate, and 12% were unsure.
 - Written comments pointed to a core trade-off: protect canopy and habitat, while keeping residential permits workable for safety and straightforward situations.
- **Strong support for protecting mature and habitat trees**
 - Preferred candidates for Significant Tree status included old growth (75%), wildlife trees (65%), rare native species (64%), large trees ≥ 60 cm DBH (about 50%), and culturally modified trees (47%).
 - Many comments emphasized retaining existing mature trees in new developments, strengthening ecological corridors, and improving capacity for tree establishment and maintenance.
- **Planting priorities**

- In order of importance, respondents prioritized new development and redevelopment areas, downtown and the urban core, streets and transportation corridors, parks, and industrial and commercial sites, as planting priorities.
- Comments called for stewardship programs to plant trees on private property and also noted the need for the District to improve its capacity to maintain both existing and newly planted trees.
- **Wildfire and safety concerns shaped views on exemptions**
 - Responses split between a full permit exemption for fire-prone trees in the High-Risk Ignition Zone (48%), an exemption that still protects Significant Trees over 80 cm DBH (29%), and requiring permits for all fire-prone trees to secure replacement (22%). Comments also raised safety concerns related to hazard trees, falling trees, and wildlife conflicts.
- **Cash-in-lieu replacement fees**
 - Most respondents supported increasing the current \$250 cash-in-lieu fee for development projects (69%).
 - Most respondents supported keeping the \$250 cash-in-lieu fee unchanged for Affordable Housing projects (68%), with smaller shares supporting a reduction (10%) or removal (12%). Final comments questioned whether cash-in-lieu reflects the value of mature trees and called for stronger monitoring of replacement survival.
- **Recurring themes in final comments**
 - The most common themes included stronger protection on development sites (43 comments), tree risk management (32), development-related tree loss (29), and opposition to permits and fees for homeowners (20).
 - Other themes included cash-in-lieu and replacement concerns (18) and a desire for a clearer, simpler bylaw process (11).
- **Overall direction of feedback**
 - Responses supported stronger protection and meaningful replacement where development removes mature canopy.
 - Responses also supported clearer, faster pathways for residential hazard and wildfire-risk removals, with added oversight for large or Significant Trees.

1.2 Recommendations

The recommendations from this report aim to strengthen and simplify the bylaw in response to the feedback from public engagement. Key changes include removing the parcel-size exemption to apply tree protection more consistently across the District and modifying the definition of Significant Trees to include all trees 60 cm or greater. A key recommendation is to maintain the tree density target as the main tree replacement mechanism and exempting tree removals for wildfire mitigation in high ignition areas unless the tree is a Significant Tree. Finally, this report recommends adding tree protection barrier standards as a schedule to the bylaw and increasing cash-in-lieu and security amounts to better reflect the true cost of planting and establishment, while keeping a lower cash-in-lieu fee for Affordable Housing Projects.

2.0 Scope of the Engagement

This project included two opportunities for engagement (**Table 1**). A preliminary online survey was sent to key interest-holders including developers, builders, arborists, and Qualified Environmental Professionals in July of 2025. A public online survey was open from December 3, 2025, to January 12, 2026, to gather feedback on the bylaw update. The survey asked about past experiences with the current bylaw, views on the strength of existing tree protections, which trees should be protected in the future, and the use of cash-in-lieu fees for replacements. The findings are summarized in this engagement report and will inform key directions for the updated Tree Management Bylaw.

Table 1. Summary of engagement opportunities.

| Date | Engagement Activity | Participants |
|-------------------------------------|---|-----------------|
| July 2025 | <i>Preliminary External Online Survey</i> | 16 respondents |
| December 3, 2025 – January 12, 2026 | <i>Public Online Survey</i> | 153 respondents |

2.1 Preliminary External Engagement Findings

The preliminary online survey responses showed mixed responses on the level of tree protection achieved by the current bylaw. However, the bylaw was seen as too complex by many respondents, especially where it overlaps with DPA/ESA rules and there was confusion with interpreting the Net Developable Hectare definition. Finally, the current fees and deposits were widely seen as too low to reflect real planting and establishment costs.

3.0 Who We Heard From

The survey collected feedback from 153 respondents across 12 neighbourhoods, of which:

- 23% in Garibaldi Highlands/University Heights,
- 21% in Brackendale,
- 15% in Garibaldi Estates and Downtown,
- 13% in SEAandSKY,
- 9% in Valleycliffe and Crumpit Woods,
- 6% in Dentville (**Figure 1**).

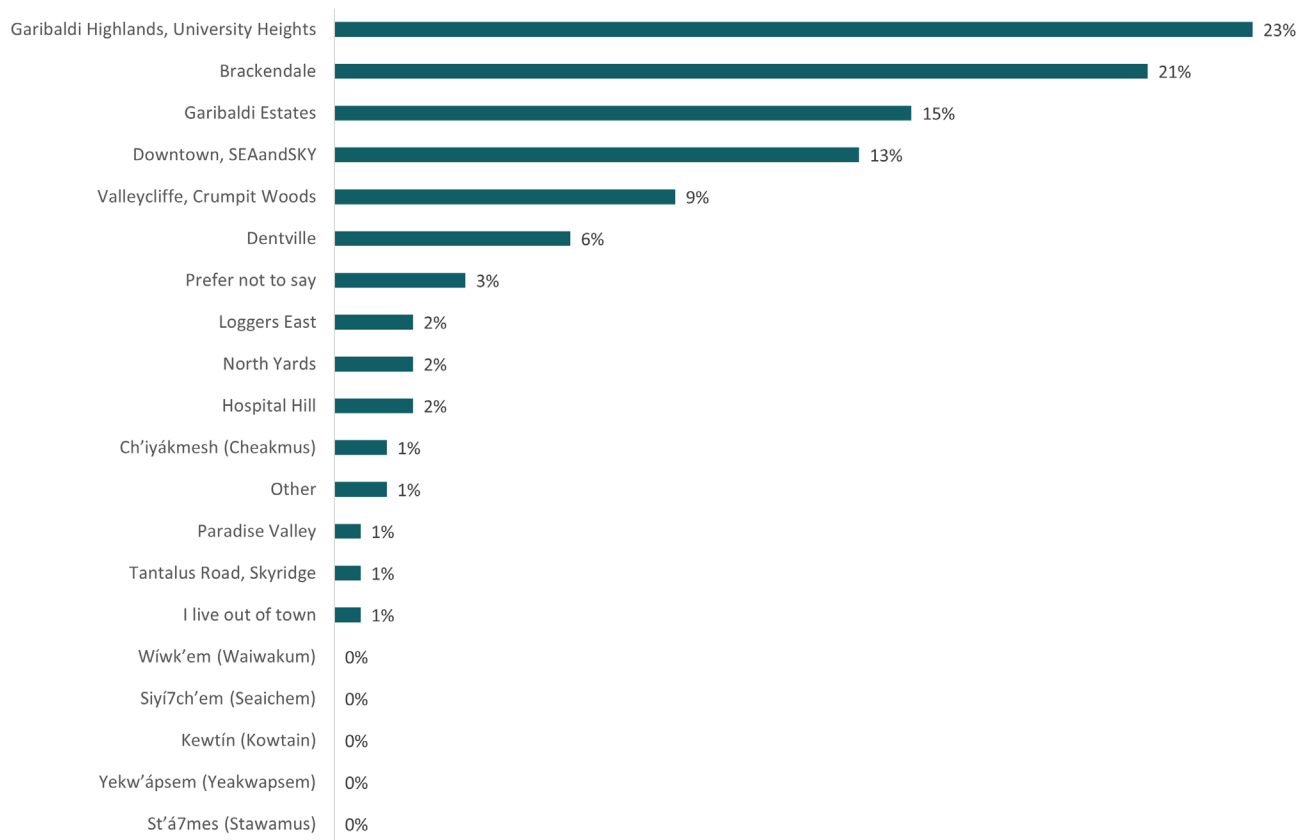


Figure 1. Respondents' neighbourhoods of residence (Answered: 151).

Most respondents were 35-44 years old (34%), followed by 45-54 years (23%) and 55-64 years (17%). Twelve percent (12%) of respondents were older than 65 years and 9% were under 35 years (**Figure 2**).

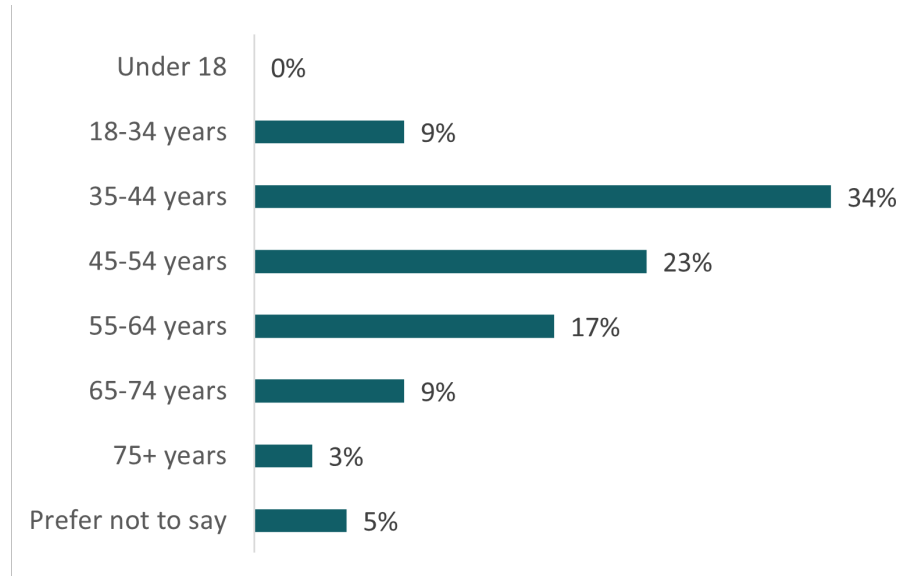


Figure 2. Age distribution of respondents (Answered: 149).

Most respondents learned about the tree bylaw engagement opportunity through social media (41%), followed by District eNews (30%) and the District website (13%) (**Figure 3**).

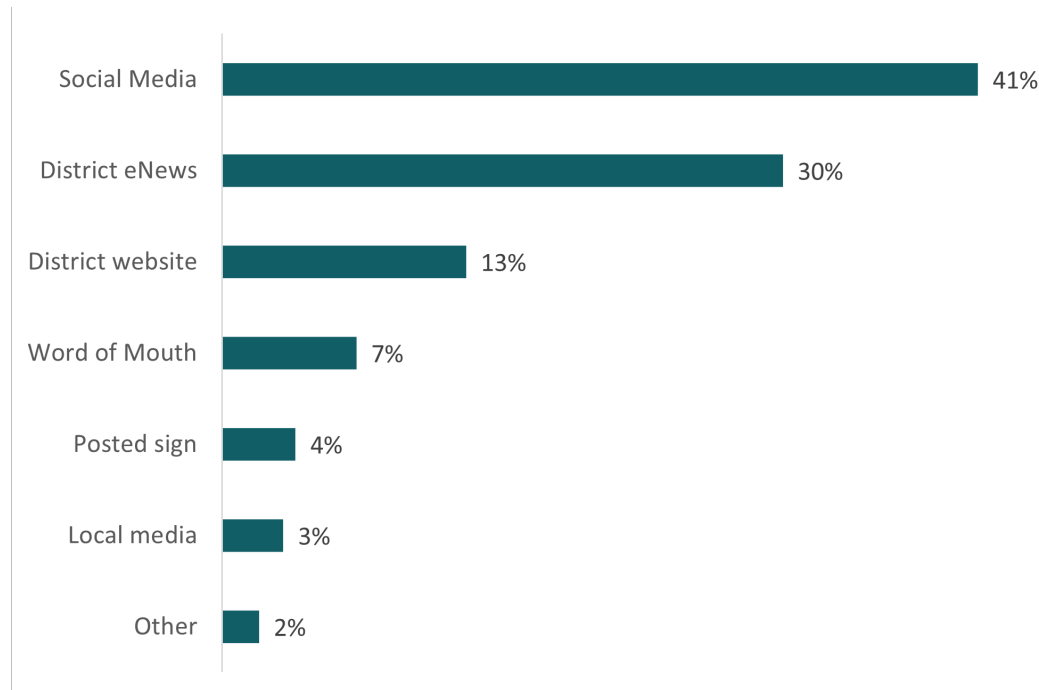


Figure 3. Ways in which respondents learned about the tree bylaw survey (Answered: 153).

4.0 What We Heard

The online survey collected feedback on:

- Experience with the current Tree Management Bylaw
- The adequacy of tree protections in the bylaw
- Significant tree definition
- Preferred tree planting locations within the District
- Tree permit exemptions for fire-prone trees
- Cash-in-lieu replacement fees for developers
- Cash-in-lieu replacement fees for Affordable Housing projects
- Additional thoughts and feedback.

4.1 Experience with the current Tree Management Bylaw

Online survey participants reported varying levels of familiarity with the existing Tree Management Bylaw. Nearly half (46%) of participants were somewhat familiar with the tree bylaw, 39% were not very familiar and only 15% were very familiar (Figure 4).

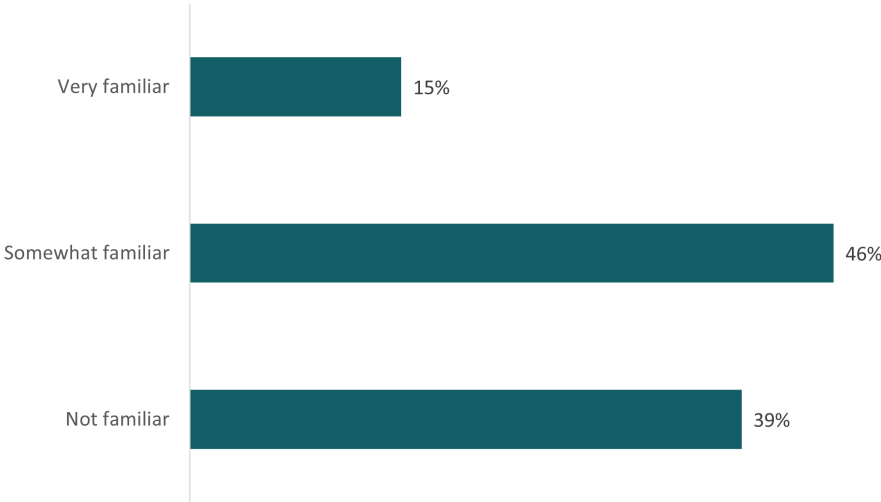


Figure 4. Respondents' level of familiarity with the District's existing Tree Management Bylaw (Answered: 153).

Most respondents (87%) had experience applying for the removal of one or more trees on their property (Figure 5).

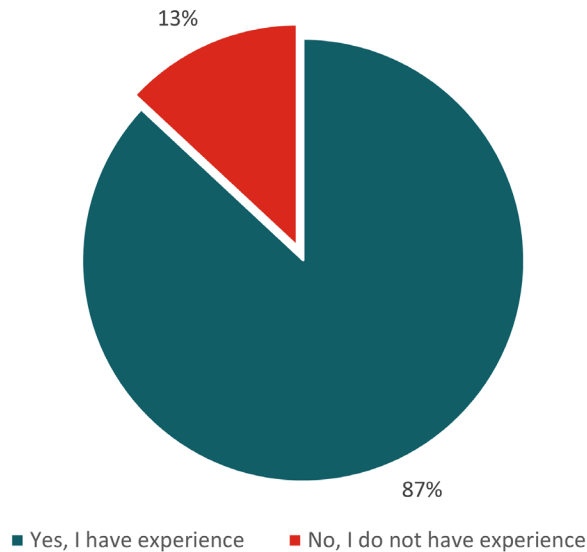


Figure 5. Respondents who have experience applying for tree removals on their property (Answered: 153).

Most respondents (75%) described themselves as homeowners who have removed trees on their property (Figure 6). Twelve (12%) of respondents were professionals whose personal experience with tree removal is a product of their work and 5% of respondents are renters. Seven percent (7%) of respondents described themselves as something ‘other’ and noted through comments that they lack experience with tree removals or that they were involved with tree removals via a profession not listed (i.e. farmer and equipment operator).

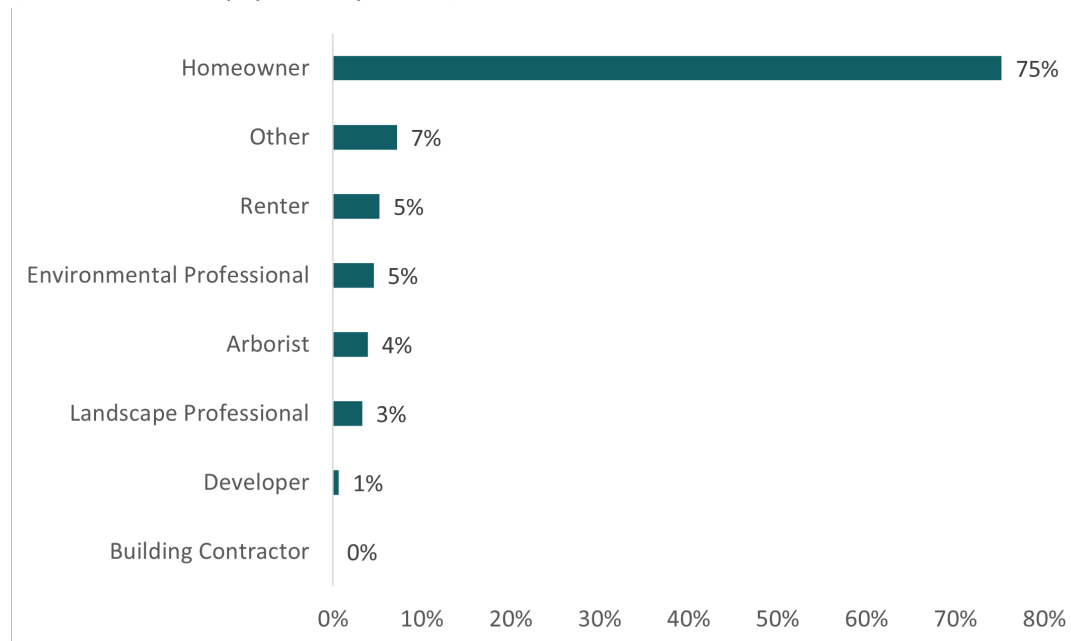


Figure 6. Self-described personal experience with tree removals (Answered: 153).

Twenty (20) respondents left comments regarding their experiences with tree removals. Eight commenters implied a negative experience with applying for tree removals, eight neutral experiences and four positive experiences. Commenters mentioned:

- Issues with trees on neighbouring municipal properties overgrowing onto private land.
- Frustrations with the difficulty and length of the permit application process; however, there were also positive reflections on timely and smooth removal processes.
- Issues finding assistance with understanding the bylaw and completing applications.
- Challenges with cost and selecting replacement options.

4.2 Satisfaction on the level of tree protection in the bylaw

Respondents had mixed levels of satisfaction on tree protection in the current bylaw, which requires a permit for the removal of trees over 20 cm diameter at breast height (DBH), with some exemptions notably on residential parcels smaller than 0.4 hectares among others (Section 4.1 of the Bylaw) (**Figure 7**). Thirty-seven percent (37%) felt that trees were not sufficiently protected, 26% felt that current protections were too restrictive, 24% felt that protections were adequate and 12% were unsure.

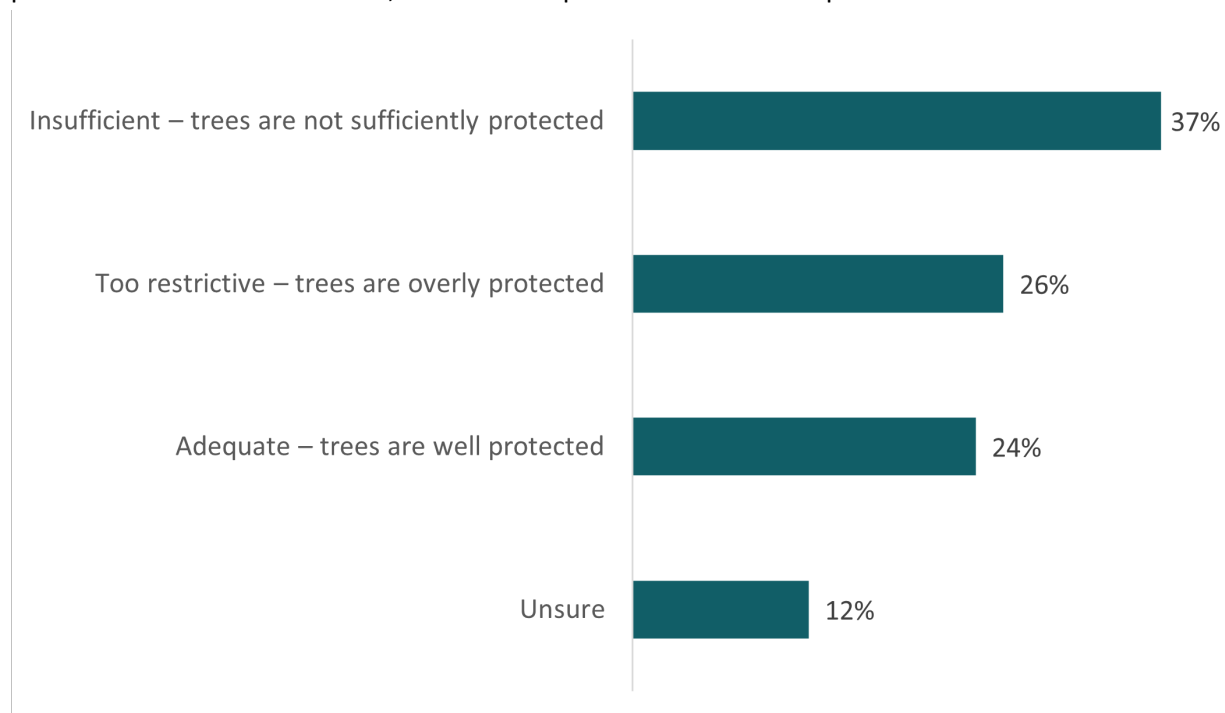


Figure 7. Agreement with level of tree protection in the current bylaw (Answered: 153).

4.3 Significant Trees

Respondents were asked to select which additional types of trees could be considered Significant Trees and receive stronger protection and or higher replacement requirements (Figure 8).

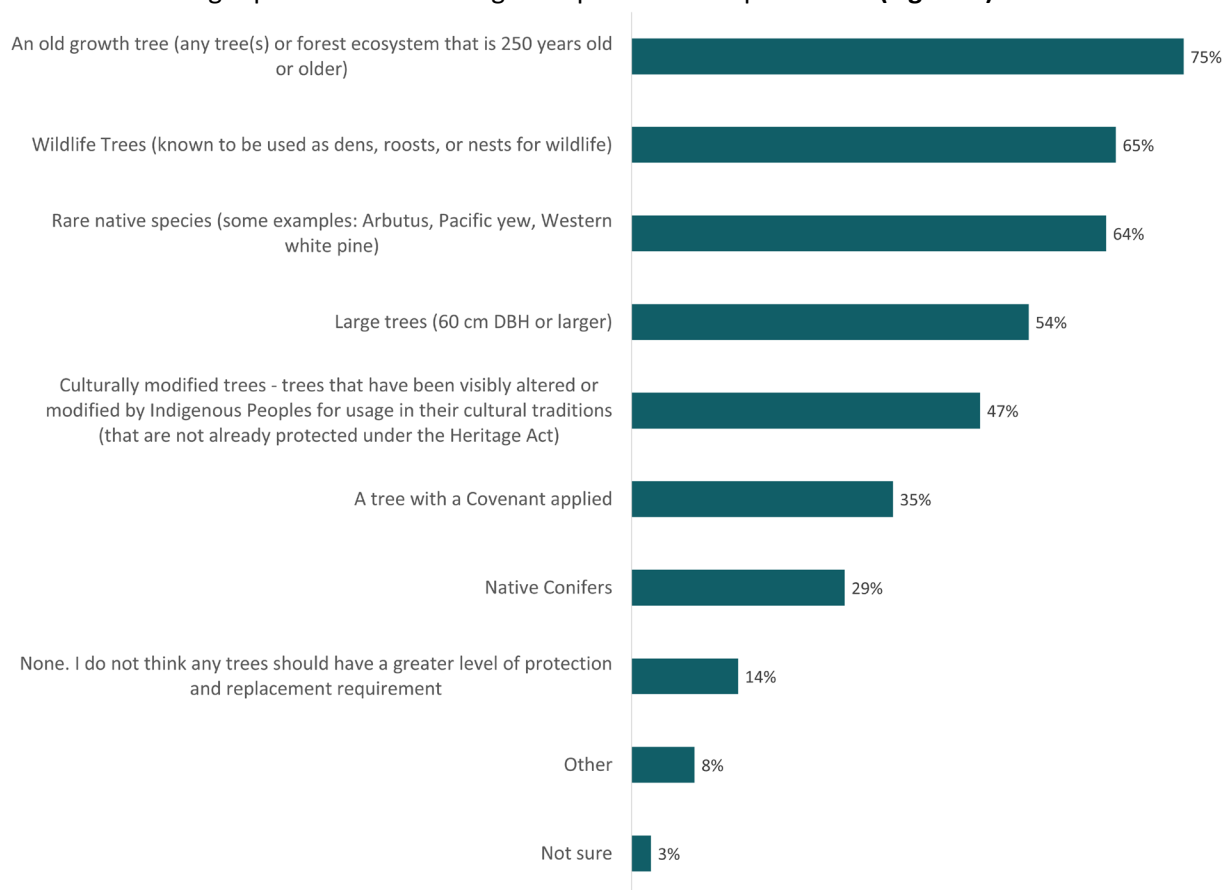


Figure 8. Respondent feedback on which trees should be considered Significant Trees (Answered 153).

4.4 Preferred tree planting locations within the District

All 153 survey participants provided comments on where in the District they felt more trees should be planted. The following were referenced most often:

- New Developments and Redevelopment Areas (60 mentions)
 - Includes all new builds, Sea and Sky, Dentville, Northyards, Garibaldi Estates, Brackendale developments, subdivisions, and high-density redevelopment areas.
- Downtown and Urban Core (45 mentions):
 - Includes downtown streets, Cleveland Ave, Government Rd, commercial core, Logan Lane, London Drugs area, and general downtown calls.
- Streets, Roads, and Transportation Corridors (40 mentions)
 - Includes major streets, Pioneer Way, Winnipeg Ave, Main St, Pemberton Ave, Highway 99, Tantalus Rd, bike paths, and active transportation corridors.
- Parks, Playgrounds, and Public Spaces (35 mentions)

- Includes Oceanfront Park, Waterfront, Feather Park, Cottonwood Park and Playground, Brennan Park, schoolyards, dog parks, and recreation areas.
- Industrial, Commercial, and Business Areas (30 mentions)
 - Industrial Park, Dentville Industrial, Valleycliffe industrial lands, Northyards Commercial Area, parking lots, plazas, and Government Rd industrial corridor.

Comments also called for stewardship programs that encourage residents to plant trees on private property, place greater emphasis on retaining existing trees, and strengthen ecological corridors. Some commenters also noted the need for the District to improve its capacity to maintain both existing and newly planted trees.

4.5 Tree permit exemptions for fire-prone trees

Respondents were asked if they would support a tree permit exemption for removal of fire-prone trees (as defined in the Wildfire Landscaping Management Bylaw No. 2834, 2021) within the High-Risk Ignition Zone of a dwelling on residential property (1.5 m from building as defined by BC FireSmart) (**Figure 9**).

- 71% of respondents supported exemptions for fire-prone trees, of which:
 - 48% supported exemptions for all trees within the 1.5 m ignition zone
 - 29% supported exemptions for all trees except Significant Trees (>80 cm DBH)
- 22% of respondents did not support exemptions, meaning fire-prone trees should require a permit to always ensure a replacement is secured.

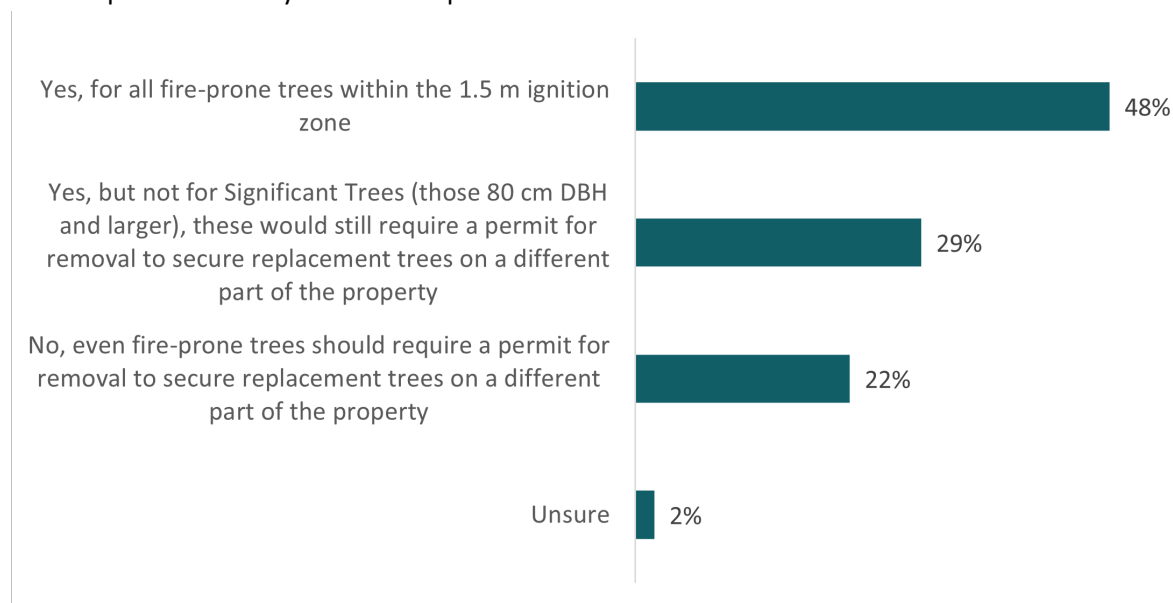


Figure 9. Respondents' support for tree permit exemptions for tree removal of fire-prone trees (as defined in the Wildfire Landscaping Management Bylaw No. 2834, 2021) within the High-Risk Ignition Zone of a dwelling on residential property (1.5 m from building as defined by BC FireSmart) (Answered: 153).

4.6 Cash-in-lieu replacement fees for developers

When asked about their level of support for the current \$250 cash-in-lieu replacement fee for development projects, most respondents (69%) supported an increase to this fee to reflect the current costs of planting and maintaining a tree as per the Bylaw (**Figure 10**). A smaller proportion of respondents (22%) felt the current fee was adequate and 9% were unsure.

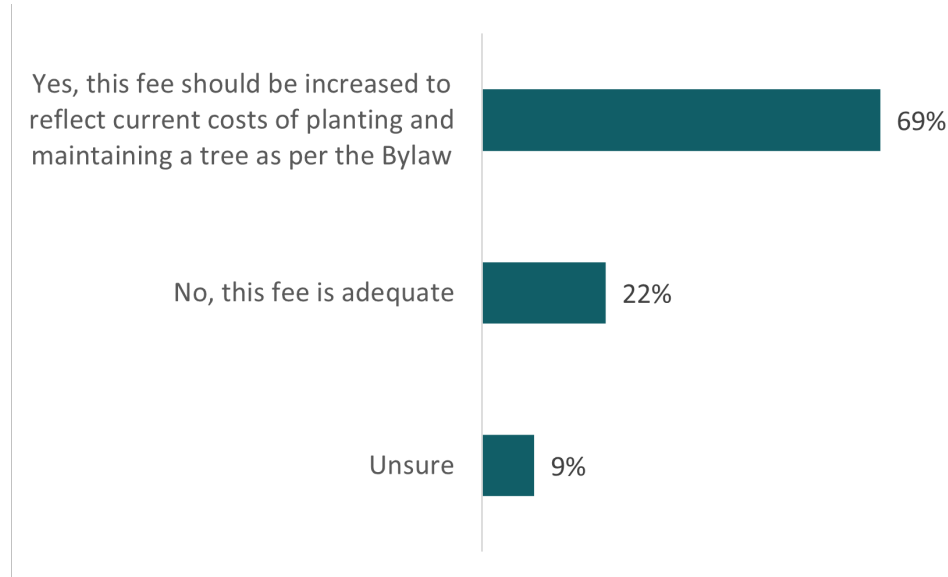


Figure 10. Respondents' support for cash-in-lieu replacement fees when development projects that cannot provide replacement trees on site (Answered: 153).

4.7 Cash-in-lieu replacement fees for Affordable Housing projects

Respondents were then asked if they felt Affordable Housing projects should also be required to pay the \$250 cash-in-lieu fee per tree. Most respondents (68%) felt that the \$250 cash-in-lieu replacement fee should remain unchanged for Affordable Housing projects (**Figure 11**). A smaller proportion felt the fee should be removed (12%), while 10% felt this fee should be reduced, and 10% were unsure.

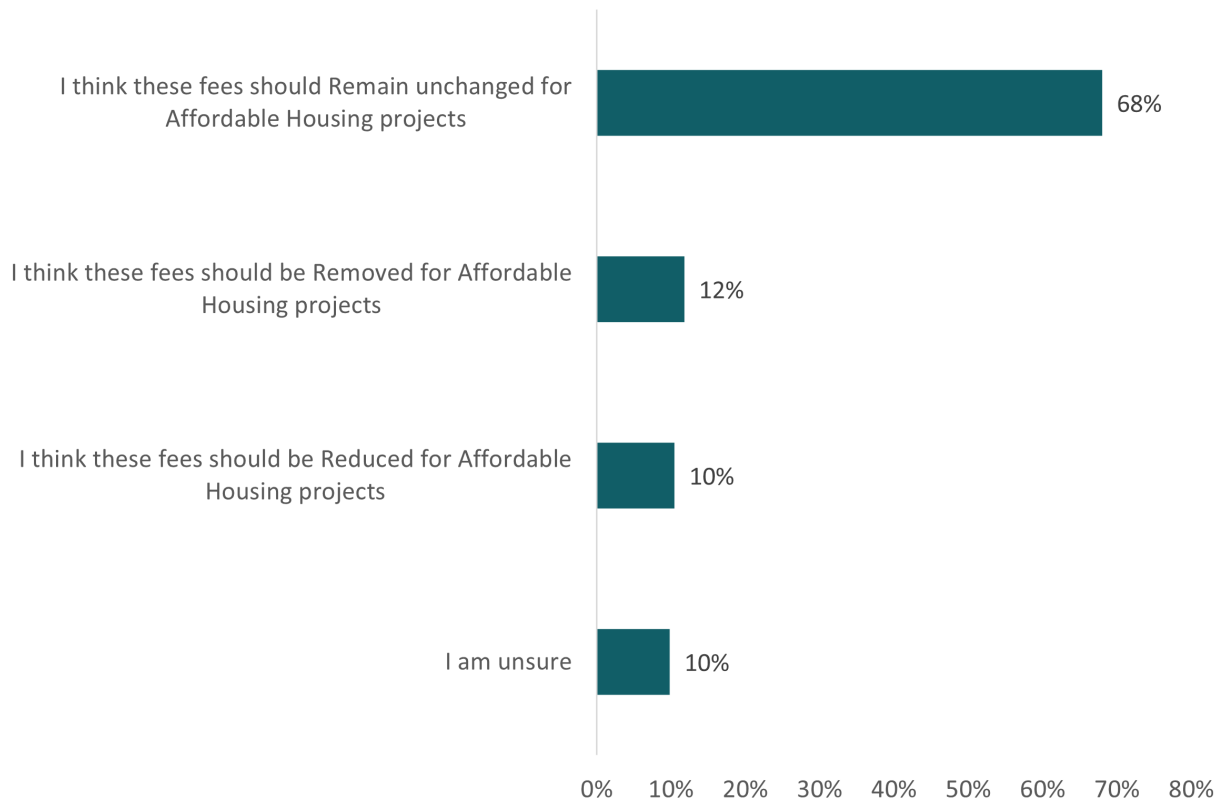


Figure 11. Respondents' support for cash-in-lieu replacement fees for Affordable Housing projects that cannot provide replacement trees on site (Answered: 153).

4.8 Additional thoughts and feedback

Survey participants provided 100 final comments regarding the protection and management of trees within the District of Squamish. The key themes that appeared in the comments are presented below, beginning with the most common themes:

- **Support for Stronger Tree Protection (43 responses):** These comments were focused on stricter tree regulation on development sites, particularly for large, mature, old growth, and wildlife habitat trees; higher fees or fines to deter removal; better enforcement and monitoring of replacement obligations; and clearer standards to ensure that tree retention and meaningful canopy replacement are prioritized in development decisions.
- **Tree Risk Management (32 responses):** Many comments focused on wildfire risk and public safety, with calls for less stringent or no permit requirements for homeowners seeking to remove trees that pose fire hazards or other safety risks. There was also support for additional measures to address hazard trees, including District-wide alignment with FireSmart principles. Beyond wildfire concerns, commenters raised issues related to trees falling on homes, people, or infrastructure, as well as species that attract bears.
- **Development and tree loss concerns (29 responses):** A subset of comments raised concerns about tree loss, frequently referencing clear-cutting tied to development, removal of mature trees in established neighbourhoods, and the cumulative decline of canopy cover and wildlife corridors. Many questioned whether current replacement practices meaningfully compensate for the long-term ecological and community impacts of these removals.
- **Opposition to permits and fees for homeowners (20 responses):** Some commenters expressed opposition to a Tree Management Bylaw that regulates trees on the private property of homeowners. They cited various grievances with the permit application process such as slow timelines, too many fees and opposition to government regulation on private land. Several comments argued that tree protection rules should apply primarily to developers rather than homeowners.
- **Cash-in-Lieu and Replacement Concerns (18 responses):** These responses questioned whether the \$250 cash-in-lieu fee meaningfully deters tree removal or reflects the value of mature trees. Many called for higher fees or mandatory on-site retention and stronger replacement standards, while others raised concerns about monitoring and survival of replacement trees. A smaller number opposed applying cash-in-lieu fees to homeowners.
- **Desire for Clearer, Simpler Bylaw Process (11 responses):** These responses called for a more streamlined and transparent process, citing confusion around thresholds, overlapping regulations (e.g., DPA and tree permits), and slow or costly permitting requirements. Several suggested phased permits, exemptions for straightforward residential situations, clearer public communication, and better alignment with FireSmart and other policies to reduce administrative burden while maintaining oversight.

5.0 Recommendations and Alignment with Proposed Changes

The District of Squamish is considering potential changes to the Tree Management Bylaw. The desired changes and how the engagement summary results reflect community support, opposition or mixed perspectives on each proposed change are presented below.

5.1 Amending the definition of protected Trees and Significant Trees.

Respondents showed support for expanding the definition of Significant Trees. The highest level of support was for old growth trees, wildlife trees, rare native species, large trees (≥ 60 cm DBH) and culturally modified trees. It is recommended to expand the protected tree definition to include evidence of nesting or use by raptors under the Wildlife Act, protect rare native species at a smaller size of 10 cm DBH, and amend the definition of Significant Trees.

Recommendation 1. Consider expanding the definition of bylaw-protected trees to include:

- a. All trees that contain evidence of **nesting or use by raptors** as defined in the Wildlife Act, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 488, an osprey, or a heron colony;
- b. All trees **≥ 10 cm** in diameter (measured at 1.4 m above the ground) of the desired **rare native species** (Arbutus, Pacific yew, Western white pine).

Recommendation 2. Consider amending the definition of Significant Trees to include:

- a. All trees **≥ 60 cm** in diameter on all properties;
- b. All trees **≥ 250 years old**.

5.2 Exemptions & tree density target

Under the current bylaw, trees are regulated differently depending on parcel size. On parcels larger than 0.4 hectares, a permit is required to remove trees 20 cm or greater, and the Tree Density Target maintains a minimum canopy floor of 50 trees per net developable hectare. This approach is important because it caps replacement requirements on heavily forested properties and allows routine forest management and wildfire mitigation to occur without automatically triggering extensive replacement obligations, as long as the minimum density threshold is maintained. Retaining the Tree Density Target is therefore preferred over replacing it with a simple replacement ratio, which would create a significant replacement or cash-in-lieu burden on forested parcels, discourage proactive vegetation management, and remove the guaranteed minimum canopy floor on larger sites.

Currently, properties 0.4 hectares or smaller are largely exempt, with permits only required for Significant Trees 80 cm or greater, trees on slopes of 20 percent or more, and trees within ESAs. To achieve more consistent tree protection outcomes, the District could explore removing the parcel-size exemption. This recommendation will likely increase the volume of permits the District will be administering. It is also recommended to simplify the tree density target by removing the net developable hectare definition to clarify administration and instead exclude Environmentally Sensitive Areas from the density calculation. Together, these changes would make the target clearer and fairer to apply while preserving its core function as a guaranteed minimum canopy floor.

Recommendation 3. Consider modifying the exemptions for a tree permit by:

- a. Removing the exemption for tree removal on land parcels ≤ 0.4 hectares in size
- b. Adding an exemption for tree removal that does not result in less than the tree density target, unless the removed tree is:
 - i. a Significant Tree;
 - ii. located on a slope where the grade is greater than 30 percent;
 - iii. located within 20 m of a Knotweed plant;
 - iv. a Replacement Tree or Retained Tree;
 - v. located in a Floodway;
 - vi. is located within an Environmentally Sensitive Area and is not regulated by a valid and subsisting EDPA; or
 - vii. associated with any proposed development or Development Approval process.

Recommendation 4. Consider modifying the tree density target definition by:

- a. Removing the net developable hectare definition from the bylaw
- b. Excluding Environmentally Sensitive Areas.

5.3 Tree removal for wildfire hazard

Just under half (48%) of respondents supported permit exemptions for fire-prone trees that pose risks to homes, and 29% still wanted some level of protection for large or Significant Trees. It is recommended to exempt tree removals related to wildfire hazard from requiring a permit provided a FireSmart Assessment be completed, unless the tree is a Significant Tree. Wildfire mitigation guidance (including FireSmart principles) generally focuses on understory, ladder fuels, smaller conifers near structures, and spacing and thinning rather than removing dominant mature trees. As a result, the protection of Significant Trees, as proposed, would still be consistent with the FireSmart landscaping requirements as defined by the Wildfire Landscaping Management Bylaw No. 2834, 2021.

Recommendation 5. Consider an exemption for tree removals related to wildfire hazard in the high ignition zone, contingent on a FireSmart Assessment, unless the tree is a Significant Tree.

5.4 Tree protection during construction

The survey results generally support tree protection measures for existing trees during construction. It is therefore recommended to add physical protection requirements in the form of a tree barrier guideline schedule to the bylaw.

Recommendation 6. Consider adding a schedule on tree protection barriers to the bylaw.

5.5 Cash-in-lieu

Most respondents were in favour of a higher cash-in-lieu fee for development projects (69%) but not increasing the fee for Affordable Housing projects (68%). Support for increasing cash-in-lieu fees for development projects suggests recognition that current fees do not reflect the true cost of replacing lost canopy and a desire for more stringent regulations for developers. Cash-in-lieu and replacement securities should be equivalent amounts to simplify enforcement by enabling the municipality to retain securities without having to fine applicants to recover the balance amount for cash-in-lieu.

Recommendation 7. Consider increasing the cash-in-lieu fee and tree replacement security to cover the full cost of tree planting, site preparation, and establishment maintenance.

Recommendation 8. Consider maintaining the same cash-in-lieu fee (\$250) for Affordable Housing Projects.

Next Steps

The results from the Tree Management Bylaw engagement summary will be used to inform the Tree Management Bylaw amendments, set to be completed in 2026.