

SEATTLE URBAN FORESTRY COMMISSION

Tom Early, Chair • Steve Zemke, Vice-Chair
Weston Brinkley • Leif Fixen • Reid Haefer • Donna Kostka • Richard Martin • Joanna Nelson de Flores
Erik Rundell • Andrew Zellers

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

October 12, 2016

Meeting Notes

Seattle Municipal Tower, Room 2750 (27th floor)
700 5th Avenue, Seattle

Attending

Commissioners

Steve Zemke – vice-chair
Reid Haefer
Donna Kostka
Joanna Nelson de Flores
Erik Rundell
Andrew Zellers

Staff

Sandra Pinto de Bader - OSE
Robert Stowers- Parks
Sarah Calvillo-Hoffman - FAS

Absent- Excused

Tom Early – chair
Weston Brinkley
Leif Fixen
Richard Martin

Public

Linda Murtfeldt – Seattle Audubon

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

Steve called the meeting to order, read the Commission’s mission and the agenda.

Public comment

none

Finance and Administration Services

The Resource Conservation Advisor for FAS, Sarah Calvillo-Hoffman, is a member of the Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team. The Department of Finance and Administrative Services (FAS) is a very broad department that provides many internal services and owns and manages many of the City government properties (there are around 136), including City Hall, Seattle Municipal Tower, the Justice Center, and around 154 vacant lots and surplus sites. FAS has no formal urban forestry (UF) program. Don’t have dedicated budget for tree management. Don’t have tree management staff. Have one landscape manager that takes care of things such as watering plants in buildings but doesn’t have tree-specific duties. The department doesn’t have a dedicated arborist for the purpose of UF management. Use services of Parks and

SDOT, sometimes use Seattle Conservation Corps. Vendors tend to get paid through direct voucher, which makes it hard to track how much is spent/year. If something happens around trees the budget comes from the actively managed properties budget. Trees are removed if they are hazardous, or considered a safety concern, and they tend to learn about those issues through tenants and constituents.

UFC question: How many acres does FAS manage?

Answer: We don't track by acre. We use sqft and I can get that information for you.

Challenges include issues with invasive plants in vacant properties. They don't learn about how bad some areas are until there is an issue such as a tree falls on private property. There is no budget for ivy removal. Sometimes they learn about issues when a constituent brings them forward. Blackberry and morning glory are also an issue. It's very likely that most of the vacant properties are in the same situation. Even some of their actively managed properties continue to have invasive plant problems. They remove invasive plants and they get re-established.

UFC question: are you aware of Japanese knot-weed that requires chemical treatment?

Answer: Yes, I know about knot-weed but it has not come back to me from property managers that we have any in our properties.

Sarah showed photos of three properties that have experienced challenges such as trees falling on private property. They have a lot of property on steep slope that is invaded by ivy, blackberry and morning glory.

UFC question: can you say that you don't know what the budget spent on UF is?

Answer: we can put a number to it, it would take quite a bit of effort. It comes out of the GF and I don't think it would be accurate.

UFC question: part of the problem is being able to fully grasp how much trees are a part of the properties. The UFC is trying to learn about challenges and help departments. Maybe recommend having a line-item included in FAS' budget to support UF?

Answer: they are considering hiring an arborist to assess surplus properties before they get sold. Doing a thorough survey of all the properties would be necessary to get a clear understanding of the situation and begin addressing it.

UFC question: Have you asked Council for funding?

Answer: no

UFC question: is there interest?

Answer: there is no one leading this piece internally.

UFC question: if the UFC were to make a recommendation to provide funding, would there be interest?

Answer: Absolutely!

UFC question: are any of your properties impacted by people camping there?

Answer: we have properties that include the shelter. FAS is not involved in the cleanup of encampments.

I can't respond specifically to whether or not there are encampments in our properties beyond police and fire stations. Some areas are closed and secured. Some properties are actively managed. Some with more opportunities for trees. Many times fire and police don't want trees because they consider them security issues.

UFC question: what's the status of some of the surplus locations. Could they be used for homeless encampments.

Answer: I suspect that many surplus sites that are in slopes that would be unsafe. We have many tiny pieces of property that might not present opportunities for tree planting or locations for encampments.

UFC question: are there any buildings that are not being used that could be used as shelters?

Answer: there was an old fire station up north that used to be a homeless encampment. Mary's Place is leasing land where the north precinct is. There are a lot of fixes that would need to happen in some properties before they would be suitable to be inhabited.

We could track down amounts paid to either SDOT or Parks to remove a tree and plant two-for-one. Typically, there is a two-year span between removal and re-planting. Often times when we remove a tree from an actively managed property, the preference is to plant the new trees on Parks property. A frustrating thing is that there is no policy around trees in our properties. There would need to be a leadership initiative on this. Many of the properties have odd shapes and are tiny (not developable).

UFC question: any figures you can provide in terms of acres, # of properties, would be helpful. There should be an inventory of properties and a line item to maintain trees.

Answer: Don't have an arborist on staff. Assessing the situation of our properties would make sense. I will provide list of surplus stations.

Homeless encampments impacts on Parks

Robert Stowers from Parks and Recreation briefed the Commission. This week they have been tackling the issue of encampments under I-5. Parks has been in the encampment cleanup business for over 20 years. It was never budgeted. Parks took it on because they had to.

FAS does have the central coordination of encampments now. They are in charge of the multi-jurisdictional entity that coordinates and facilitates encampment cleanup effort.

Current situation:

- 4,000 to 5,000 persons homeless in Seattle sleeping on our sidewalks, our parks, green spaces, and urban forests
- There are multiple causes:
 - o Lack of housing
 - o Unemployment
 - o Mental health issues
 - o Addictions, alcoholism and drugs

There has been a tremendous increase in homelessness and encampments which has caused more interest by City leaders and homeless advocates, including:

- A concern that the current protocol promotes continuing movement of campers and promotes more instability in their life.
- A need to change the MDAR process to stop the uprooting of campers
- A greater interest in sheltering the homeless, and
- An interest in housing first.

History of encampments:

In the early 2000s, after an ongoing rise in homelessness in Seattle, the Mayor and Council appointed residents, business leaders, and advocates to a Taskforce. This was done 15 years ago. The idea was to develop a protocol on how to approach the handling of encampments on public land. After the task force completed its work it created a protocol called the Multi-department Administrative Rules of Encampments, or MDAR.

Mayor encampment issues in the urban forest areas and hot spots:

- East Duwamish Greenbelt – the Jungle – from late 1990s through 2012
- East Duwamish greenbelt – Bayview – from 2013 led to a major cleanup and restoration efforts
- Cheasty Greenbelt – mole man caused severe destruction and major trash dumping
- West Duwamish Greenbelt – major cleanups through 2015
- Mineral springs
- East and west Queen Anne Greenbelts
- Louisa Boren park
- Magnuson Park
- Arboretum
- Thornton Creek

Multi-department Administrative Rules (MDAR)

The MDAR establish a sequential set of rules or protocol on the handling of encampment on City-owned public lands including Parks lands. The MDAR includes a database (SERIS) that tracks the posting, outreach and removal of encampments (defined as three or more tents or structures).

Multi-disciplinary operation team (MDOT)

In late 2014 the Mayor’s Office along with City departments sought a coordinating agency to provide facilitation and outreach to departments reporting encampments. They selected FAS to be that agency. Its role was to work with City departments to set up outreach services to the encamped. In some cases, they contract vendors and using FAS staff to clean encampments.

Recommended solution:

Currently there following is at work on finding solutions:

- The Mayor has developed a Pathway to Housing initiative
- City Council has established a task force to revamp the MDAR protocol
- The Mayor established a temporary amendment to the MDAR
- The ACLU has introduced legislation to allow encampments in public places and parks.

The modification of the ordinance is to back away from wholesale opening parks. They are going to determine if a location is “unsuitable” or “not unsuitable.” they are trying to define areas that unsuitable or dangerous, leaving the rest to be defined as not unsuitable. Council is re-thinking the approach and the Mayor is likely to veto.

Steve had a very brief conversation with CM Herbold where Steve expressed that there is concern about opening parks and parkland to camping. She said that they are making mayor changes to it.

Parks has issued a statement saying that they are against allowing camping on parks property. The Mayor still asked them to work on determining what areas are not suitable and not-unsuitable.

UFC question: how much of this is SDOT vs. WSDOT. And what is WSDOT position on this.

Answer: under I-5 they are cleaning to build road and put up a fence and will be likely monitoring constantly.

Steve proposes that the UFC vote on whether they want to take a position or not. This impacts a lot of the urban forest in Seattle. Coming up with a brief letter saying the UFC is very concerned and that the UFC believes that opening parks lands will create a lot of chaos might be appropriate.

Donna made a motion for the UFC to write a letter to oppose allowing encampments on any city park or natural area. The motion was seconded. The motion passed. Joanna would like to lead with compassion for the people and written in a way that can be heard.

UFC question: what would be other options?

Answer: they have been talking about SDOT street ends.

UFC comment: maybe we need to include this in a ballot.

Answer: many property deeds specify that properties can only be used for parks. That would probably bring law suits.

UFC question: where is the information captured?

Answer: The Customer Service Bureau puts out every week a report about homeless encampments.

ACTION: A motion to write a letter opposing the idea of opening encampments on parks and forested lands was made, seconded, and approved.

The Commission spent the remainder of the meeting working on this letter.

Backyard Cottage/DADU discussion ad possible vote

Moved to next meeting.

Public comment:

None

New Business:

None

Adjourn**Public input:**

From: Linda Murtfeldt [mailto:lindamurt@yahoo.com]

Sent: Friday, October 14, 2016 3:23 PM

To: Pinto de Bader, Sandra <Sandra.Pinto_de_Bader@Seattle.gov>

Subject: RE: Camping in Parks letter for City Council from Seattle Audubon

Hi Sandra. Just received the OK for you to share the Audubon letter with the Commission. Thanks for waiting.

Linda

----- Forwarded Message -----

From: Mary Bond <maryb@seattleaudubon.org>

To: Conservation Committee <Conservation@seattleaudubon.org>

Sent: Thursday, October 13, 2016 5:07 PM

Subject: Camping in Parks letter

Hi all,

With help from the Seattle Nature Alliance, Connie Sidles, shop volunteer Alison Wysong, and our new Americorps volunteer Nadine Youssef-Hatch, John Brosnan and I sent the following letter to the nine Seattle City Councilmembers regarding CB 118794, the ordinance that would allow some camping in city parks. Thanks for your encouragement! -Mary Bond

Dear Councilmember X,

Seattle Audubon encourages you to reject the proposed homeless encampment ordinance and amendments. We believe that undeveloped areas in our city parks and open spaces provide essential services for residents and wildlife alike. Allowing camping in these areas would be a short-sighted response to the very serious long-term problems of housing and homelessness in Seattle.

For 100 years, Seattle Audubon has led a local community in appreciating, understanding, and protecting birds and their natural habitats. As many as 109 bird species rely on our healthy urban environment to sustain them – to say nothing of migratory visitors. Having reliable greenways for birds to forage and rest in during migration is especially critical in urban areas.

We must protect our urban forests and open spaces from high-impact use so they will remain healthy ecosystems for our current residents and for future generations of people and wildlife.

Seattle Audubon's work engages Seattle's diverse communities and empowers citizens to restore healthy bird habitats and build more resilient natural systems in the face of climate change. We have a deep respect for the years of land-use planning and boots-on-the-ground restoration efforts that Seattle Parks, the Green Seattle Partnership, Earthcorps, Forterra, Friends of the Burke-Gilman Trail, and generations of volunteers have accomplished in our city parks and natural areas.

Seattle Audubon believes that the City of Seattle and King County should devote their considerable resources to addressing the needs of people experiencing homelessness in our region, but not at the expense of our area's parks and natural areas. If public lands are needed for encampments, the City should select defined areas that would be able to withstand high-impact use—not parks and natural areas. As a city and as individuals, we should have more compassion for people experiencing homelessness and should do much more to help solve this crisis. If our urban forests are deemed suitable places for camping, the City Council would be setting up nature preservation and homeless advocacy as opposing causes, when in fact many people have and do support both. City leaders can and should solve the housing crisis without turning to our urban forests.

Thank you.
John Brosnan
Executive Director
Seattle Audubon
8050 35th Avenue NE
Seattle, WA 98115
206-523-8243
johnb@seattleaudubon.org

From: cassturnbull@comcast.net [mailto:cassturnbull@comcast.net]
Sent: Thursday, October 20, 2016 7:56 AM
To: Pinto de Bader, Sandra <Sandra.Pinto_de_Bader@Seattle.gov>
Subject: The FAS report.

Sandra,
If it is allowed, please forward these comments to the Commission.

I have now listened in to several presentations to the Commission prepared by various departments and agencies. I am struck by two things--1) The commission poses great questions and 2) how presenters tend to leave out information or gloss over important issues.

The UW urban forestry plan presentation made no mention of the controversy regarding the recent intrusion into Kincade Ravine--a critical area--by building into it when the proposed structure could have been taller instead. It would have saved more than 80 trees. The presentor just said something like, 'we dont have anybody to do a survey of the Kincade area' (???!!!) So there is no policy for it.' It is a heavily forested, natural area of considerable size.

FAS obscured the fact that there are lots of unbuilt, unwooded areas and also built upon surplus propertied that could be suitable for homeless encampments and temporary shelter. I know of several. One is the ROY Street Shops in south lake union. It is a full City block long. Half of it is a parking lot, half is an old warehouse that was used by Parks up until a few years ago. There is a chainlink fence around the lot. There may be some asbestos or other residual contaminants that make the City fearful of lawsuits. But the homeless will presumably be there temporarily which would limit exposure. How likely are they to sue? Is it really worse than living in lawless jungles, with no water or plumbing? Often located next to other contaminated areas like railroad land and under bridges.

And don't get me started on how DPD determined there will be no environmental impact on the inclusion of more DADUs in our growth plans. We were never told the timespan used to make the determination, only that they are not looking at the cumulative impact 50 years hence.

And the premise was that the rate of building DADUs after adding incentives would continue at the same pace

as before the proposed changes. It simply doesn't make sense.

Just saying. I think the UFS is wise to consider comments from folks outside the system in order to get the most objective picture of urban forestry issues. It is natural to avoid opening 'the can of worms' when reporting on ones's own programs, I realize. So, no hard feelings. We just need to look for the hidden dragons.

Thanks for allowing me to be one of those commentors.

Cass Turnbull
TreePAPlantAmnesty

Sent from my smarty pants phone. Peas excuse any missing letters