

Urban Forestry Commission (UFC)

June 1, 2011

Meeting Notes

Seattle Municipal Tower Room 2750
700 5th Avenue, Seattle
3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

The Urban Forestry Commission was established to advise the Mayor and City Council concerning the establishment of policy and regulations governing the protection, management, and conservation of trees and vegetation in the City of Seattle

Attending

Commissioners

Matt Mega (MM) – chair
John Small (JS)– vice chair
Gordon Bradley (GB)
John Floberg (JF)
John Hushagen (JH)
Jeff Reibman (JR)
Peg Staeheli (PS)

Staff

Sandra Pinto de Bader (SPdB) - OSE
Mark Mead (MMead) - Parks
Shane DeWald (ShD)- SDOT
Bill Ames (BA) - SDOT

Absent- Excused

Nancy Bird (NB)

Public

Richard Ellison (RE)
Steve Zemke (SZ)

Call to Order

MM called the meeting to order

Public Comment

Richard Ellison: Talked about the Yesler Terrace project where a large number of trees are being removed to densify the site. The new design doesn't have enough space for planting trees and not enough public spaces. This is an opportunity for the UFC to comment. How can the UFC lend a hand to allow for more trees to be planted? This is an old-style type of project that allows for removal of large trees.

JR – the current code makes no provision for allowing extra height.

JF – UFC advises on policy and regulations. This could be an opportunity for that

MM – that's what the UFC struggles with. Should be providing overarching advise and are stuck on a reactionary mode.

JH – We will be constantly facing this type of issues. It will take for the City to take tree preservation seriously with the creation of a Department of Urban Forestry with centralized authority over the City's trees.

ShD – Just last week the Seattle Housing Authority did a presentation to the Design Commission. They are the advisory body on street vacation conditions. These conditions provide an opportunity. The two commissions might want to share information and cooperate. Bill Ames has been working with DPD on a tree inventory.

BA – all the trees at the site are inventoried now. There is a matrix of trees that are candidates for preservation. The project is at the conceptual stage. It's very early in the process. Many of the trees are under power lines and have had poor maintenance. 15% of the trees might be worth preserving. This is a project that will go on for 20 years.

GB – where is the deficiency in the regulatory scheme?

RE – relative to decisions of what trees can be retained and based on what design

BA – trees have been historically topped and due to site conditions and work done to the trees in the past many of them don't lend themselves to preservation.

JR – who in the process gets involved and why aren't they doing something for the trees? Sounds like the Design Commission and DPD? Bigger picture would be long term education so we don't have to do it project by project.

GB – don't anticipate the UFC having to do this project-by-project. Who has the authority to do something?

ShD – the Design Commission is reviewing and advising Council on it.

JR – the steps to affect the process on a project by project basis is to get awareness on the Design Commission of trees as part of the design process and awareness on the planner side.

GB – if there is a deficiency with the policy that is in place that is allowing this to happen

BA – the inventory was carried out by an independent consultant

ShD – would recommend the UFC to check out the SHA presentation to the Design Commission. There was a strong emphasis on tree canopy on the presentation.

Parks brief on Bell Street Project

Commissioner Staeheli excused herself from this discussion.

MMead – This is a small project going on in Bell Street downtown, close to Pike Place Market. Three blocks of right-of-way were given over to Parks to develop a green space. It will be a single lane with pedestrian access on both sides expanded and large trees planted. 45-46 trees will be removed. Tree retention was looked at pretty strongly. Creating a pedestrian causeway similar to Vine street with large trees being planted. They were asking what type of trees they would bring in. They are going to plant 105 trees including River Birch, Tulip Tree, London Plane, and Quaking Aspen. They will use structural soils and silva cells to support large trees.

They create a space for the trees to have soil under the paving and have space to grow bigger. The project is being funded by the Parks and Green Space Levy. Using \$2.5 million which includes paved surfaces and utilities work. There are large, major underground utilities running through the site.

This is not a normal project in terms of what they are trying to do. This is a great experiment in placing large trees in a urban environment. It will be striking in five years. The majority of the trees being removed are in okay shape but they are in conflict with existing infrastructure and are close to existing buildings. It is very problematic to retain all those trees. My colleagues from SDOT are here to help answer questions.

JR – sounds like a great project. What are the cross streets?

MMead – First to Fifth

JF – are you requesting an action from the UFC?

MMead – No, just making the commission aware. This is a good experiment. Because of SDOT current practices if Parks intends to remove trees they would need to be posted now.

JF – do you anticipate that there will be any controversy?

ShD – SDOT has a new policy of early posting of trees to be removed (during 60% design). Bell St. was one of the first projects where this policy is applied. The project manager has received comments from people that are concerned about the loss of threes. I would like to share these comments with the UFC. It's important for the UFC to hear about project impacts early on.

JH – How do you feel about the tree removals?

ShD – it was her understanding that some trees would be retained. She has been involved with the project for several years interacting with Parks. This is a different proposal and SDOT anticipated that there would be a removal and replacement strategy but it's a change of use to they are leaving this to Parks.

JH – Do you have an opinion on the species selection?

BA – London Plan are great trees but are overused. Birch are believed to cause allergies so SDOT limits the use of Birch.

ShD – Mark was not as involved in the design and choice of trees.

JR – what about conifers?

BA – evergreens were not used due to security concerns.

MMead – the species list is subject to change. He raised the same issues already mentioned. The species list is variable from an availability standpoint to site selection until you actually do the planting. The design is at 60%... London Plane is a proven item. The group doing the design is amenable to changes. Shape, form and color drive decisions for landscape architects. Looking for things that are going to survive.

There are negative comments about tree removals. The group worked hard to preserve trees but there were conflicts with the underground utilities. Upon receipt of the site they had a lawsuit by someone who tripped on a tree and fractured their jaw. The design team is pushing hard on silva cells. He is happy that the City is making an effort to preserve trees.

JF – The levy does a lot for new parks but not for maintenance

MMead – this is similar to Freeway Park. Have a maintenance and management plan inside of the project. Will there be maintenance dollars? They are working with City Council to create funds to cover facility costs.

JS – will there be future utilities replacement?

MMead – there is a main running down the middle of the street.

SPdB – the reason why Parks came to brief the UFC on this project is because the Urban Forest IDT talked about it and wanted to make sure you were aware of it in case the public reacts to the removals.

JF – has this been done before?

ShD – SDOT is working with WSDOT putting together a structural soil recipe. The trees are getting placards before 60% approval. After 60% it's fine tuning. It's important for the UFC to be aware.

MM – When do we get arborists to start providing input on functional issues of trees besides form, shape and color? Maybe the UFMP update is a good opportunity to talk about canopy instead of number of trees. Canopy impacts and gains. Getting to maintenance costs – get to those arguments.

MMead – All those are great comments. It's important to first ask what one wants to accomplish at the site and then get into the design mode.

GB – what precipitated this project? Are there plans to create more green spaces like this?

MMead – this project has been in the works for years (since 1988). There is not an intention to create more of this. This project is linked to a larger plan for a pedestrian corridor and is a link for a walking corridor. The idea has been around for some time. The true cost of it is probably why it took so long to implement and then jurisdictional issues, how the land would be transferred over, took time.

JR – this a great spot for it connecting downtown to the pier.

JH – what are the 46 street trees species and sizes?

MMead – Hatch maple 10” and 12” a few larger, and pear, 6”-8” in size.

ShD – Existing condition is not the reason to take those trees out

JH – what about re-planting?

ShD – the smaller ones are being considered for replanting

MMead – cost sometimes doesn’t work

Approve May 4 and May 11 meeting notes

ACTION: A motion was made to approve the May 4 meeting notes as written. The motion was seconded and carried. MM and JS abstained.

ACTION: A motion was made to move approval of the May 11 as amended. The motion was seconded and carried. JH abstained

2011 Work Plan review – set goals for ordinance

MM – doesn’t want to lose track of the tree ordinance

PS – it would be best to re-visit after the meeting with the IDT.

SPdB – we talked about setting the meeting up for after the Mayor presented the budget, and he is doing that September 26. So we are having the meeting in early October.

PS - Maybe work on it again in November and make that a focus. Can go back to the stuff we already have. Maybe look at the early stuff in July and be ready to send it out in November.

JS – Take a more generic approach. Set out the goal the UFC sees for ordinance and don’t get into the weeds, i.e. one set of rules and regulations for all trees in the City, canopy based, etc.

PS – I was thinking of things when we were more into the goals. Maybe take the letter they wrote to revisit it in July?

JR – would be a good starting point. There is something to be said about city-wide interdepartmental work.

JF – Are you proposing to look at early generic goals.

PS – re-look at our letter

JF – we'll also need to prep for the meeting with the IDT.

MM – in July we are going to be reviewing the UFMP and related documents. From there we can figure out what we want to accomplish with the IDT.

SPdB – re-visit the letter as a separate conversation before we dive into the UFMP.

MM – July 6. We might end up cancelling that meeting due to people being out of town.

PS- I agree

MM – Sandra and I will look at the agenda. We can do both on the same day.

PS – some things are weedy

MM – I would also like to see at the whole outreach component of the ordinance. Maybe make suggestions to Council to hold town hall meetings.

GB – the ordinance is related to residential

PS – private, not just residential

GB – sometimes covers commercial? Also development?

MM – Development is covered by the Green Factor

PS – There wasn't anything covering 'I want to take a tree down in my yard'

GB – there is a lot of information in the UFMP when you get into land uses. There seems to be a lot of programs affecting planting and there are different jurisdictions, DPD, SDOT, Parks, doing different things in different land uses. It would be useful to get a picture to figure out where the gaps are.

JR – one half of 1% of the land is developed in a given year

PS – let's watch our word 'this ordinance'. We have no definition or boundary of the ordinance at this time. It stopped. They are going to start over.

SPdB – Brennon was not able to be here but he asked me to remind you that "Councilmember Conlin and the Mayor agreed to postpone any work on DPD's part until 2012. At that time, we will sit down with them to get resolution on the larger question of whether we should require tree removal permits outside of development and if so, when should property owners be allowed to remove trees."

PS – so they tabled it?

Sandra repeated Brennon's email.

PS – I think that's misreading the public comment. That seems way too narrow for what we were hearing. Somebody needs to independently look at what the public was talking about. It's more than just tree removal permits.

MM – we might recommend to broaden this again. It's complex.

JF – public comment that went to DPD?

JR – I would assume that when we re-start the process they will

SPdB – public comment is posted in the DPD site.

PS – our letter covered a lot of things. They didn't really acknowledge our letter because they said they'd table it.

JS – Council directed DPD to look at the Director's Rule and update the code and if we decide as a group that that's the wrong approach, then we need to tell council that they need to ask DPD to do X.

MM – we can look at our letter and start there and retool it.

JS – yes tell Council and the Mayor, you need to tell DPD to do this.

PS – And we are telling you in advance so when 2012 comes and you start work on this again. They can put more money into it.

JS – as you budget for that, you will need to allocate more funds.

MM – we have some discussions to have. It's still compartmentalized, does it need to include a permit system. We are closer to agreement. We are looking at this in July. Are there other pressing issues in the work plan to consider? We have not talked about budget. They are the main ones: Ordinance, budget, outreach.

PS – my understanding is that we meet with the IDT the issue of canopy coverage will come out.

MM – when is the City going to have the results of i-Tree study?

SPdB – year end

UFC fact sheet and speaking points

MM – distributed a fact sheet to get us started. Started with two boundary points, the top is the UFC's mandate and at the bottom, the mission of the UFMP. Struggled with the goal. We are trying to elevate the importance of trees into the City's decision-making.

PS – We just want it to be fairly simple. Need to have the tree ordinance status. We are going to get a lot of questions on that.

JR – is this supposed to be issue by issue stuff?

PS- no, just give us the ability to glance down to address questions of the public. Simple facts.

JR – recent activities/current projects

MM – I had two primary directives, it was help strengthen the City’s regulation component and planting more trees. I don’t know if that fits in there.

JF – you can’t achieve the 30% goal without planting more trees.

JR, PS – we like what you did here

JS – I would like to see that it’s getting larger, not just maintaining the status quo. Get the word increase in there.

PS – Do we need to have something talking about zones?

JF – maybe we need a speaking point to reinstate the UFMP across the zones.

MM – maybe add a sub bullet under #1 to talk about zones?

JF – are there any zones that have achieved their goals?

PS – Parks. But they are going to lose canopy over the next several years due to the poor quality of the canopy.

JR – the Design Commission are the stewards of the Comp Plan. As far as I can tell the steward of the UFMP is Sandra.

SPdB – the IDT

JR – I wonder if that’s a role that we should carve out for ourselves. Being stewards would be more all encompassing than just helping implement. Review goals.

PS – is that possible? To change our goal? Through the ordinance? Maybe we can do it through the letter.

MM – the ordinance has already given us that role.

PS – Sandra already answered it: the IDT.

SPdB – at the staff level is not Sandra, it’s the IDT. At this level it’s you. The resolution I put in your packet says it.

JS- advice that the UFC work with the UF IDT to include language in the updated UFMP stating the role of the UFC.

MM – it will be very good for us to have the mandate from Council when they adopt the UFMP next year.

JF – the difference between advising and stewarding is metrics, raising the awareness of people that relate to the canopy goal. Some people are uninformed about it. Get the word out.

PS – you are right, it's semantics. My perspective is. I was on the Ped Advisory Board and when we got to be stewards of the plan much more rigor came into what the board had to do. You got your agenda and are reviewing the rigor of the departments in the city. Are they following the plan? You are the cops of the plan.

JR – stewardship is your are responsible for the growth and health of that thing. As the plan is supposed to go through regular updates I would like for us to be involved if not fully responsible for them.

JF – other agencies to be similarly engaged and buying in. Make sure the network is there.

MM – that's where we are going to with the meeting with the IDT

PS – it would be great to realign our work plan when we meet with them.

JR – what does the IDT do as the stewards of the plan? They are responsible for the update...

SPdB – Once we can true up what the canopy is doing. We might be able to extrapolate the i-Tree results to get some canopy date, but that's not certain. We will need to have another tree canopy assessment via satellite. Something that provides apples-to-apples. When we wrote the UFMP we established goals, we also did the Five-year implementation strategy, we keep track of what we said we would do and at the end of the year we produce a progress report that we bring to you. That's the opportunity for you to say wait...

JF – that's when what Gordon said comes in, we have all these agencies we have Seattle reLeaf, SDOT, GSP, all of that is supposed to be captured in that report.

SPdB – yes, each department has a work plan with goals that have been set by the UFMP. Parks reports on the GSP because it takes place in their land. Each department that has a stake in the UFMP has their workplan already established. As we update it we will see where we are. We are starting to work on it now to be prepared for the conversation with the UFC. How can we better adapt our actions to get to 30 by 2037. That's the opportunity for the UFC when we bring our work plans and the progress report for you to are or are not accomplishing the UFMP goals. The stewardship, in my mind, the way we are asking residents to become stewards of the urban forest, I'm thinking the UFC IS the steward of the UFMP via review of these reports.

GB in the plan it makes reference to the Urban forest Coalition.

SPdB – that is now the UF interdepartmental team. Also the numbers in the plan are outdated compared to the numbers in the 5-year implementation strategy. All of that needs to be updated. What I would like to do is after we are done updating the UFMP is to create another 5-year implementation strategy, that way we keep on moving and not having to wait until the following update to fine tune our actions to accomplish the goals and objectives.

MM – I think the status report is good. There are things we can suggest to re-prioritize. The work plan for the IDT, even though we are talking about the opportunity being in private property, a lot of the work they do day-to-day is not that. It's only Jana doing the real private outreach. How do we channel more funds to that effort.

SPdB – just to bring that into perspective. Trees for Neighborhoods was created two years ago by OSE as a pilot, because we saw that as a gap. That's why we are proposing that it moves to SPU to give it more legs and ability to grow. The Seattle reLeaf was created by the IDT as a place to have all the information residents might need regarding the UF in one place. The specific role Jana has been playing in the Trees for N'hoods and the other two grant-funded efforts, the Urban Orchards, and Tree Ambassadors, were the result of that exploration done at the IDT level and that position's role to seek grants and partnerships. The idea is that that program will be a resource for the whole of the IDT. The fact that the program is not in Parks, it doesn't mean it will not support Parks on their needs, for example.

JR – the comment that was put forth is the idea of helping implement the UFMP and help achieve 30% canopy cover goal. At a higher level we want to be stewards of the UFMP along with the IDT.

MM – we can add the stewardship piece and add the land use piece.

SPdB – I will re-read the article in the DJC and bring up at the IDT that someone in DPD was not well informed and it might be confusing when people talk about issues with the media. These are all good things for us to work on. It's important that conversations had at the IDT get trickled throughout the departments.

MM – maybe they were misquoted. One role of the UFC is to continue to ask people what is the goal for the different zones...

PS – what's interesting is the discussion of whether trees are appropriate in industrial areas. I think with those on this and under recent activities/current projects...

MM – add ordinance on recent activities

JR – maybe put ongoing items instead of current projects...

Logistics of next weeks' Torchlight Parade route tour

SPdB – next week we are meeting with SDOT staff to take a tour of the Torchlight Parade route. We'll meet at 3:00 p.m. at Fourth and Wall. Then we'll go to John Small's office and we'll talk about Matt's canopy cover project with Audubon.

MM – I don't have all the city data. I have data for Columbia City and SE Seattle. UW students have data on Columbia City that might be more accurate. Good introduction to metrics.

JF – metrics is our Achilles heel right now.

MM – I can explain how we did it. Maybe check where they are on the i-Tree?

SPdB – Did you also want to finalize the UFC Seafair recommendation? I will bring copies so we can work on that.

MM – we should definitely do that.

PS – I was coming down on First this morning from the north and it has a very decent canopy, developing canopy as well. I'm starting to pay attention to that. I remember trees that had come down in storms and we are getting more than one downtown street with canopy.

JH – It's a done deal that they are going to tie back and prune.

MM – it throws a wrench in our letter because we are saying that they shouldn't.

PS – It's good for next year.

PS – Greg McPherson and other people are having another symposium down in Davis. I'll find out.

Adjourn