FAQ:
Do I need a permit to landscape or remove a tree from my property?

Background:
The zoning code includes regulations for landscaping, tree removal and earth moving in certain scenarios. The code includes the following definitions:

- **Earth Moving Activity** - Any construction or other activity that disturbs the surface of land including but not limited to excavations, embankments, land development, subdivision development, and the moving, depositing, or storing of soil, rock, or earth.

- **Site Clearing** - The cutting or removal of trees, grubbing of roots, or removal or filling of building foundations to create a site that is free of physical obstructions to development. This shall not include tree removal that is conducted to address a life safety issue identified by L&I.

- **Development** - As used in Flood Protection and Steep Slope Protection: Any construction, reconstruction, modification, extension, expansion, or substantial improvement of structures; filling; dredging; mining; grading; paving; excavation; drilling operations; or storage of equipment or materials; land excavation; land clearing; land improvement; or any construction thereof.

Answer:
In most scenarios, a permit is not required for landscaping or tree removal. The following are exceptions where a permit is required:

- **Steep Slope Protection** - Any proposed development, site clearing or earth moving activity within the Steep Slope Protection Area requires a zoning permit, which is issued by L&I. When an application for a permit includes land that is located within the Steep Slope Protection Area, prerequisite approval from the Commission is required. The City may require that the applicant submit a topographic survey, prepared by a licensed engineer or surveyor confirming the locations of slopes of 15% or greater, as well as a plan showing the limit of earth moving or site clearing activities. Use Atlas to determine if your property is located within the Steep Slope Protection Area.

- **Wissahickon Watershed** – Any proposed earth moving activity within the Wissahickon Watershed Overlay District requires a zoning permit, which is issued by L&I. No earth moving activity will be permitted within the watershed unless done in accordance with approved earth moving plans. These plans must be prepared by a licensed professional engineer in accordance with regulations approved by the Commission and must set forth the measures by which erosion and sedimentation are controlled. Use Atlas to determine if your property is located within the Wissahickon Watershed.

- **Heritage Trees** – A heritage tree is defined as Any tree that has a diameter breast height of 24 in. or more and is of a species listed on the [Department of Parks and Recreation Heritage Tree Species List](#). The removal of a heritage tree requires a zoning permit, which is issued by L&I. Heritage trees may be not be removed from any property unless the applicant meets the standards of **14-705(1)(e)(.1)** or obtains a special exception approval in accordance with **14-705(1)(e)(.2)**.
• **Flood Protection** - Any proposed development within the Flood Protection Area requires a zoning permit, which is issued by L&I. Within the Flood Protection Area, development includes any modification to the land such as landscaping, adding or removing paved areas such as driveways or parking pads, fencing, retaining walls, etc. Use [Atlas](#) to determine if your property is located within the Flood Protection Area.

**Questions?**
Call 311 or (215) 686-8686 (if outside Philadelphia) or submit a permit-related question online via [https://form.jotform.com/81494420572154](https://form.jotform.com/81494420572154).

**Disclaimer:**
This interpretation, policy or code application is intended to provide guidance to staff for consistency of review and is subject to change without notice. Application of this interpretation, policy or code application to specific projects may vary. There may be other ways to comply with the Code. If so, you are not required to use this method. You may want to investigate other options, or consult with a professional identifying an equally code compliant solution.