



2020 URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Update process

Prior to the plan's development, the City's Urban Forestry Core Team worked with Seattle Public Utilities' Community Connections program and the Department of Neighborhood's Community Liaisons program to engage native peoples, as well as the African American, East African, Chinese, and Latinx communities living in and around the Greater Seattle region.

Traditional stakeholder engagement was conducted through the Trees for Seattle newsletter, website, and social media channels; presentations to key groups such as the Urban Forestry Commission; listening sessions with key partner organizations; and an online feedback form that was translated to Chinese (traditional and simplified), Korean, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

Feedback received through these efforts was used to produce a draft plan. The team then shared draft goals, strategies, and actions with members of nine environmental-justice priority communities (African American, Chinese, disabled, East-African, Latinx, Native American, seniors, Southeast Asian Cham refugees and un-housed populations) to ensure initial input was captured accurately.

Input received informed action agenda priorities and prompted the project team to change technical language to make the plan more accessible. Elements that changed based on feedback include:

- Plan goals and strategies were modified to focus on racial and social equity.
- Actions were added to work on community-requested, ongoing engagement, better ways to keep community involved in urban forestry work, and more translation.
- A new climate-change strategy was added to better address the importance of this issue.

Our urban forest is fundamental to the character of Seattle and to our quality of life, especially as Seattle continues to grow. Seattle's urban forest represents a valuable asset that provides ecological, economic, and social benefits. It helps define the character of the city, supports Seattle's public health, provides habitat for wildlife, creates spaces for exploration and enjoyment, cleans our air and water, and reduces the quantity of stormwater runoff, further helping water quality.

The 2020 Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) provides a framework for policy and action that guides city government decision-making to help Seattle maintain, preserve, enhance, and restore its urban forest. The core of the plan is a set of goals, strategies, actions, and indicators that will support a healthy and sustainable urban forest across Seattle's publicly and privately owned land.





Seattle's urban forest today

Seattle has more than four million trees¹ and a diversity of understory plants. The urban forest occurs within a diverse range of environments, from natural areas with multi-story plants to downtown areas with individual trees planted in small tree-pits. Overall, Seattle's urban forest is a highly managed environment that has been profoundly shaped by its past and current residents and more recently by changes in climatic conditions. The urban forest is a critical infrastructure system, which works in concert with other infrastructure such as drains, pipes, sidewalks, and wires to deliver important services. It is estimated that the replacement value of Seattle's existing urban forest (the cost to re-plant trees and nurture them to their current size) is close to \$5 billion dollars.²

The presence of trees in an urban environment must be balanced with other citywide goals such as property rights, growth management, transportation, economic development, urban design, and the goals of property owners. A significant challenge faced by Seattle's urban forest is climate change. Trees both mitigate climate change and are affected by climate change. They absorb carbon dioxide and produce oxygen, but the changing weather (longer, drier summers, stronger storm events, etc.) has negative impacts on tree health, making them more susceptible to disease and pests.

Managing the urban forest

The City of Seattle has a diversity of existing policies, programs, regulations, and incentives that are used to manage Seattle's urban forest. Nine City departments engaged in Seattle's urban forestry work; each bring important expertise, perspective, and resources to this commitment—to the tune of nearly 100 city staff and over \$20 million dollars. The City urban forestry team plants and cares for street trees, provides free trees for residents, protects and restores forested parklands, regulates the removal of trees, and promotes stewardship of the urban forest. Interdepartmental coordination is essential for effective management and consistent delivery of urban forestry programs.

¹ Green Cities Research Alliance, August 2012. Seattle's Forest Ecosystem Values. Analysis of the Structure, Function, and Economic Benefits.

² Green Cities Research Alliance, August 2012. Seattle's Forest Ecosystem Values. Analysis of the Structure, Function, and Economic Benefits.





Urban Forest Management Plan goals

The City's Urban Forestry Core Team developed a set of diverse, comprehensive goals to guide urban forestry work. These goals were informed by an inclusive engagement process undertaken in preparation for this plan update.

1. **Racial and social equity.** Urban forestry benefits and responsibilities are shared fairly across communities, community trust is built, and decisions are guided by diverse perspectives, including those of environmental justice communities.
2. **Ecosystems and human health.** The urban forest improves air quality, human well-being, public health and water quality; provides beauty, environmental and economic benefits, fish and wildlife habitat, food, outdoor fun; and helps store rainwater.
3. **Human safety and property protection.** Urban forestry work is focused on public and crew safety and uses up-to-date practices.
4. **Climate change.** Urban forestry work helps people, and urban trees and vegetation adapt to and recover from the impacts of climate change.
5. **Community care.** The Seattle community, including all people, organizations, institutions, and businesses, works together to appreciate and care for the urban forest and to understand tree protection regulations.
6. **Balance competing priorities.** Urban forestry practices and policies work with and support other City and community goals including access, climate action, culturally appropriate resource provision, economic development, environmental protection, social justice, food and medicine production, housing, balancing tree shade with light, public safety, recreation, transportation, and utility provision.



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Strategies

In order to meet the goals of this plan, seven overarching strategies were developed that represent a comprehensive approach to mobilizing informed and effective action. These strategies were used to develop the specific actions included in the action agenda.

1. Consider the needs of environmental justice communities in all urban forestry actions.
2. Prepare for climate change impacts and build a resilient urban forest.
3. Understand the condition and complexity of the urban forest resource, how it was different in the past and how it may change in the future.
4. Coordinate communication, cooperation, and decisions within the City and with other agencies.
5. Inspire, inform, and work with the community to help care for Seattle's urban forest.
6. Preserve, restore, and enhance the urban forest on City property and rights-of-way.
7. Regulate and provide support to the community for keeping, removing, replacing, and planting trees.

Action agenda

The action agenda outlines the steps that the City of Seattle and community partners will take to implement the UFMP. The action agenda was informed by the inclusive engagement process and reflects input provided by environmental justice communities (communities of color, immigrants, native peoples, refugees, people with low-incomes, youth, and individuals with limited-English proficiency), key stakeholders and the public at large. Departmental workplans will provide additional details on those aspects of the urban forest that each department can manage. For example, SDOT manages trees along our streets in the rights-of-way while SPR has primary responsibility for the Developed Parks and Parks' Natural Areas Management Units.

City government will continue to perform key ongoing, urban forestry work including:

- Planting trees throughout Seattle and complying with the City of Seattle Two-for-One tree replacement policy.
- Developing plans and strategies to manage the urban forest on City of Seattle natural landscapes and properties.
- Removing invasive plants from Seattle's forested areas.
- Coordinating departmental work and collaborating on urban forestry citywide efforts.
- Updating initiatives and regulations in support of our Seattle's urban forest.

The actions in the table on the following page build on our ongoing work and will be the focus of this plan for implementation in the next five years.



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Urban Forest Management Plan Action Agenda (Priority actions are in bold font)

Action #	Action	Rationale	Dept. Lead
Strategy 1: Consider first the needs of environmental justice communities in all urban forestry actions			
1	Create a program to improve access for people in environmental equity priority communities to internships, apprenticeships, and jobs in urban forestry.	BIPOC communities want to participate in urban forestry; the industry needs active change in order to create a robust, diverse pipeline both in the public and private sector.	OSE
2	Focus tree planting in environmental equity priority communities.	To mitigate disparities due to lower canopy cover existing in BIPOC communities.	Core Team
3	Focus tree, landscape, and natural area maintenance in environmental equity priority communities.	To mitigate disparities due to lower canopy cover existing in BIPOC communities.	Core Team
4	Explore ways to support property owners and renters in environmental equity priority communities to care for trees on private property.	Tree maintenance requires specialized knowledge and can be expensive and burdensome. Support to BIPOC communities will enhance the quality of our urban forest on private property.	Core Team
Strategy 2: Prepare for climate change impacts and build a resilient urban forest			
5	Conduct a climate change vulnerability assessment to inform how the City's urban forestry work should respond to a changing climate, including increasing droughts and pests.	A vulnerability assessment for our urban forestry work will identify, quantify, and prioritize/rank the weaknesses in the system. Specific actions will support resiliency in Seattle's urban forest.	SPR, SDOT
6	Develop a list of tree species resilient to climate change and pests.	Diversity of species, especially those resilient to climate change will improve the resiliency of our urban trees individually and as forest stands.	Core Team
7	Explore ways to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from urban forestry work.	City departments will coordinate to reduce negative impacts from our urban forestry operations (e.g. reduce excess or duplicated driving, acquire more efficient equipment types, etc.).	Core Team
Strategy 3: Understand the condition and complexity of the urban forest resource, how it was different in the past and how it may change in the future			
8	Perform a citywide canopy cover assessment every five years. Compare the results to previous estimates to understand what has changed.	Frequent assessments will provide canopy cover change over time data and help monitor progress towards our goals.	OSE
Strategy 4: Coordinate communication, cooperation, and decisions within the City and with other agencies			
9	Continue using the Urban Forestry Core Team as the key coordination group for City-wide inter-departmental urban forestry work.	Interdepartmental coordination is key to providing enhanced customer service and provide timely technical expertise to the City.	Core Team
Strategy 5: Inspire, inform, and work with the community to help care for Seattle's urban forest			
10	Create a citywide urban forestry communication strategy that will identify better ways to share information with environmental equity communities about volunteer opportunities, tree care information, regulations, incentives, and winter storms. This strategy should have a special emphasis on Native American communities.	Throughout the inclusive engagement for the plan update BIPOC communities expressed interest in being included in all aspects of the City's urban forestry work and efforts.	Core Team
11	Expand volunteer programs focused on elders and children.	The inclusive engagement process confirmed a need to broaden our volunteer programs to be more accessible to elders and children in BIPOC communities.	Trees for Seattle
12	Explore the impact of trees on allergies and opportunities to reduce tree-produced allergies.	This was a concern identified by the Chinese Information Service Center.	Core Team

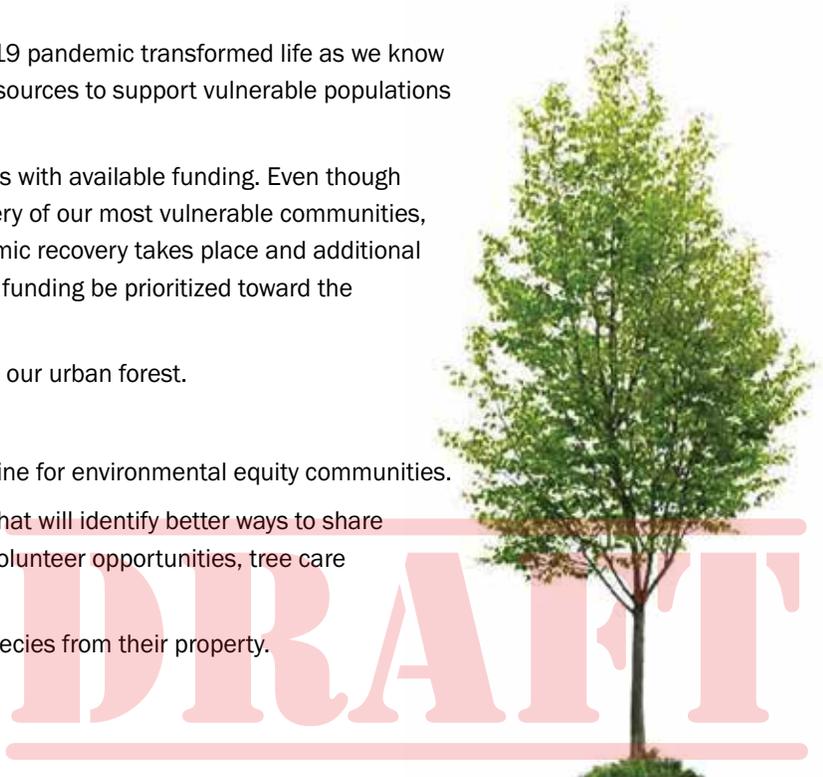
Urban Forest Management Plan Action Agenda (continued)

Action #	Action	Rationale	Dept. Lead
Strategy 6: Preserve, restore, and enhance the urban forest on City property and the right-of-way			
13	Support citywide efforts to find long-term solutions to homeless encampments in urban forests.	Unintended consequences of unhoused populations encampments in forested areas include negative impacts to restoration efforts and tree health.	Core Team
14	Explore solutions for conflicts between tree roots and sidewalks that support the needs of people with disabilities.	Tree roots sometimes cause sidewalks to get out of compliance with the American with Disabilities Act requirements. Finding creative solutions for these conflicts is key for responsible management of our street trees.	SDOT
Strategy 7: Regulate and provide support to the community for keeping, removing, replacing, and planting trees			
15	Explore ways to help property owners remove invasive plants and pests on private land.	The City's Green Seattle Partnership has and continues to invest resources to free our forested parklands from invasive plants and pests. When such species exist on private property, they migrate to our restored acres negating our investment.	Core Team
16	Explore ways to help property owners manage unimproved rights-of-way next to their property	Unimproved rights-of-way present an opportunity to increase our tree canopy.	Core Team
17	Explore ways to increase canopy (tree) cover in industrial areas.	Based on SDOT's updated inventory, opportunities for street tree planting in industrial areas will mitigate air quality and heat island effect in areas with reduced or no tree canopy.	SDOT
18	Update the City's tree protection regulations.	Most of our trees are on private property (67% of the land is residential and represents 72% of our canopy). Effective protection for trees on private property is a key element of our citywide strategy to keep Seattle livable especially as we continue to grow.	SDCI

As the UFMP update process was moving forward, the COVID-19 pandemic transformed life as we know it. The City pivoted to emergency response and re-allocated resources to support vulnerable populations that were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

City departments will continue to support urban forestry efforts with available funding. Even though some of the action items below could help expedite the recovery of our most vulnerable communities, Core Team is aware of the challenging times ahead. As economic recovery takes place and additional funding becomes available, Core Team recommends that new funding be prioritized toward the following efforts:

1. Ongoing funding for tree and natural area crews to maintain our urban forest.
2. Continuing to perform canopy cover assessments.
3. Expanding efforts to implement an urban forestry jobs pipeline for environmental equity communities.
4. Creating a citywide urban forestry communication strategy that will identify better ways to share information with environmental equity communities about volunteer opportunities, tree care information, regulations, incentives, and winter storms.
5. Providing support to Seattle residents to remove invasive species from their property.





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