



# 2020 URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# Update process

Our urban forest is fundamental to the character of Seattle and to our quality of life, especially as Seattle continues to grow. Seattle's urban forest represents a valuable asset that provides ecological, economic, and social benefits. It helps define the character of the city, supports Seattle's public health, provides habitat for wildlife, creates spaces for exploration and enjoyment, cleans our air and water, and reduces the quantity of stormwater runoff, further helping water quality.

The 2020 Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) provides a framework for policy and action that guides city government decision-making to help Seattle maintain, preserve, enhance, and restore its urban forest. The core of the plan is a set of outcomes, strategies, actions, and indicators that will support a healthy and sustainable urban forest across Seattle's publicly and privately owned land.

This Plan was developed by the City's Urban Forestry staff from across nine departments organized and coordinated through teams at different levels (Interdepartmental Team, Core Team and Management Team), collectively described in the rest of the document as the Urban Forestry Team. The original Urban Forest Management Plan was developed in 2007 and the City strives to update the plan every five years. Prior to the plan's development, the Urban Forestry Team worked with Seattle Public Utilities' Community Connections program and the Department of Neighborhoods' Community Liaisons program to engage native peoples, as well as the African American, East African, Chinese, and Latinx communities living in and around the Greater Seattle region.

Traditional stakeholder engagement was conducted through the Trees for Seattle newsletter, website, and social media channels; presentations to key groups such as the Urban Forestry Commission; listening sessions with key partner organizations; and an online feedback form that was translated to Chinese (traditional and simplified), Korean, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

Feedback received through these efforts was used to produce a draft plan. The team then shared draft goals, strategies, and actions with members of nine environmental-justice priority communities (African American, Chinese, disabled, East-African, Latinx, Native American, seniors, Southeast Asian Cham refugees and un-housed populations) to ensure initial input was captured accurately.

Input received informed action agenda priorities and prompted the project team to change technical language to make the plan more accessible. Elements that changed based on feedback include:

- Plan outcomes and strategies were modified to focus on racial and social equity.
- Actions were added to work on community-requested, ongoing engagement, better ways to keep community involved in urban forestry work, and more translation.
- A new climate-change strategy was added to better address the importance of this issue.





# Seattle's urban forestry today

Seattle has more than four million trees<sup>1</sup> and a diversity of understory plants. The urban forest occurs within a diverse range of environments, from natural areas with multi-story plants to downtown areas with individual trees planted in small tree-pits. Overall, Seattle's urban forest is a highly managed environment that has been profoundly shaped by its past and current residents and more recently by changes in climatic conditions. The urban forest is a critical infrastructure system, which works in concert with other infrastructure such as drains, pipes, sidewalks, and wires to deliver important services. It is estimated that the replacement value of Seattle's existing urban forest (the cost to re-plant trees and nurture them to their current size) is close to \$5 billion dollars.<sup>2</sup>

The presence of trees in an urban environment must be balanced with other citywide goals such as property rights, growth management, transportation, economic development, urban design, and the goals of property owners. A significant challenge faced by Seattle's urban forest is climate change. Trees both mitigate climate change and are affected by climate change. They absorb carbon dioxide and produce oxygen, but the changing weather (longer, drier summers, stronger storm events, etc.) has negative impacts on tree health, making them more susceptible to disease and pests.

# Managing the urban forest

The City of Seattle has a diversity of existing policies, programs, regulations, and incentives that are used to manage Seattle's urban forest. Nine City departments are engaged in Seattle's urban forestry work; each bring important expertise, perspective, and resources to this commitment—to the tune of nearly 100 city staff and over \$20 million annually. The Urban Forestry Team plants and cares for street trees, provides free trees for residents, protects and restores forested parklands, regulates the removal of trees, and promotes stewardship of the urban forest. Interdepartmental coordination is essential for effective management and consistent delivery of urban forestry programs.



<sup>1</sup> Green Cities Research Alliance, August 2012. Seattle's Forest Ecosystem Values. Analysis of the Structure, Function, and Economic Benefits.

<sup>2</sup> Green Cities Research Alliance, August 2012. Seattle's Forest Ecosystem Values. Analysis of the Structure, Function, and Economic Benefits.





## UFMP outcomes

The City's Urban Forestry Team developed a set of diverse, comprehensive outcomes to guide urban forestry work in the next five years. These outcomes were informed by an inclusive engagement process undertaken in preparation for this plan update.

- 1. Racial and social equity.** Urban forestry benefits and responsibilities are shared fairly across communities, community trust is built, and decisions are guided by diverse perspectives, including those of environmental justice priority communities.
- 2. Ecosystems and human health.** The urban forest improves air quality, human well-being, public health and water quality; provides beauty, environmental and economic benefits, fish and wildlife habitat, food, outdoor fun; and helps store rainwater.
- 3. Human safety and property protection.** In implementing the work, urban forestry teams use up-to-date practices to protect the safety of the public and staff.
- 4. Climate change.** Urban forestry work helps people and urban trees and vegetation adapt to, recover from, and mitigate the impacts of climate change.
- 5. Community care.** The Seattle community, including all people, organizations, institutions, and businesses, works together to appreciate and care for the urban forest and to understand tree protection regulations.
- 6. Balance competing priorities.** City government will work to grow, maintain, preserve, enhance, and restore Seattle's urban forest as it meets other priorities. Urban forestry practices and policies work with and support other City and community goals including access to spaces, climate action, appropriate resource provision, economic development, environmental protection, social justice, food and medicine production, housing, balancing tree shade with light, public safety, recreation, transportation, and utility provision.



# UFMP strategies

In order to meet the outcomes of this plan, seven overarching strategies were developed that represent a comprehensive approach to mobilizing informed and effective action. These strategies were used to develop the specific actions included in the action agenda.

1. Consider the needs of environmental justice priority communities in all urban forestry actions.
2. Identify and implement management actions that increase the urban forest's resilience to potential impacts, including climate change.
3. Understand the condition and complexity of the urban forest resource, how it was different in the past and how it may change in the future.
4. Coordinate communication, cooperation, and decisions within the City and with other agencies.
5. Inspire, inform, and work with the community to help care for Seattle's urban forest.
6. Preserve, restore, and enhance the urban forest on City property and rights-of-way.
7. Provide support to the community, via incentives and regulations, for keeping, removing, replacing, and planting trees.

## Action agenda

The action agenda outlines the steps that the City of Seattle and community partners will take to implement the UFMP. The action agenda was informed by the inclusive engagement process and reflects input provided by environmental justice priority communities (communities of color, immigrants, native peoples, refugees, people with low-incomes, youth, and individuals with limited-English proficiency), key stakeholders (such as home builders, freight, tree service providers, and tree advocates) and the public at large. Departmental workplans will provide additional details on those aspects of the urban forest that each department can manage. For example, Seattle Department of Transportation manages trees along our streets in the rights-of-way while Seattle Parks and Recreation has primary responsibility for the Developed Parks and Parks' Natural Areas Management Units.

City government will continue to perform key ongoing urban forestry work including:

- Planting trees throughout Seattle and complying with the City of Seattle Two-for-One tree replacement policy.
- Developing plans and strategies to manage the urban forest on City of Seattle natural landscapes and properties.
- Removing invasive plants from Seattle's forested parklands.
- Coordinating departmental work and collaborating on urban forestry citywide efforts.
- Updating initiatives and regulations in support of Seattle's urban forest.

The actions in the table below build on this ongoing work and will be the focus of this plan for implementation in the next five years.



**UFMP Action Agenda** The actions below are in addition to the ongoing work described above. (Priority actions are in bold font)

Action #	Action	Rationale	Dept. Lead
<b>Strategy 1: Consider first the needs of environmental justice priority communities in all urban forestry actions</b>			
1	<b>Create a program to improve access for people in environmental equity priority communities to internships, apprenticeships, and jobs in urban forestry</b>	BIPOC communities want to participate in urban forestry; the industry needs active change in order to create a robust, diverse pipeline both in the public and private sector	OSE
2	<b>Focus tree planting in environmental equity priority communities</b>	To mitigate disparities due to lower canopy cover existing in BIPOC communities	Core Team
3	<b>Focus tree, landscape, and natural area maintenance in environmental equity priority communities</b>	To mitigate disparities due to lower canopy cover existing in BIPOC communities	Core Team
4	Explore ways to support property owners and renters in environmental equity priority communities to plant and care for trees on private property	Tree maintenance requires specialized knowledge and can be expensive and burdensome. Support to BIPOC communities will enhance the quality of our urban forest on private property	Core Team
<b>Strategy 2: Identify and implement management actions that increase the urban forest's resilience to potential impacts, including climate change.</b>			
5	<b>Conduct a climate change vulnerability assessment to inform how the City's urban forestry work should respond to a changing climate, including increasing droughts and pests</b>	A vulnerability assessment for our urban forestry work will identify, quantify, and prioritize/rank the weaknesses in the system. Specific actions will support resiliency in Seattle's urban forest	SPR, SDOT
6	Develop a list of tree species resilient to climate change and pests	Diversity of species, especially those resilient to climate change will improve the resiliency of our urban trees individually and as forest stands	Core Team
7	Explore ways to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from urban forestry work	City departments will coordinate to reduce negative impacts from our urban forestry operations (e.g. reduce excess or duplicated driving, acquire more efficient equipment types, etc.)	Core Team
<b>Strategy 3: Understand the condition and complexity of the urban forest resource, how it was different in the past and how it may change in the future</b>			
8	<b>Perform a citywide canopy cover assessment every five years. Compare the results to previous estimates to understand what has changed</b>	Frequent assessments will provide canopy cover change over time data and help monitor progress towards our goals	OSE
<b>Strategy 4: Coordinate communication, cooperation, and decisions within the City and with other agencies</b>			
9	Continue support of the Urban Forestry Core Team as the key coordination group for City-wide inter-departmental urban forestry work	Interdepartmental coordination is key to providing enhanced customer service and provide timely technical expertise to the City	Core Team
10	Enhance coordination with federal, state, county, and local jurisdictions, and with landowner institutions such as Port of Seattle, Seattle Public Schools, hospitals, and universities	The complex ownership landscape of property in Seattle requires enhanced coordination around urban forestry actions and decisions	Core Team

## UFMP Action Agenda (continued)

Action #	Action	Rationale	Dept. Lead
<b>Strategy 5: Inspire, inform, and work with the community to help care for Seattle's urban forest</b>			
11	<b>Create a citywide urban forestry communication strategy that will identify better ways to share information with environmental equity communities about volunteer opportunities, tree care information, regulations, incentives, and winter storms. This strategy should have a special emphasis on Native American communities.</b>	Throughout the inclusive engagement for the plan update BIPOC communities expressed interest in being included in all aspects of the City's urban forestry work and efforts	Core Team
12	Expand volunteer programs focused on elders and children	The inclusive engagement process confirmed a need to broaden our volunteer programs to be more accessible to elders and children in BIPOC communities	Trees for Seattle
13	Explore the impact of trees on allergies and opportunities to reduce tree-produced allergies	This was a concern identified by the Chinese Information Service Center	Core Team
<b>Strategy 6: Preserve, restore, and enhance the urban forest on City property and the right-of-way</b>			
14	Support citywide efforts to find long-term solutions to homeless encampments in urban forests	Unintended consequences of unhoused populations encampments in forested areas include negative impacts to restoration efforts and tree health.	Core Team
15	Explore solutions for conflicts between tree roots and sidewalks that support the needs of people with disabilities	Tree roots sometimes cause sidewalks to get out of compliance with the American with Disabilities Act requirements. Finding creative solutions for these conflicts is key for responsible management of our street trees	SDOT
<b>Strategy 7: Provide support to the community, via incentives and regulations, for keeping, removing, replacing, and planting trees</b>			
16	<b>Update the City's tree protection regulations</b>	<b>Most of our trees are on private property (67% of the land is residential and represents 72% of our canopy). Effective protection for trees on private property is a key element of our citywide strategy to keep Seattle livable especially as we continue to grow</b>	<b>SDCI</b>
17	Explore ways to help property owners remove invasive plants and pests on private land	The City's Green Seattle Partnership has and continues to invest resources to free our forested parklands from invasive plants and pests. When such species exist on private property, they migrate to our restored acres negating our investment	Core Team
18	Explore ways to help property owners manage unimproved rights-of-way next to their property	Unimproved rights-of-way present an opportunity to increase our tree canopy.	Core Team
19	Explore ways to increase canopy (tree) cover in industrial areas	Based on SDOT's updated inventory, opportunities for street tree planting in industrial areas will mitigate air quality and heat island effect in areas with reduced or no tree canopy	SDOT



**trees**   
*for* **seattle**