

Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

2019 Annual Report

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION 12/11/19

Introduction

2019 marked the 10th year of the Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) continuing its mandate to advise the Mayor and City Council on policies and regulations governing the protection, management, and planting of trees and vegetation in the City of Seattle. The Tree and Urban Forest Protection Ordinance update, an effort ten years in the making, continued to be at the forefront of the UFC's efforts. The UFC also issued recommendations on a range of topics to support City ongoing decision-making to continue to protect and grow Seattle's trees and urban forest, a critical piece of our urban infrastructure.

In 2019 the UFC's primary objectives were to:

1. Support the SDCI Tree and Urban Forest Protection Ordinance update effort
2. Provide input to the implementation of the 2017 Tree Protection Executive Order
3. Engage City Departments on the Urban Forestry Management Plan process
4. Increase outreach and engagement with the public and City staff, and
5. Advise the City on decisions that impact the 30% canopy cover goal.

UFC 2019 Accomplishments

Tree Regulation Update Ordinance

Per City Council request, the UFC worked on [editing the D7 version](#) of the Tree Regulation Update Ordinance produced by Council Central Staff and encouraged Seattle residents to provide their comments. A significant number of people have reached out to the UFC in support of their recommendations and urging the City to move forward with the update. All the communications received by the UFC can be found at the bottom of this [page](#).

The UFC created a [one-pager](#) with information on the tree regulations update to provide background and emphasizing seven key ways to protect Seattle's urban forest:

1. Expand permit program
2. Certify tree service providers
3. Replace significant trees
4. Track changes in the urban forest
5. Protect exceptional trees, groves, and trees on undeveloped lots
6. Encourage tree retention on already developed lots, and
7. Fund and enforce tree protection regulations.

UFC Recommendations:

Along with input to the draft ordinance, the UFC issued the following letters of recommendation related to tree protection.

- Letter thanking Mayor and Council for adopting [Resolution 31902](#) – Development and Implementation of a Revised Tree Ordinance
- [Letter to the Mayor](#) about Updating the Tree Protection Ordinance
- [Letter about tree protection inside the MHA Ordinance](#)

- [Follow up recommendation](#) Amending SMC 25.11.090 in MHA Ordinance
- [Letter](#) about MHA Ordinance Amendments and Draft Companion Resolution

The UFC supported Seattle Parks and Recreation’s work with the following letters:

- Cheasty Mountain Bike and Pedestrian Trail [Pilot Project](#)
- Green Seattle Partnership ([GSP](#)) [funding levels](#). The [Mayor responded](#) to the UFC letter.
- GSP funding [follow up letter](#) and Superintendent Aguirre’s [response](#).

The UFC continued to encourage community members and groups to share their ideas. SDOT and the community group Recharge the Battery participated in a creative discussion around the decommissioning of the Battery Street Tunnel. The UFC issued a [letter](#) encouraging the City to consider the significant future potential of the six city blocks involved and the West Battery Portal site to support the urban forest in one of Seattle’s most dense neighborhoods.

Fiends of Discovery Park shared their effort to create a vegetation management platform to help the City with maps that would provide a holistic view of the parks’ condition to inform planning and decision-making. The UFC issued a [letter of support](#) for this work.

UFC Discussions:

The UFC welcomes community members, organizations, and City Departments to engage in opportunities for discussion and UFC feedback. In 2019 the UFC continued this tradition to build partnerships and stay abreast of relevant subjects.

City Departments and Programs/Projects: in preparation for their annual meeting with the City’s Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team, the UFC had briefings and discussions on departmental programs and budgets with the Office of Planning and Community Development, Seattle City Light, Seattle Department of Transportation, Seattle Public Utilities, Seattle Parks and Recreation, Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, and the Office of Sustainability & Environment. This was especially helpful in 2019 as we had a number of new UFC members.

Other programs discussed with the UFC included: SDCI’s Design Review Program; Seattle Parks and Recreation’s Strategic Plan; SDOT’s cost-effective walkways; Trees for Seattle; and the Yesler Terrace Redevelopment project.

Community groups: besides discussions with Recharging the Battery and Friends of Discovery Park, the Seattle Green Spaces Coalition shared its accomplishments and invited the UFC to support the City’s Natural Capital Assessment effort.

Urban Forestry Commission/Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team Annual Meeting

The Commission and the Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team (IDT) held their 9th annual meeting at the Rainier Beach Community Center. The meeting goals were to strengthen the partnership between the Urban Forestry Commission and the Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team in order to accomplish the goals of the Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP); to understand the complexities of urban forestry work on the ground; share examples of good work; and discuss challenges. This year’s meeting included a 1.3-mile tour of departmental urban forestry work on the ground which gave departments an opportunity to showcase examples of good work with the Commission as well as talk about challenges Seattle’s trees face in our urban environment.

Commission Membership

The Commission successfully recruited five new members in 2019:

- Elby Jones - Position#2 (Urban Ecologist)
- Joshua Morris - Position#7 (NGO Representative)
- Steven Fry - Position#8 (Development Representative)
- Blake Voorhees – Position #9 (Financial Advisor, Economist, or Realtor)
- Neeyati Johnson - Position #10 (Get Engaged member)

Weston Brinkley was re-elected as Chair for 2019 with Sandra Whiting and then Steve Zemke serving as Vice-Chairs.

The Commission wants to thank Craig Johnson (Position #9 – Financial Advisor, Economist, Realtor); Bonnie Lei (Position #10 – Get Engaged); Joanna Nelson de Flores (Position #7 – NGO Representative); Sandra Whiting (Position # 2 – Urban Ecologist), and Andrew Zellers (Position #8 – Development Community or utility Representative) for their contribution to the Commission’s work in 2019.

Conclusion

In 2019 the UFC marked the end of its first decade of work with what was perhaps the most eventful year yet. Many ongoing critically important policies and plans were implemented or took major steps forward this year. These included multi-year efforts on the vegetation components of the Mandatory Housing Affordability code, implementation of Executive Order 2017-11, and the update to the City’s Urban Forest Management Plan. Most significantly substantial progress was made on the Tree Regulation Update Ordinance. In all the UFC issued more than a dozen letters of recommendation in 2019. The UFC sees this trend of progress continuing into next year. For 2020 we look forward to seeing a revised Tree Regulation Update Ordinance passed, and will be eagerly awaiting work on implementation, management, and tracking of its success. The UFC will also be focusing on the climate crisis and integration of forestry with Seattle’s Climate Action Plan and Green New Deal.

2019 Commission Members:

- Weston Brinkley, Chair – Position #3 (University Representative)
- Steve Zemke, Vice Chair — Position #1 (Wildlife Biologist)
- Sandra Whiting, Vice-Chair / Elby Jones — Position #2 (Urban Ecologist)
- Sarah Rehder —Position #4 (Hydrologist)
- Stuart Niven —Position #5 (Arborist)
- Michael Walton —Position #6 (Landscape Architect)
- Joanna Nelson de Flores/Joshua Morris - Position#7 (NGO Representative)
- Andrew Zellers/Steven Fry —Position #8 (Development Community)
- Craig Johnson/ Blake Voorhees —Position #9 (Real Estate Broker)
- Bonnie Lei/ Neeyati Johnson — Position #10 (Get Engaged)
- Whitman Bouton — Position #11 (Environmental Justice)
- Jessica Jones — Position #12 (Public Health)
- Shari Selch — Position #13 (Community/Neighborhood)

Contact:

Additional information about the Urban Forestry Commission can be found at www.seattle.gov/urbanforestrycommission, or by contacting:

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