



CITY OF DORAL COUNCIL MEETING MEMORANDUM

ITEM TITLE:

Discussion: Update on Feasibility Study for Tree Permit Program and Arborist

DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION:

Approval

BRIEF HISTORY:

In January 2025, as a request of the City Councilmembers, the Public Works Department (PWD) was directed to re-examine the feasibility of establishing an in-house Tree Permit Program. To support this effort, the PWD issued a work order to New Leaf Environmental, LLC (NLE), the firm that completed the original assessment in 2019.

The updated 2025 analysis included a cost-benefit review for the possibility of hiring a full-time arborist to manage tree permitting activities. Findings concluded that the current workload does not guarantee the creation of a dedicated full-time position. While an in-house program could provide advantages such as greater control over permitting decisions, expedited processing, enhanced community fee management, and direct oversight of mitigation efforts, these services can be effectively delivered through the City's existing "General Engineering and Architectural Services" contract (RFQ #2023-08). All pre-qualified firms under this contract offer arborist services on an as-needed basis through existing agreements.

The analysis included a review of historical tree permit activity within the City from 2023 to 2025, an evaluation of permitting practices in comparable municipalities (Miami Gardens, City of Miami, Coral Gables, and Miami Beach), cost projections based on anticipated staffing or consultant support needs, and revenue estimates derived from permit fees and Tree Trust Fund mitigation payments.

The assessment found that Miami-Dade County (County) currently processes an average of approximately 60 tree permits per year within the City. If the program were administered locally, that number is projected to increase to about 90 permits annually due to more thorough review of construction-related tree impacts. In addition, roughly 670 construction projects each year would require tree impact review, representing an estimated 725 staff or consultant hours annually for review and processing activities.

The estimated annual cost to administer the program through internal staffing is approximately \$42,444.00 for a part-time Planner/Reviewer. Alternatively, utilizing consultant support is

projected to cost approximately \$65,250.00 annually, based on an hourly rate of \$90.00. The current projected workload does not support the need for a full-time staff position; however, both part-time staffing and consultant services present viable options for program implementation.

Revenue projections from annual permit fees based on comparable municipal rates is estimated to be \$39,600.00. In addition, with the creation of a Tree Trust Fund, mitigation fees are conservatively projected at \$80,000.00 per year. This results in a total estimated annual revenue of approximately \$119,600.00. After accounting for projected consultant costs, the program is expected to generate a net surplus of approximately \$54,350.00 annually.

The non-monetary benefit of the City taking over the responsibilities from the County would assume program enforcement, addressing public inquiries and feedback. Implementation would require staff training, development of new forms, and establishment of internal procedures. Seasonal fluctuations in permit applications could impact processing times and resource allocation.

Additional benefits include greater local control over permitting decisions, timelines, and the prioritization of City projects. The City will have the flexibility to establish permit and mitigation fee structures, including options to offer discounts for residents or adjust rates for commercial projects. Enhanced alignment of tree management policies with the City's broader urban design, development, and sustainability goals.

The analysis indicates that a City-managed tree permitting program would be financially self-sustaining and revenue positive. The program is best supported through part-time staffing or consultant services, rather than full-time expansion, given the current and projected workload. Implementing a City-administered program would provide greater control over permitting decisions, improved alignment with City priorities, and enhanced opportunities for community engagement.

Recommended next steps include developing administrative procedures, training staff, and establishing City-specific fee structures to support effective and efficient program implementation.

Attached please find "Exhibit A" which includes the Tree Permitting Program Study Report dated August 18, 2025.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION: (IF APPLICABLE)

Date:	Resolution/Ordinance No.	Comments

FINANCIAL INFORMATION: (IF APPLICABLE)

No.	Amount	Account No.	Source of Funds
I.	\$0		

2.	\$0		
Total:	\$0		
Fiscal Impact Statement: The proposed item will have a fiscal impact on revenues and expenditures that cannot be determined at the moment.			

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This recommendation aligns with the City of Doral's Exceptional Service of the Strategic Plan by promoting efficiency, consistency, and fairness in the management of locals' forestry infrastructure. This will support the City's goals of improving government effectiveness and enhancing residents' quality of life. Additionally, simplifying the permit structure for residents by providing awareness which complement the City's community needs.

ATTACHMENT(S):

- A. Tree Permitting Program Feasibility Study