

ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW COMMITTEE GUIDELINES FOR TREE TRIMMING AND REMOVAL

“I am the Lorax and I speak for the trees . . .” Doctor Seuss, *The Lorax*, page 23.

Being the “Lorax”, i.e., preservation of the Laurel Ridge forest, is one of the duties of the Architectural Review Committee and of each homeowner. Most Laurel Ridge residents have stepped up to the plate and taken the duties to heart. And our diligence has borne fruit so far because our 85 homes (and growing) blend into our environment for the most part.

Unfortunately, there have been some notable exceptions. We are concerned that there has been a growing indifference by some to the duty to ensure that as few trees as possible are taken down. The Laurel Ridge Property Owner’s Association has agreed and recently enacted changes to the ARC Guidelines to tighten up on that policy.

Of course, preexisting ARC Guidelines ensured that homeowners with homes under construction remove trees only as necessary for the home site, a safety buffer around the home, and the driveway, by requiring ARC approval prior to tree removal. The Guidelines now also require that a subcommittee of the ARC approve the removal of any healthy tree of six inches or greater in diameter as measured at four feet above ground level on the upslope side of the tree. Failure to seek approval prior to tree removal can result in Board-imposed fines. Smaller trees, dead and fallen trees, and invasive locust trees are exempt from this approval process. If there is any doubt whether a tree falls within these exceptions, the homeowner must consult with the ARC prior to removal.

Generally the ARC will evaluate a tree removal request by the following criteria:

- Removal of a specific tree may be justified to protect the house, and to selectively improve views, with a strong preference that most trees, especially those greater than six inches in diameter or greater, measured four feet off the uphill level of the ground, should be left in place.
- In general, tree removal within twenty feet of the structure, or a tree that is dangerously leaning that risks falling on the structure, are strong candidates for removal.
- Clear cutting or excessive pruning of trees (such as tree topping) to obtain a completely unobstructed wide view, or a large open yard will not be permitted. Any selective tree pruning or tree removal shall be done to preserve the beauty of the area and by a professional arborist to maintain the health of the tree.
- Selective tree removal in order to enable wireless broadband is permitted with the advice of trained broadband provider and only as minimally necessary to obtain a clear signal. Selective tree pruning is strongly encouraged, if possible, rather than complete tree removal.
- Selective tree removal to achieve fire risk mitigation. Fire damage to the house can be minimized by clearing small trees within 20 feet of the house, ensuring that all larger trees within 20 feet have had their lower branches removed up to 10 feet above ground to reduce the likelihood of fire laddering.

- A preference is made for judicious pruning of trees, rather than removal or topping.
- Thinning of small trees that are encroaching on larger ones can enhance the look and health of the tree and the surrounding forest.
- If a tree is removed, it must be removed from the property when cut.
- Removal of a tree to prevent roots from encroaching on a septic field should only be on the advice of an arborist, and approval by the ARC.
- Removal of a tree on another owner's property is never permitted without the express permission of the other homeowner.
- Other circumstances may be brought to the attention of the ARC in evaluating a tree removal request.

Thank you for all of your cooperation with this Laurel Ridge HOA policy. The approval process should work pretty smoothly and the approval process costs the homeowner nothing. The names of the subcommittee members will be listed on the Laurel Ridge web site. If you want to remove a tree or have any questions about these new Guidelines, please contact Greg Vogt, Chair of the ARC, at 703.887.0767 or arc@laurelridgepoa.com.

“Protect [the trees] from axes that hack. Then the Lorax and all of his friends may come back.”
Id., at page 61.