

# Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

John Floberg, Chair • John Small, Vice-Chair

Gordon Bradley • Tom Early • Leif Fixen • Matt Mega • Jeff Reibman • Erik Rundell • Peg Staeheli

May 15, 2013.

Janet Oslund  
Department of Planning and Development  
City of Seattle  
700 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2000  
Seattle, WA 98124

RE: Tree Preservation Protocols for Small Development Projects

Dear Janet,

The Urban Forestry Commission has heard from several members of the public regarding the loss of trees in small development projects. Specifically the concern is regarding trees that are shown in permitted plans to be retained yet once under construction are either outright removed or effectively removed by damage. The Commission had a very good discussion with you and Art Pederson in March regarding plan review and construction inspection. The Commission's follow up discussion leads us to recommend that DPD review procedures and staff training regarding criteria and methods to retain trees for projects under development. In our discussion with DPD staff and the community several recommendations arose indicating that CAM's 103, 103A, 106 and 242 (and others as relevant) should be updated. As part of that update the following should be considered:

## **1- DPD Plan Review Process**

- a. Site visit:
  - i. Inspector's site photos of subject trees should be from all four directions as feasible. Other photos should reflect the full property, including neighboring trees.
  - ii. Inspection site visit should include a rough estimate of tree diameter so that the inspector can later evaluate the conditions shown on the submitted site plan. If tree appears close to exceptional size then it should be assumed exceptional until an arborist evaluates.
  - iii. Multiple trunk trees should be identified as such to understand their value.
- b. Site Plan(s): DPD staff discussed changes to the "landscape improvement checklist" The commission recommends the following in addition to what might be shown on site and applicable civil and landscape plans.
  - i. Show drip line of all trees retained including trees on adjacent property that have drip lines within the project area on all site plan sheets
  - ii. Show the tree trunk "in scale" on the site plans.

- iii. Include a signed statement by the Landscape Architect or Certified Arborist that they believe the site plan provides accommodation for tree preservation.
  - iv. Indicate on the erosion control plan all retained trees with delineated protection fencing or other approved protection approach. If a project does not have an erosion control plan then the civil site plans should show the tree protection fence and the plan should include notes indicating no excavation within the tree drip line.
  - v. Provide a section showing how the proposed grades address existing trees on slopes. This section will improve DPD's reviews related to the tree's location with respect to site and building excavation.
  - vi. Review DPD's standard notes to improve the protocols for tree protection.
  - vii. Label trees being credited for green factor; exceptional trees and other (non-required) trees saved on all site plan sheets.
- c. Landscape Plan review: We suggest that project plans showing tree preservation especially exceptional trees be reviewed by SDOT's urban forestry staff. (See also staff training #4 below.)
- d. Green Factor and tree retention: When Green Factor was updated in 2010, the Commission questioned the impact on existing trees. We recommend Green Factor Value for existing trees be reviewed and possibly look at stronger mitigation requirements.
- e. Exceptional trees: The delay in the new DPD Tree Ordinance is impacting tree preservation as there is question on interpretation. If a tree is "exceptional" the tree should be retained. If removed, the mitigation should reflect the value of the tree.
- f. Construction:
- i. Encourage DPD to implement tree protection signs similar to SDOT's that are visible both to the public and to the construction crew.
  - ii. Tree protection fencing should be installed prior to start of work – consistent with erosion control in place. This should be added to pre-construction check list.
  - iii. Root zone protection: This is an important part in tree preservation. The requirements should include a 4-8 inch layer of hog fuel placed over the root zone to protect the roots from compaction during construction.
- g. Easements or other mechanisms: If a project site plan that has been approved for development indicates a retained tree then a mechanism to facilitate keeping the parcel in compliance should be implemented. This mechanism could define a surface area that must be maintained to allow a comparable tree species to grow to maturity on the property or an equivalent fee-in-lieu. This approach works towards meeting the City's long term canopy goal.

## **2- Fines for Damage or Removal**

- a. Removal of trees intended to be saved should come with significant penalties.
- b. Replacement trees should be of species with similar canopy and height.

**3- Mitigation alternative**

- a. Reduce the time in the Design Review Process (current mitigation is a two-month process) if a property is attempting to save a tree and requests code exemptions.
- b. Provide a mechanism for off-site mitigation such as fee-in-lieu toward Green Seattle Partnership or other fund to plant trees.

**4- Staff training**

- a. Improve site plan training regarding tree protection for review staff. Suggest a staff brown bag or other training at least once per year.
- b. Include staff arborist in plan reviews for trees being retained; mandatory if tree is getting Green Factor credit or is exceptional.

The Commission recognizes the difficulty of evaluating trees being preserved under the variety of project types. We hope reviewing the areas identified in these recommendations will improve Seattle's success with tree retention and mature tree preservation as well as improve certainty in the process for the small parcel development community.

Sincerely,



John Floberg, Chair  
Seattle Urban Forestry Commission



Peg Staeheli  
Urban Forestry Commissioner

cc: Mayor Mike 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, Phyllis Shulman, Michael Jenkins, Meg Moorehead, Christa Valles

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