



**Urban Forestry Commission briefing
September 14, 2011**

Green Seattle Partnership: Building community to restore our forested parklands

Seattle's forest is dying

Without direct intervention, 70% of the forest canopy in our parks could be dead within 20 years. Our big trees are nearing the end of their natural lives, and invasive species like English ivy are smothering healthy, mature trees and choking out the seedlings that should replace them. This loss has significant costs. The forests in our parks provide more than \$10 million of value every year by managing storm water, cleaning our air and water, raising our property values, and sequestering carbon.

The Green Seattle Partnership is part of the solution

The Green Seattle Partnership is a unique public-private venture dedicated to promoting a livable city by re-establishing and maintaining healthy urban forests. Formed in 2004 by a Memorandum of Agreement between the City of Seattle and Cascade Land Conservancy (CLC), the Green Seattle Partnership (GSP) is a one-time, 20-year investment in the restoration of our forested parklands. The GSP's goal is to restore 2,500 acres by 2025.

We celebrate GSP's accomplishments to date:

- Over 415,000 volunteer hours (representing more than 250 full time employees)
- Over 100 people directly adopted 70 parks
- The Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks) has invested over \$6.8 million
- CLC has raised over \$2.75 million
- SPU has invested approximately \$650k
- OSE continues to actively participate in the Partnership
- We have proven this stewardship model works: 600 acres are in restoration

Almost every day of the year, neighborhood, business, nonprofit, school, and religious groups turn out to take ownership for the restoration of our forested green spaces. While volunteers are planting native trees, there is something else growing too: pride of place. The Green Seattle Partnership strengthens our communities and improves our quality of life by connecting people to nearby nature and their neighbors.

We are at a critical juncture

After six successful years, the Partnership is at a critical juncture. The GSP has become one of the largest efforts of its kind in the state, if not the country, primarily because of the tireless investment of citizens, community leaders, agencies, non-profits, companies, and the City. With all its accomplishments, this community investment will be lost in two to five years if the City cannot find sustainable funding.

Funding at the scale necessary (\$4 million per year) will require direct political support from both the community and the City of Seattle.

Some of the main issues GSP is facing are:

- Cumulative Reserve Fund and Parks Levy Funding beyond 2012 is in doubt
- CLC budget for GSP is decreasing. CLC fulfilled their original private fundraising commitment and will no longer be raising funds for GSP at the same level
- Forests represent 50% of Parks land and receive less than 2% of the annual Parks budget
- Volunteers require one paid staff support hour for each four hours of volunteerism
- Parks trees are 20% of the city's overall canopy and their canopy cover declined 2.5% between 2003 and 2007, while the city as a whole remained constant
- If the forest is not restored our creeks and larger water ways will be degraded by increased uncontrolled stormwater.

Seattle's forested parklands are at risk of losing all that has been gained by the GSP if a dedicated funding source is not secured in the next two years. Without a funding commitment from the City for the GSP, we risk losing the confidence and energy of hundreds of dedicated community members that have volunteered their time to help restore our forests. The GSP relies on a network of resources and commitment from all partners to survive. The GSP is not an "outside" entity; the City has played a critical role in the Partnership's success to date, and it is important that City support and participation continues.

Our public commitment needs to grow

After thousands of events and six very successful years, it is clear the limiting resource is not volunteer commitment, or even private philanthropy; it's sustainable public funding. The volunteer and community contributions have been leveraged by more than \$8 million spent by the City of Seattle. The Green Seattle Partnership currently stands as the most visible and successful model of public-private partnership in the region. However, its future is uncertain without dedicated funding.