

Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

2018 Annual Report

Introduction

In 2018 the Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) ramped up its efforts to support the City in updating the tree protection ordinance. As the UFC celebrated its 9th year, it continued to fulfill its mandate to advise the Mayor and City Council on policies and regulations governing the protection, management, and conservation of trees and vegetation in the City of Seattle. The UFC made recommendations to support City ongoing decision-making to continue to protect and grow Seattle's trees and urban forest, a critical piece of our urban infrastructure.

The UFC's primary objectives are:

- To support implementation of the Urban Forest Stewardship Plan's goals and improve the plan through the plan update process.
- To provide feedback and recommendations to City Council and the Mayor on specific policy actions that will ensure the long-term health and viability of Seattle's urban forest; and
- To provide a forum for public dialogue to assist the Commission in its advisory role.

UFC 2018 Accomplishments

Learning from partners and strengthening relationships

The UFC focused on learning about the work the City's environmental partners are doing. The UFC engaged Seattle 2030, Sound Transit, Mountains to Sound Greenway, Port of Seattle, The Nature Conservancy, Forterra, City Fruit, and King Conservation District.

The UFC continued to build partnerships with the community and City departments. The UFC heard briefings from SPU on the Ship Canal Water Quality project, and Trees for Seattle; from OSE on the Duwamish Valley Action Plan and the Urban Forest Management Plan update; from SDCI on the Director's Rule on penalties for illegal tree removal, the Mandatory Housing Affordability Ordinance and EIS, and the tree regulations update; from OPCD on the Green Factor Director's Rule and Accessory Dwelling Unit EIS; and from Seattle Parks on their Viewpoint Park policy and Cheasty Mountain Bike/Pedestrian Trail Pilot project.

Additionally, the UFC met with City Council, Council Staff, and Central Staff on numerous occasions to discuss broad goals for urban forestry as well as updating the tree regulations ordinances. This included thoughtful visits from Councilmembers Bagshaw, Herbold, and multiple visits from Councilmember Johnson and his staff.

Community members visited with the UFC to talk about Lawton Park, the latest findings on Moss as a tool to measure pollution, the community's plans for Battery Street once the tunnel closes, Othello Square project, and efforts for an integrated mapping tool to be piloted at Discovery Park.

UFC Recommendations:

The UFC issued the following letters of recommendation:

Tree regulations update: The UFC has provided numerous recommendations and has written

position papers on this issue over the years. The effort to update our tree regulations has been quite overdue and under Councilmember Johnson's leadership and his Tree for All initiative, the update is finally underway. The UFC issued six letters of recommendation about the tree regulation update:

- [April 11 recommendation](#): The UFC stressed the importance to finding ways to allow for flexible management of trees by property owners, while protecting trees and accomplishing the City's urban forestry goals. The UFC recommendations included: keeping protection of groves and exceptional trees; reinstating a policy of no-net-loss of tree canopy by exploring incentives for tree retention and deterrents for tree removal; establishing a fee-in-lieu program for tree replacement, maintenance, and tree protection enforcement; establishing a tree removal permit system to track and monitor tree loss and replacement; requiring canopy impact assessments for development sites; establishing a tree service provider registration/certification to cover all tree work done in Seattle; including environmental equity considerations; removing the exception from the tree protection code for small-lot single-family zones.; establishing financial guarantees to ensure tree survival; and including requirements to follow industry standards and best management practices for tree selection and care.
- [May 9 Trees for All proposal recommendation](#):
- [June 6 Comments to the May 11 Council Central Staff Memorandum](#):
- [July 11 letter on Enforcement of SMC 25.11.090 – Tree Replacement and Site Restoration](#):
- [August 31 comments to draft tree regulation update ORD D7 and the August 16 Council Central Staff Memo](#):
- [October 10 letter on adequately resourcing an updated proposed tree ordinance](#):
- [November 14 response to policy questions asked in the September 14 Council Central Staff memo](#):

[SDCI's Draft Director's Rule 21-2017 on Calculating Tree Valuations and Civil Penalties for Tree Protection Code Violations](#): The UFC recommended adopting a simpler tree valuation and penalty calculation and stressed the importance of creating a comprehensive permit system for tree removal and a tree worker registry to better support Seattle's urban forestry goals.

[Letter to Mr. Bruce Stotler](#): the UFC thanked Mr. Stotler for his decision to sell his property to the City of Seattle so it can eventually be added to Schmitz Park.

[SPU's Ship Canal Water Quality Program and 3rd Avenue Water Main project](#): The UFC provided comments and recommendations for the planting plan for the projects and recommended: using trees that mature with larger canopies while providing clearance to vehicles and utilities; providing greater diversity of tree species; ensuring that understory plants are appropriate for site conditions including durability, low-maintenance, and provide habitat, and increasing the number of native plants at some of the planting sites. The UFC provided specific tree species recommendations.

[Accessory Dwelling Units \(ADU\) Draft EIS](#):

The UFC expressed disagreement with the ADU-Draft EIS determination of no significant unavoidable adverse impacts to the tree canopy reduction for the following reasons: 1. The ADU-Draft EIS underestimated tree canopy reduction from ADU policy, and 2. Stronger mitigation measures are needed to abate the biological, visual, and health impacts that the proposed zoning changes outlined in the ADU-Draft EIS are projected to have on the urban forest and tree canopy. Given the number of proposed cumulative impacts to tree canopy resulting from code changes related to development currently underway, the UFC recommended including stronger, more binding requirements to promote and improve tree coverage when ADUs are constructed.

Proposed Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) Ordinance:

The UFC expressed concern that the proposed changes to Green Factor multipliers, as they relate to existing tree retention and tree planting, do not go far enough to promote the retention of the City's existing tree canopy or to increase tree canopy in the areas affected by the ordinance. The UFC recommended establishing a hierarchy within the multipliers to further encourage planting of medium/large trees and preservation of existing trees.

In order to mitigate for tree loss (especially conifers) in single family zones due to development the UFC recommended focusing on the tree species and size at maturity (or in 10 years) to determine tree planting requirements for a site to encourage evergreens and the largest canopy tree as appropriate for the site's constraints, and increasing the points for medium/large trees and for preservation of trees at least six inches in diameter.

Green Factor Director's Rule update:

The UFC provided technical input to the draft Director's Rule sections about minimum soil volumes, irrigation, and structural soil systems. The UFC also recommended finding ways to change the perception of trees being a disposable, short-term piece of landscape and assigning the highest valuation to preservation of high-value trees such as mature conifers with smaller trees receiving lower values as part of the Green Factor worksheet.

Urban Forestry Commission/Urban Forest Inter-departmental Team Annual Meeting

The Commission and the Urban Forest Inter-departmental Team had their 8th annual meeting at Camp Long. The facilitated meeting focused on strengthening the partnership between the Urban Forestry Commission and the Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team in order to accomplish the goals of the Urban Forest Stewardship Plan (UFSP) and exploring opportunities for including public health as a component of the Urban Forest Management plan update.

Commission Membership

The Commission expanded its membership to include Environmental Justice, Public Health and Community/Neighborhood representatives. Seven new members joined the Urban Forestry Commission in 2018:

- * Sandra Whiting (Position#2 -Urban Ecologist)
- * Stuart Niven (Position #5 - Arborist)
- * Michael Walton (Position #6 - Landscape Architect)
- * Bonnie Lei (Position #10 - Get Engaged member)
- * Whitman Bouton (Position #11 - Environmental Justice)
- * Jessica Jones (Position #12- Public Health), and
- * Shari Selch (Position #13 - Community/Neighborhood representative)

Weston Brinkley was re-elected as chair for 2019 with Sandra Whiting serving as vice-chair.

Conclusion

2018 was an eventful year for Seattle's urban forest. We continue to work towards a long overdue update for the City's tree code and other associated policies. This effort has been on the top of the UFC's priority list since its inception in 2009. Huge strides were made in developing this policy with efforts from City staff, City Council and the public. We look forward to finally marshaling a new code across the finish line in 2019.

This past year also saw the important launch of the planning process for the update to the Seattle Urban Forest Management Plan. This critical document will be updated next year, and include not only improved data, but a comprehensive social and environmental equity competent providing us with our best guide yet for preserving and expanding Seattle’s forests.

On a UFC note, we expanded our ranks this past year, incorporating three new positions. These new positions represent an ongoing effort to diversify the expertise represented on the UFC. We look forward to continuing to incorporate new perspectives in our work and will be looking for more community engagement opportunities as part of our 2019 work.

2018 Commission Members:

- Weston Brinkley, Chair: University Representative —Position #3
- Joanna Nelson de Flores, Vice-Chair: NGO Representative—Position #7
- Steve Zemke: Wildlife Biologist — Position #1
- Sandra Whiting: Urban Ecologist — Position #2
- Sarah Rehder: Hydrologist —Position #4
- Stuart Niven: Arborist—Position #5
- Michael Walton; Landscape Architect —Position #6
- Andrew Zellers: Development Community —Position #8
- Craig Johnson: Realtor —Position #9
- Bonnie Lei: Get Engaged — Position #10
- Whitman Bouton: Environmental Justice — Position #11
- Jessica Jones: Public Health — Position #12
- Shari Selch: Community/Neighborhood — Position #13

Contact:

Additional information about the Urban Forestry Commission can be found at www.seattle.gov/urbanforestrycommission, or by contacting:
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