

**DRAFT – UFC Recommendation on Tree Pruning to accommodate Seafair’s
Torch Light parade
5-4-11 v.2**

Mayor Michael McGinn
Council President Richard Conlin
Seattle City Hall
Seattle, WA 98124

RE: Seafair’s Torch Light Parade and Seattle’s urban forest

Dear Mayor/Dear President Conlin,

As you know, Seattle is actively working on increasing its canopy cover in order to maximize the many benefits urban trees provide. Canopy cover goals are included in both the Comprehensive Plan and in the Urban Forest Management Plan. The Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team and the Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) have been working hard over the past years to support progress toward these goals. We have made much progress, but have a ways to go.

Last February, SDOT sent a letter to Ms. Beth Knox, Seafair’s CEO and President. The letter stated that SDOT would not be pruning or tying back trees along Fourth Avenue to accommodate the balloons in the Torchlight Parade in 2011 or in the future. The UFC was supportive of SDOT’s position. The UFC has now been informed that SDOT will actually prune and tie trees back to accommodate the parade this year.

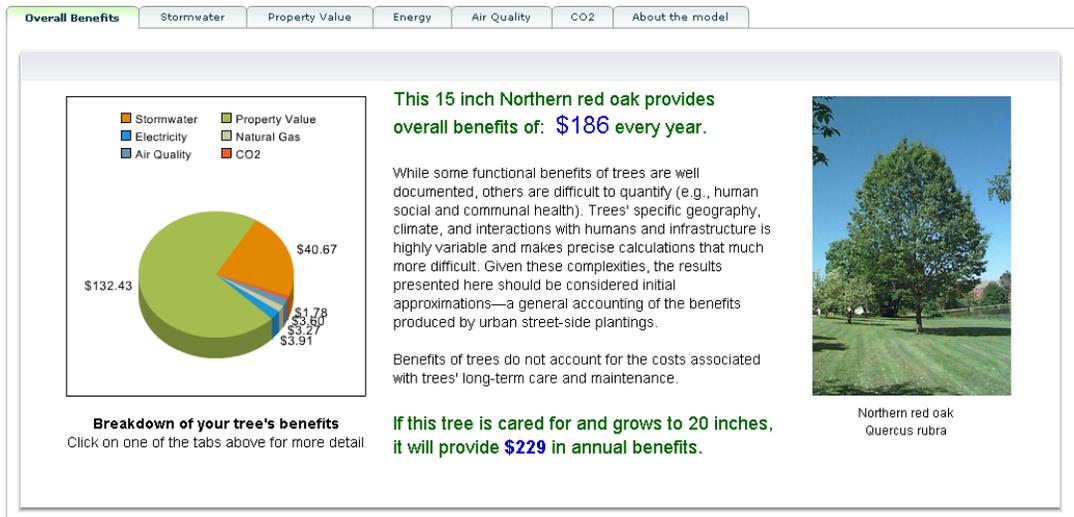
The UFC is concerned that pruning and tying back trees will cause irreparable long-term damage to the trees. The loss of canopy will cause stress to the trees, depriving the trees of leaves (the trees’ food source) and inflicting wounds which could open up the trees to infection by pests and disease. The trees may require more frequent pruning in future years if the trees react poorly to this work by sending out weakly attached sprouts. The UFC does not believe it is sound policy to spend taxpayer dollars and allow practices that have negative long term effects, for short-term purposes UFC believes the parade could be re-routed to a street where there would be no conflict with the trees, thus meeting the needs of Seafair while protecting the investment Seattle has made in these trees.

Many of the trees proposed to be pruned are mature, healthy Northern red oaks. The City has spent significant resources over the years on planting, establishment, and maintenance of these trees (include cost to plant a tree in a downtown sidewalk?). People travel from all over the world to visit the Emerald City, and expect to see healthy mature trees in our downtown corridor. They are a community asset that shades our downtown streets, traps stormwater runoff that would otherwise spill into Puget Sound, encourages pedestrians to walk, and provides many other benefits to Seattle.

Furthermore, compromising the health and structural soundness of trees in the public right-of-way might open the City up for liability in the future if hazards were created due to the resulting poor structure of the tree which has the potential to damage private property or life.

It is our recommendation to work with the Seafair organization to find a more appropriate and sustainable route for its parade, such as Sixth Avenue.

First and foremost we feel these trees should not be pruned to accommodate the parade, but if SDOT moves forward with the work, there should be assurances that Seafair pays the full costs of the work. Also, we feel Seafair should establish a mitigation fund to replace any trees that are damaged or need to be removed in subsequent years because of excessive pruning.



Thank you for your consideration

Cc