

## SEATTLE URBAN FORESTRY COMMISSION

Leif Fixen, Chair • Tom Early, Vice-Chair

Gordon Bradley • Donna Kostka • Richard Martin • Joanna Nelson de Flores • Jeff Reibman • Erik Rundell • Steve Zemke

*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*

**May 6, 2015**

### Meeting Notes

Seattle Municipal Tower, Room 2750 (27<sup>th</sup> floor)

700 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Seattle

#### Attending

##### Commissioners

Leif Fixen - chair  
Tom Early – vice chair  
Donna Kostka  
Joanna Nelson de Flores  
Richard Martin  
Jeff Reibman  
Erik Rundell  
Steve Zemke

##### Staff

Maggie Glowacki - DPD  
Sandra Pinto de Bader - OSE  
Nick Welch - DPD  
Jesseca Brand – Planning Commission

##### Guests

Lauren Squires - Planning Commission

#### Absent- Excused

Gordon Bradley

##### Public

None

**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

Leif called the meeting to order. Read the Commission's mission statement and went through the agenda.

#### Public comment

None

#### Adoption of April 1 and April 8 meeting notes

**ACTION: A motion to approve the April 1 meeting notes as amended by adding a paragraph proposed by Donna was made, seconded, and approved.**

The Commission agreed to have a discussion about the disclosure caveat on draft documents at the time when the Protocols are discussed.

**ACTION: A motion to approve the April 8 meeting notes as written was made, seconded, and approved.**

#### Planning Commission visit

Commissioner Lauren Squires, transportation planner with SvR Design, is representing the Planning Commission (PC). The PC is a volunteer body with 16 members, 7 appointed by Mayor, 7 by Council, one

Commission appointment, and one Get Engaged member. The PC is the only Commission identified in the City's charter.

The Planning Commission is the steward of the Comprehensive Plan. They are currently working on a major update. They make yearly recommendations for the yearly Comp Plan amendments.

Examples of their work include reports on Housing in Seattle, Family-size housing report, Transit Communities (aligning land use and transportation), and Industrial lands preservation. All work can be found on their website. The PC works with departments and with Office of Housing on Housing Affordability, with DPD work on guiding policies, and work with SDOT on transportation issues. They have three subcommittees: land use, housing, and Comp Plan.

The Planning Commission wants to engage other Commissions as they work on the Comp Plan update. They have a lot of expertise and want to have other Commission's expertise. They are looking for input from the UFC on this major Comp Plan Update. First draft will come out in July.

The UFC put together a group to interact with DPD as they move forward with the Comp Plan update. Environmental Element and have provided input through the assigned commissioners. There are policy issues that the UFC wants to weigh in on during the Comp Plan update.

UFC Question: Does the Comp Plan deal with other infrastructure besides Transportation?

Answer: Yes, Capital facilities are mentioned.

The Comp Plan deals with the way Seattle grows. The connection to green spaces will be looked at. As we grow as a city and get denser, our ideas around meaningful access to green spaces might change. They are looking at changing the term 'Amenities' to 'essential components of livability.' They would also like a more organized effort in understanding what's important to the city and what does 'green' mean.

The Comp Plan, as a guiding document, would be a place to prioritizing green infrastructure. The PC is not writing the document but advises DPD. They would like this update to take a holistic approach.

Question: has the decision to remove ECA from the Environment section already made?

Answer: The ECA section recognizes the importance of trees as providers of environmental benefits. It will move forward to public comment as a separate section of the Comp Plan draft.

Question: is there going to be a focus on equity and environmental justice in the new Comp Plan? Answer: Environmental equity issues as they relate to the urban forest. They issued a joint letter with the five commissions from Office of Civil Rights asking for a more intense focus on equity.

Also, as part of the EIS there will be an equity analysis that will dive deep into displacement of vulnerable and marginalized populations. They are looking at environmental impacts that affect people's health. Climate change is going to be another issue to be considered.

UFC comment: Would like to recommend having an index in the draft so the topics can be found.

UFC comment: one of the UFC's concerns is incorporating UFSP and canopy cover goals into the Comp Plan.

Answer: those are good ideas. The draft comes out in July. The PC would like to have another sit down with the UFC to discuss. In the fall they would like to get Commissions come together to talk about the draft.

### **Environmentally Critical Areas Update – Nick Welch and Maggie Glowacki (DPD)**

Maggie and Nick briefed the Commission on Environmentally Critical Areas (ECA) update and Low Impact Development (LID).

Environmentally critical areas in Seattle include aquifers, landslide-prone and steep slope areas, peat bogs, streams, small lakes, shorelines, and wetlands.

DPD is required to update the ECA. The 2015 ECA update includes:

1. Review regulations for compliance with Growth Management Act
2. Best available science
3. Public participation plan, and
4. Develop policies and regulations.

DPD developed the policies and are currently working on the regulations. They have a draft of the policy changes that will be part of the Comp Plan. As part of the update, they have updated the maps of the ECAs. Maps include Peat Settlement-prone areas, abandoned landfills, Seattle Parks and City Property, Biodiversity areas, wetlands, riparian corridors, etc.

Existing ECA regulations are in section 25.09 of the Seattle Municipal Code which defines ECAs, establishes exempt development, and specify submittal requirements. Current regulations establish specific development standards for each ECA type; outline variance process for development on steep slopes; and outline exception process for lots predominantly ECA.

The priority species protection includes bald eagle and heron. Buffer areas are changing according to EPA definitions based on best available science. The Commission issued a letter of recommendation about heron rookeries in 2010. Sandra will send the letter to Maggie.

Exemptions:

UFC Question: How are ECA requirements applied to City projects?

Answer: City departments do their own review and whether they qualify for exemptions. They have to provide documentation of their analysis. All exempt activities must use best management practices.

UFC Question: Is there an exemption for restoration projects?

Answer: there is the exemption and there is SEPA. Restoration activity is not considered development. You can touch the area to improve it. They are making this clearer in the update. They still have the SEPA component where there is no agreement on whether or not this is SEPA exempt.

UFC comment: Believes Parks has blanket SEPA exemption for restoration activities.

Low Impact Development (LID)

DPD is also working on making low impact development code changes. There are new requirements for municipal stormwater permits from the Washington State Department of Ecology. It's a separate section within the Land Use Code. They are also reviewing development related codes and standards to encourage LID and remove unintentional barriers in the code.

Low Impact development includes:

- Stormwater and land use management strategies that mimic natural hydrology, and
- Reduced impervious surface, bio-retention, and preservation of native vegetation.

What changes are proposed?

- Changes to the land use code would encourage LID by:
  - o Making it easier to do rain gardens; Clarifying that bio retention qualifies as landscape open space; Allowing some flexibility for landscaping or setback requirements to accommodate bio-retention and GSI, and Requiring Green Factor for certain institutional lots.

UFC comment: There are existing utilities underground that prevent LID. It would be nice if the minimum distances of disturbance were coordinated. You no longer need the spatial requirements.

Answer: This is being addressed under the ROWIM.

Sandra will ask for a ROWIM and Stormwater code updates briefings.

UFC Question: what about Parks pruning trees for views? Is this being looked at?

Answer: This is in the environmental section – it says that you can't perform an action that will kill a tree. It allows for maintenance of certain areas established prior to 1992. There are vegetation standards that could be reviewed. Parks is supposed to follow ECA regulations.

Releasing SEPA on this process by June and that would be the end of formal public comment. UFC will make comments by mid- June.

Include comments to LID and ECA in June 3 agenda. Maggie will send Sandra the draft documents for UFC comment.

#### **Draft Cheasty Hydrology Concerns letter – Second draft discussion and possible vote**

The Commission reviewed the letter. Donna would like to add citations so the City understands the legal implications of this project. The Commission agreed to use broader language and only city Section 25.09 of the Seattle Municipal Code.

**ACTION: A motion to approve the letter of recommendation as amended was made, seconded, and approved.**

#### **Letter of recommendation on Arboretum Multi-use Trail – Second draft discussion and possible vote**

The Commission discussed edits to the letter and will further discuss at the May 13 meeting.

#### **New business and announcements**

None

#### **Adjourn**

Public Input:

**From:** Friends of Licorice Fern Natural Area [mailto:lfnafriends@gmail.com]

**Sent:** Thursday, April 23, 2015 9:03 AM

**To:** Acosta, Rachel; Williams, Christopher; Hoff, Paula; Pinto\_de\_Bader, Sandra; Godden, Jean; Rasmussen, Tom

**Subject:** Fwd: Parks' Cheasty recommendations ignore policy and our efforts

Seattle Parks Board of Commissioners:

Our neighborhood group is alarmed and saddened by the recommendations from the Parks Department on the Cheasty Project. We participated in Parks' Focus Groups and Mini-Summit this spring, and none of that overwhelmingly pro-nature opinion is taken into account.

We have labored for years to improve our Natural Area within the guidelines of the Natural Areas Policy. We feel that this Cheasty project (because of the bicycle component only) threatens the future of our Natural Area and all others in Seattle.

Please reverse this direction that the Parks Department has taken, and restore our faith in the future of our Natural Areas.

I'm inserting below a copy of the draft letter from Thornton Creek Alliance, which eloquently states the details of our opinion.

## Dass Adams for Friends of Licorice Fern Natural Area

<http://LFNAFriends.org> [LFNAFriends@gmail.com](mailto:LFNAFriends@gmail.com)

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Seattle Park Board of Commissioners  
100 Dexter Avenue North  
Seattle, Washington 98109

Re: Keeping Cheasty, and All Seattle's Natural Areas, Healthy for Urban Nature

Greetings Park Board Commissioners:

We hope that after hearing all the points of view, and after your own experiences in meeting with the public, you will do the right thing for Seattle's few remnants of urban forest and save this one for the present and future enjoyment of our diverse neighborhoods and swelling population. Thornton Creek Alliance (TCA) strongly supports foot trails and ADA standard trails in natural areas. We want everyone have the lovely opportunity to enter our natural areas, walk through them, enjoy watching wildlife, and participate in forest restoration. These are gifts only a forest can give. How else will people of all backgrounds and income levels get to experience our forests first-hand if they are sliced up and modified to accommodate the various interests of successions of 'activity activists'?

Please note that the April 2, 2015 Parks staff recommendation to you has very little in common with the single perimeter trail and three-year pilot project that the city council unanimously approved last August. The Parks recommendation makes the mountain biking community and a subset of Chesty neighbors happy, but it is not at all supported by another subset of neighbors, and it is generally condemned by Forest Stewards and everyone else who loves quiet study and restoration of these parcels of land that make up a scant 15% of Parks' property. Note also that the 'activity activists' have only begun arguing for the changes they want to make to Cheasty, changes that will require yet more clearing in this very narrow natural area.

The December outreach meeting with the under-served communities must be considered invalid for the simple reason that there was no educational component. How could these communities be expected to know ahead of the meeting why natural areas have been preserved and developed in the first place? Of course they liked everything they thought was on the table when they had no clear understanding of what was being taken off.

Parks is recommending bike trails for the reasons given below. (By this logic no Seattle natural area is safe from consideration.) Yet, note that all of these goals can be achieved without bicycles in natural areas, and in fact, a great many more goals could be reached with bicycles omitted.

- The trail will provide recreational opportunities for currently under-served communities, providing families with the opportunity to experience nature and recreation in their own neighborhood.
- This project will provide a link between the Rainier Vista community and North Beacon Hill.
- The trail responds to environmental issues within the Cheasty greenspace and has been designed to work with the geology of the property.
- There is strong community support for the trail.
- Volunteer restoration work is a high priority for the surrounding community and there is a strong commitment to this project and the maintenance necessary to maintain the trails.
- Our City is experiencing unprecedented growth. We need to look at creative ways to provide recreational opportunities in our urban environment.

One has to wonder why the goals refer to a 'trail' when in fact two concentric trails, plus access trails, are now proposed, and even more are on the horizon. Additionally, these goals reflect no acknowledgement of the many considerations and reservations put forth by various PAT members or anyone else who contributed to the discussion. Ditto for the entire recommendation letter. How is this appropriate?

We certainly agree that Parks has done a lot of outreach around the Cheasty bike plans, and we truly appreciated the opportunity afforded by the Mini Summit discussion of natural area policies three weeks ago. However, the talk in the hall has been of 'inclusion illusion', and this Parks staff recommendation seems to bear that out.

TCA supports a policy of right activity, right place. Sports equipment, including bicycles, works well in a wide variety of park venues and elsewhere, but it does not belong in our natural areas which can be activated in much more appropriate ways. For example, we could begin now to build momentum for a 2016 'Seattle Summer of Nature', and invite everyone in to explore and learn about the hidden life of our natural areas.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Ruth Williams, President  
Thornton Creek Alliance

**THORNTON CREEK ALLIANCE** (TCA), founded in 1993, is an all-volunteer grassroots, nonprofit organization of 100 members dedicated to preserving and restoring an ecological balance throughout the Thornton Creek watershed. Our goal is to benefit the watershed by encouraging individuals, neighborhoods, schools, groups, businesses, agencies, and government to work together in addressing the environmental restoration of the creek system including: water quality, stabilization of water flow, flood prevention, and habitat improvement through education, collaboration, and community involvement.

[www.thornton-creek-alliance.org](http://www.thornton-creek-alliance.org)

[www.facebook.com/Thornton.Creek.Alliance](https://www.facebook.com/Thornton.Creek.Alliance)

**From:** David Perasso [mailto:perasso@cruzio.com]

**Sent:** Thursday, April 23, 2015 9:20 AM

**To:** Acosta, Rachel; Williams, Christopher; Hoff, Paula; Pinto\_de\_Bader, Sandra; Godden, Jean; Rasmussen, Tom

**Subject:** Support Cheasty Bike Trail, multi use project

I'm writing in support of the Cheasty Greenspace Trails and Bike Park Project.

You've heard all the arguments (probably have nightmares about them at this point) so I won't repeat them all. Just wanting you to know that a long time restoration worker, WNPS forest steward and GSP steward agrees with importance of human (especially youth) access to our natural areas and supports the project. I think it is a good compromise between protecting and enhancing our natural areas and inviting humans into those areas, something that is especially important in SE Seattle.

If I could change anything about the project, I would add more space for humans, especially gathering areas that can be used for programming.

I look forward to volunteering in the area and enjoying it's beauty.

- David Perasso  
6842 Beacon Ave S  
Seattle

GSP Forest Steward — Martha Washington Park  
WNPS Native Plant Steward