



Trees Are Included In Revamped Zoning Code

by Marilyn Loser

2017 November 22

I am so glad that the City of Alamosa is revamping the Zoning Code. From a Tree Board Member perspective, I think it is an overall improvement. If you wish to read and/or comment on the code, please visit the City of Alamosa website and click on the red button at the top of the page. There will be a public hearing regarding the code at the regular City Council meeting on December 6.

Several tree issues grabbed my attention: “Parking Lot Landscaping,” “Prohibited Tree Pruning Techniques,” “Landscape Design Principles for non-residential and multifamily development that involve more than 1,000 sq. ft. of landscaped area,” and “Maintenance Standards.”

Parking Lots: The Alamosa Tree Board (TB) has been interested in these issues for many years. More than 4 years ago, the Tree Board made a presentation to Alamosa City Council (2013 Jan 16) regarding trees in smaller parking lots and maintenance of trees on commercial properties. We made a few specific suggestions after pointing out local examples and researching what other cities in Colorado require. We suggested landscaping be required for any parking lots with 5 or more spaces, permanent watering systems, water efficient landscaping, and replacement of trees and shrubs if they die or are removed.

The draft zoning code requires landscaping for lots of 16 or more spaces. I feel this leaves too much uninterrupted hard scape. The TB in 2013 suggested landscaping on any lot of 5 or more spaces. I’d settle for a compromise of 10 spaces!

Pruning: Several to-be-avoided procedures that I’ve discussed in this column are prohibited “on trees that are preserved or planted pursuant to an approved landscape plan.” They include “(1) Topping (cutting large vertical branches of the tree to reduce its height), (2) Tipping (cutting branches between nodes), (3) Bark ripping (cutting branches so that the bark rips when the branch falls), (4) Flush cuts (cutting the branch too close to the collar, the area where the branch connects to the tree), and (5) Stub cuts (cutting branches too far away from the collar, the area where the branch connects to the tree).”

The TB first discussed the zoning code draft at its November meeting. Following the meeting, TB member and Colorado State Forester Adam Moore sent copies of our initial notes to Colorado Community Forestry Program Manager Keith Wood and Colorado Community Forester (& presenter of several tree workshops in the San Luis Valley) Vince Urbina.

Vince responded that he thinks it’s best to avoid specific definitions and procedures as they change over time. I suggest preceding the specific prohibitions with a statement saying the pruning “will follow the industry accepted standards for proper tree pruning as contained in the latest version of the ANSI A300

Pruning Standard and the latest version of the International Society of Arboriculture Tree Pruning Best Management Practice. Currently, these include:”

Landscape Design Principles: I am very pleased that the code addresses tree species diversity. The code calls for, “a. Not more than 40 percent shall be of any one genus; and b. Not more than 20 percent shall be of any one species.” I prefer Keith’s assessment that the diversity should be not more than 30% in one family, not more than 20% in one genus, and not more than 10% of one species. While it’s true that species selection is more limited in the SLV, I think we can achieve this level of diversity.

As recommendations may change over time, Vince suggests consulting of the ‘Setting Diversity Goals’ section of the Colorado Tree Coalition’s Colorado Ash Tree Replacement Selection Tool <http://coloradotrees.org/find/>. And don’t forget the local ‘Board Recs’ under the ‘Tree Lists’ tab at Alamosa Trees website www.alamosatrees.net .

Maintenance Standards: I was delighted to see this section. Too often, I’ve seen initial landscaping deteriorate as it is NOT maintained. The code states, “All landscaping elements and irrigation equipment shall be maintained in good condition. Ongoing maintenance, including the replacement of dead or unhealthy plantings, is required for areas that are landscaped pursuant to an approved landscape plan.”

The zoning code draft is not light reading! It’s more than 200 pages includes a lot of legalese. Oh, my!

“We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.” Aldo Leopold