Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

July 12, 2012

Lisa Rutzick
Department of Planning and Development
PO Box 34019
Seattle, WA 98124-4019

RE: Urban Forestry Commission input to Design Guidelines

Dear Lisa,

The Urban Forestry Commission was created to advise the Mayor and City Council on urban forestry policy. The Commission works closely with the City's Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team to ensure implementation of the Urban Forest Management Plan goals, including the goal to reach 30% canopy cover by 2037.

Trees are an important infrastructure element within the City of Seattle due to their role in promoting social, economic, and environmental health. In particular, trees manage stormwater by capturing and slowing rain; filter air pollution; provide food and habitat; and contribute to the character and aesthetic beauty of our neighborhoods and business districts.

The Commission believes that making reference to the urban forest in general and trees in particular will strengthen existing Design Guidelines and provide additional opportunities for increasing Seattle's canopy cover.

Introduction (page ii)
What is Design Excellence?

"…This is reflected in choices made about materials, building assembly techniques, ongoing maintenance, and the type of energy used for heating, ventilation, and cooling. Finally, a project's contribution to the public realm, not only in terms of the building itself but also in side development, landscape, and public open space and amenity can be a measure of design excellence as well. The Seattle Design Guidelines…"

What do we Value in the Built Environment? (page iii)

- "…Design that preserves, reflects, or takes inspiration from the physical environment of hills, water, forests, and mountains that comprise the extraordinary setting surrounding Seattle;"

CS1 – Natural Systems and Site Features
B. Sunlight and Natural Ventilation (page 2)
"3. Managing Solar Gain: Manage direct sunlight falling on south and west facing facades through shading devices and ~~planting of deciduous~~ existing or newly planted trees."

D. Plants and Habitat (page 3)
"1. On-site Features: Incorporate on-site urban forest habitats and landscape elements including existing trees, tree groves, or vegetation into project design and connect those features to existing networks of ~~public~~ open spaces and urban forest habitats wherever possible. Consider relocating significant trees and vegetation if retention is not feasible."

2. Off-site Features: Provide opportunities through design to link with off-site habitats such as riparian corridors or existing urban forest corridors. Avoid fragmenting habitat and increase interconnected corridors of urban forest and habitat where possible.

E. Water
"2. Adding Interest with Project Drainage: Consider using project drainage systems as opportunities to add interest to the site through water-related design elements. Features such as trees, rain gardens, bioswales, green roofs, fountains of recycled water, and/or water art installations can create movement and sound, air cooling, focal points for pedestrians, and habitats which may already be required to manage on-site stormwater and allow reuse of potable water for irrigation."

CS2 – Urban Pattern and Form (page 4)
A. Location in the City and Neighborhood
"1. Sense of Place: Emphasize attributes that give Seattle, the neighborhood, and/or the site its distinctive sense of place. Examples include patterns of streets or blocks; slopes; sites with prominent visibility, relationships to bodies of water or significant trees, natural areas, or open spaces, iconic buildings…"

B. Adjacent Sites, Streets, and Open Spaces (page 4)
"2. Connection to the Street: Identify opportunities for the project to make a strong connection to the street. Consider the qualities and character of the streetscape –its sidewalk, parking, landscape strip, street trees, travel lanes, and other amenities- in siting and designing the building"

"3. Character of Open Space: Contribute to the character and proportion of surrounding open spaces. Evaluate adjacent sites, streetscapes , trees, vegetation, and open spaces for how they function as the walls and floor of outdoor spaces or 'rooms' for public use to determine how best to support those spaces through project siting and design~~.~~ (e.g. using mature trees to frame views of architecture or other prominent features.)"

PL1 – Open Space Connectivity (page 8)
A. A Network of Public Spaces

"2. Adding to Public Life: Look for opportunities to increase the size and/or quality of the physical space available for public life. Consider features such as widened sidewalks, recessed entries, curb bulbs, courtyards, plazas, or through routes~~.~~ along with place-making elements such as trees, landscape, public art, or other amenities."

B. Walkways and Connections (page 8)
"3. Pedestrian Amenities: Provide pedestrian amenities where necessary to enliven the area and attract interest and interaction with the side and building. Examples of pedestrian amenities include seating and other street furniture, lighting, trees, landscaping, pedestrian scale signage, site furniture, art work, and/or kiosks."

C. Outdoor Uses and Activities (page 9)
"3. Year-Around Activity: Where possible, include features…. These may include:
…d. An extra level of pedestrian lighting.
e. Trees for moderate weather protection and shade"

PL3 – Street-Level Interaction
A. Entries (page 12)
"2 Ensemble of Elements: Design the entry…
…c. Ground surface: seating walls; special paving, landscaping, trees, lighting; and…"

DC1 – Project Uses and Activities
C. Parking and Service Uses (page 18)
…2. Visual Impacts: Reduce the visual impacts of parking lots, structures, entrances, and related signs and equipment as much as possible. Consider breaking large parking lots into smaller lots, and/or provide trees, attractive landscaping or fencing as a screen…"

DC2 – Architectural Concept
C. Secondary Architectural Features (page 20)
…3. Fit with Neighboring Buildings: Use design elements to achieve a successful fit between a building and its neighbors, such as:
…b. Using trees, landscaping or other screening to buffer the building from its neighbors, and/or…

DC3 – Open Space Concept
C. Design (page 22)
"1. Reinforce Existing Open Space: Where a strong open space concept exists in the neighborhood, reinforce existing character and patterns of ~~street~~ neighborhood tree planting, buffers or…
…3. Support Natural Areas: Consider an open space design that retains and enhances on-site natural areas and connects to natural areas that may exist off-site and may provide urban forest habitat for ~~urban~~ wildlife…."

DC4 – Exterior Elements and Finishes
D. Trees, Landscape, and Hardscape Materials (page 24)

"…3. Long Range Planning: Select plants that upon maturity will be of appropriate size, scale, and shape to contribute to the site as intended. It may be necessary to create a landscaping plan for various stages of plant maturity, such as 5, 10, and 20 year plans in order to ensure the landscaping will perform and function as needed over the life of the project. Consider tree canopy coverage and the goals of the Urban Forest Management Plan.

4. Place Making: Create a landscape design that helps define spaces with significant elements such as trees."

Thank you for the opportunity to comment as your update existing Design Guidelines.

Sincerely,

Matt Mega, Chair
Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

Jeff Reibman,
Urban Forestry Commissioner

cc: Mayor Michael McGinn, Council President Clark, Councilmember Bagshaw, Councilmember Burgess, Councilmember Conlin, Councilmember Godden, Councilmember Harrell, Councilmember Licata, Councilmember Rasmussen, Councilmember O'Brien, Diane Sugimura, Jill Simmons, Marshall Foster, Michael Podowski, Michael Jenkins, Christa Valles

Sandra Pinto de Bader, Urban Forestry Commission Coordinator
City of Seattle, Office of Sustainability & Environment
PO Box 94729 Seattle, WA 98124-4729 Tel: 206-684-3194 Fax: 206-684-3013
www.seattle.gov/UrbanForestryCommission