

Urban Forestry Commission (UFC)

January 11, 2012

Meeting Notes

Seattle Municipal Tower Room 1940
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)
John Floberg (JF)
Jeff Reibman (JR)
Peg Staeheli (PS)
Nancy Bird (NB)

Staff

Sandra Pinto de Bader (SPdB) - OSE
Jessica Farmer (JFa) - OSE

Public

Steve Zemke (SZ)
Margaret Thouless (MT)
Ken Shaw (KS)

Absent- Excused

Tom Early (TE)
Gordon Bradley (GB)

NOTE: Meeting notes are not exhaustive. For more details listen to the digital recording of the meeting at: <http://www.seattle.gov/urbanforestrycommission/meetingdocs.htm>

Call to Order

MM – called to order

Public comment

SZ – The last Street Tree Ordinance community meeting is today at the Ballard community center at 6:30 p.m. He understands that the Meadowbrook meeting was the highest attended one with seven people there. The outreach isn't really happening. It's important to keep that in mind to get public support for this. He has had to take out a couple of hazardous trees in his properties. Unless there is a way to keep track of what's happening in the city we won't know whether we are gaining or losing... this is obviously happening in other properties.

MT – Went to the Meadowbrook meeting. Disconcerted by low numbers of people. She inquired on how they publicized these meetings. She found out through an email from a friend. She was told that if she had been on Facebook she would have found out. She know all but two people at the meeting, it was basically a bunch of tree people. This is not going out to people. She asked how they are going to notify people of their obligations under the new ordinance and they said that probably would include an insert in the utilities bill. SDOT is only responsible for about half of street trees. For the rest the home owner is responsible for maintenance but

would need to get a permit. Most people don't know about this. When she bought her house nobody told her that the street tree outside was her responsibility.

KS – He is a member of Friends of Schmitz Park. He has worked with the group for 17 years. What he keeps seeing is that we need everybody and not everybody is involved. Some trees took down power lines and didn't have power for many hours. He had to find the fallen tree and report it himself. We don't have everybody in the city involved somehow for caring for our city, whether it's trees or other things. We need to focus on total involvement. When his parents were sick he dropped from over 1,000 hours of volunteer labor because he was taking care of his parents. It didn't feel good that the Green Seattle people would not follow up on the work they had done. He saw the re-growth of blackberry thickets. When people came to remove ivy they didn't pick it up. He has lots of ideas to share if the Board is interested in listening to what he has to say.

Approval of December 7 and December 14 minutes

ACTION: A motion was made to approve the December 7 meeting notes as written. The motion was seconded and carried.

ACTION: A motion was made to approve the December 14 meeting notes as written. The motion was seconded and carried.

2011 Trees for Neighborhoods Program report – Jessica Farmer (OSE)

Jessica Farmer, Trees for Neighborhoods Project Manager from the Office of Sustainability and Environment (OSE) delivered the report on the 2011 program.

The program provided 1,000 trees to residents of the City of Seattle for planting in their yards and planting strips. Altogether, the program gave out 75 fruit trees, 400 small trees, and 525 medium to large trees. 135 of the trees distributed were approved by SDOT arborists for planting as street trees at 75 residences throughout the city. Of the 525 medium and large trees, 39.8% went to addresses on the south side of Seattle, and 27.3% went to addresses in Northwest Seattle and Ballard, areas with lower existing canopy cover. Program outreach was targeted to these neighborhoods to support the Urban Forest Management Plan goals for canopy cover.

Participants attended a workshop on how to properly plant and care for their young trees and received free watering bags, coupons for free compost, and educational materials providing information about tree planting and care.

PS – Was there a question about 'did you talk to your neighbor'?

JFa – she will build that into recommendations for next years' program

PS – it would be important to track that in the survey

JF- measure leverage

JS – was there an effort to track SCL removals?

JFa – yes, through the Urban Tree Replacement Program. Trees for Neighborhoods works closely with SCL to provide preferential access to the program for people whose trees have been removed by SCL. The program allows a maximum of four trees per household.

NB – curious as to where they placed their trees... in the front yard, back yard, street? Did they have gardens?

JFa – there were participants that are ‘over-planters’ but nothing consistent

MM – Great program. Will there be site visits to measure survivability? This would be a great opportunity for Seattle Audubon or the UFC to look at survivability and cumulative positive impacts of trees being planted, doing the tree wiki. Likes the fact that the program is targeting low canopy cover areas but that was open to the whole city.

SPdB – yes, and also there is a survivability survey that goes out to past years participants.

PS – was there specific mention that they are responsible for the maintenance of their street trees?

JFa – there was a disclaimer as well as a document they signed promising to care for their trees.

PS – did it say they would be responsible for utility damage (according to SDOT’s street tree ordinance)?

JF – interesting to see the spread of natives vs. non-natives in the species selected.

SPdB – the program provides species diversity compared to past years and also provides tree options appropriate for different locations and preferences.

Street Tree Ordinance recommendation - vote

Peg talked to SDOT – they have been working on the ordinance since it was presented to the UFC for comment.

JR – maybe use sight triangles when they have a stop line. Maybe at controlled intersections reduce the no planting zone to that of a sight triangle.

JS- should it be a consideration of use? Not much work done to understand how many trees would be out of compliance. Would i-Tree study provide enough points to figure out trees within sight triangle?

JF – how did the outreach occurred? It would be important to find out whether the outreach was appropriate and there simply was not enough interest? Was it advertised in neighborhood blogs? Did they reach out to Trees for Neighborhoods participants?

MM – it is issues based, went out to POSA and not a lot of POSA folks attended.

PS – include disclaimer in Trees for Neighborhoods program that people will be liable for damage to utilities.

MM – doing education and outreach around ordinances.

NB - Go to places where people are already and take the message to them so they don't have to go to another meeting.

JS – there is discontinuity to what people might perceive this ordinance refers to. Public vs. private trees.

UFC 2012 Work Plan – continues

MM – thank you to Sandra for putting together this first draft.

JF – what are the follow up steps for these meetings about the UFMP update?

SPdB – City staff would like to receive specific feedback from the UFC

NB – Will be creating a strategy for industrial land-uses to accomplish canopy cover goals.

PS – industrial area near the shoreline is important. Looking for corridors of trees. If repaving or re-stripping could trigger tree planting in industrial properties.

JS – the Shoreline Master Program, Superfund and others are driving the Duwamish river corridor. The UFMP would be insignificant comparatively speaking.

PS – okay, take it out. North of West Seattle freeway.

JS – would agree to lower the canopy cover goal for industrial areas and pick it up in another land use

PS- nothing to do with current situation statement. You can work on a strip. Also, there are no good strategies for single family.

NB – for industrial area could re-visit the drainage strategy, SPU's CSOs

PS- impact of planting smaller trees in industrial areas? Planting in industrial ROWs. Get a couple of people and talk about restoration in industrial corridors. Talk to us about your costs for planting trees.

MM - Get Peg Gainer here?

PS – what percentage of industrial area is ROW?

JS – 24% based on GIS

MM – will continue discussing the Work Plan at next meeting

2011 UFC Annual Report

Moved to next meeting

New business and announcements

Adjourn

Community comment:

From: Michael Oxman [mailto:michaeloxman@comcast.net]

Sent: Monday, January 09, 2012 1:46 PM

To: Pinto_de_Bader, Sandra

Subject: Attn.: Urban Forestry Commission

Seattle Urban Forestry Commission,

The final argument concerning street trees is the 800 pound gorilla, and that is that the city has not accepted liability for all trees located between the sidewalk & the curb. By ingenuously placing responsibility for tree maintenance on the adjacent property owner, we ignore the many court cases where the city has had to pay damages for 'trip & fall' claims and traffic accidents involving street trees. The city needs to accept both liability and the resulting obligation for maintenance of over 100,000 street trees it has disowned.

The SDOT tree inventory is not a public document: it is available only on the proprietary Hansen Geographic Information System (GIS) system available by employee password only on the city's computers.

All city ordinances must have a statement of financial implications. The current street tree ordinance has costs to enforce it, which are unknown.

Prior to enacting this proposal, we need to know what the number of violations per year are, and the amount of time city employees spend processing these cases. The new proposal will purportedly have more effectiveness, so we also need to know how the enforcement costs will increase. The same units of measuring costs must be used in each case for an effective comparison.

Council Resolution 31138 also asks for a permit process covering removal of trees from private property, which is planned to be introduced in the Spring of 2012. We need to know how the same SDOT inspectors will interface with the Planning Department tree inspection program.

Since the street tree ordinance is so closely intertwined with the citywide tree ordinance, why aren't they both being introduced at the same time? The 2007 Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) talks about integrated management, so how is the street tree proposal mixed in with the form of the ordinance regulating removal of trees from private property?

A proposed tree ordinance that failed in 2010 stated that no tree removal permit process exists, and a permit system is unworkable, yet the Critical Areas ordinance has a provision for removing trees by a permit administered by the DPD. We were lied to. We also know that the Parks department has a tree removal permit application form for neighbors whose view is blocked by park trees on the hillside. Here we see that SDOT also has such a permit system, and intends to tighten it up.

Before 'tightening up' enforcement against violators who unlawfully remove trees from our community without a good reason, we need a report on how these 3 permit processes work.

The 2009 Tree Audit states that our program lacks 'performance metrics' to gauge effectiveness. To pass any tree ordinance without the numbers may be premature.

<http://www.seattle.gov/audit/docs/PublishedReport20090515.pdf>

"Finding 6 (page 31)

Specifically, we found that the City's current approach to tree issues lacks:

6.3. A comprehensive plan for trees that aligns individual department efforts with City-wide goals and priorities, and establishes approaches or strategies in the pursuit of shared goals and performance metrics."

Arboreally yours,

Michael Oxman
(206) 949-8733