

Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

Peg Staeheli, Chair • Tom Early, Vice-Chair

Gordon Bradley • Leif Fixen • Donna Kostka • Jeff Reibman • Erik Rundell • Steve Zemke

May 7, 2014.

Mayor Ed Murray and Councilmember Sally Bagshaw
Seattle City Hall
600 4th Avenue
Seattle, WA 98124

RE: Disposition of Seattle City Light Surplus Substations

Dear Mayor Murray and Councilmember Bagshaw,

Concerned community members have brought to the Urban Forestry Commission's attention the removal of a number of mature trees from Seattle City Light surplus station properties. The Commission was briefed by Seattle City Light and Law Department staff about the disposition process for surplus substations. Although it is clear that process was followed, it is not clear that the process looked wider at opportunities for innovation for use of public land. The Commission believes there are several policy areas that should be considered.

First - 30% Canopy Goal. City Council unanimously voted to adopt the 2013 Urban Forest Stewardship Plan (UFSP) last September. The UFSP's goal for Seattle to reach 30% canopy cover by 2037 is often undermined by other City objectives, plans, and projects that are inconsistent with UFSP efforts to protect our urban forest, especially mature trees. We believe the UFSP is clear and with your approval to adopt it should be considered in procedures.

Second - Vegetation Management. Unfortunately, in the past many trees were improperly planted under power lines. Today, Seattle City Light's vegetation management work to protect our power grid comes with significant impacts on Seattle's canopy cover. Surplus properties could be converted into tree banks to mitigate for SCL's impacts due to mature tree removal.

Third - Codes. The Commission is pleased that SCL modified their tree removal and soil remediation approach to retain trees, however it appears this approach is only temporary as the purchaser will not be required to retain trees and the DPD development codes are not tailored to find and/or incentivize creative ways to retain trees and develop property.

We encourage the City to:

1. Look closer at the process for property surplus especially for rate-based utilities to see if there are other options for creative financing to retain properties that have citywide value (in this case retain mature tree canopy)
2. Review the metrics for pocket parks to include the need to improve canopy coverage.
3. Request SCL review their vegetation management practices and the guidance provided for outsourced crews.
4. Encourage DPD to restart their Tree Ordinance so at least the public could understand that surplus properties still had another layer of opportunity to be creative with development around mature trees.

Finding creative ways to preserve mature trees while accommodating other City priorities is a key strategy to accomplish Seattle's canopy cover goals.

Sincerely,

Peg Staeheli, Chair
Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

cc: Mayor Ed Murray, Council President Burgess, Councilmember Clark, Councilmember Godden, Councilmember Harrell, Councilmember Licata, Councilmember Rasmussen, Councilmember O'Brien, Councilmember Sawant, Jill Simmons, Jorge Carrasco, Lynn Best, Brent Schmidt, Eric McConaghy

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