



City of Seattle
Urban Forestry Commission

Weston Brinkley (Position #3 – University), Chair
Julia Michalak (Position #1 – Wildlife Biologist), Vice-chair
Elby Jones (Position #2 – Urban Ecologist - ISA) • **Stuart Niven** (Position #5 – Arborist – ISA)
Michael Walton (Position #6 – Landscape Architect – ISA) • **Joshua Morris** (Position #7 – NGO)
David Moehring (Position # 8 – Development) • **Blake Voorhees** (Position # 9 – Realtor)
Jessica Hernandez (Position #11 – Environmental Justice) • **Jessica Jones** (Position # 12 – Public Health)
Shari Selch (Position # 13 – Community/Neighborhood)

November 10, 2021

Mayor Jenny A. Durkan and Seattle City Council Members
Seattle City Hall
600 4th Ave
Seattle, WA 98124

RE: Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI) MO-001-A-002

Dear Mayor and Seattle City Councilmembers,

The Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) would formally like to express how imperative it was for the City to respond to the Statement of Legislative Intent SLI MO-001-A-002 so that we could make our recommendations. The UFC is extremely disheartened by the zero responses we received from the City staff and would like to take the necessary steps so that this does not happen again.

Seattle Ordinance 123052 (August 10, 2009) mandates that the UFC "provide recommendations on legislation concerning urban forestry management." This cannot be done unless we have effective and planned meetings with city staff. The UFC has witnessed other cities such as Portland, Oregon participate in successful working sessions with City staff, as has the Seattle UFC historically, so we know that this is not an impossible request.

It is well understood by the UFC that collaboration with City staff prior to materials being made public is the required operating procedure as outlined in the UFC enabling legislation Ordinance 123052, specifically section 3.72.050. That section states the UFC is required to review 2."City plans" and "department recommendations", and "7.preliminary proposed work", and the UFC is expected "To provide recommendations on legislation concerning urban forestry management, sustainability and protection of associated trees and understory vegetation and related habitat on public or private property *prior to its introduction and referral to any Council committee.*" We are unable to fulfill our commitment unless we make regular meetings with City staff a part of our standard practice.

SLI MO-001-A-002 requested that "the Executive, Urban Forestry Commission (UFC), and Urban Forestry Interdepartmental Team evaluate models for consolidating the City's urban forest management functions and based on this evaluation, make recommendations on how changes could be implemented." The evaluation was presented as a task that the Executive, City staff, and UFC work on in partnership. On July 15, 2021, the UFC transmitted to Council the first of two responses to the SLI,

writing that the “UFC looks forward to collaborating with the City and awaits an invitation to begin this work,” and requested that the “UFC and staff meet in deliberative sessions.”

However, the UFC never received an invitation to collaborate. No deliberative sessions were held. The UFC submitted to Council a final, independent response to the SLI by letter dated September 8, 2021.

On September 15, 2021, City staff also transmitted to Council a response to the SLI. The letter outlined the City’s process in preparing the response, stating “As directed in the SLI, staff have consulted with the Mayor’s Office and have had initial conversations with the UFC,” and that City staff “worked during this year on this request, with the [Urban Forestry] Core Team meeting on a biweekly basis for several months...”.

The UFC does not recall initial conversations about the SLI and was not invited to participate in any of the biweekly meetings. When asked what prevented collaboration with the UFC, City staff cited limited staff capacity and competing priorities, including engagement related to Resolution 31902 and finalizing the Urban Forestry Management Plan.

The UFC is a technical advisory body with extensive experience on tree protection, management, and policy. However, the UFC’s effectiveness is severely limited by the lack of information made available and the lack of engagement and the access to working with City staff. The UFC are a mandated resource and provide additional capacity for City staff when needed. We expect the Mayor and staff to utilize Commissioners in instances when City staff is constrained.

The UFC knows there are real consequences from lack of coordination between City staff and UFC:

- 1. UFC’s role is reduced from recommendation and meaningful co-construction of policy, to simply commenting on established policy.** This removal of partnership is not in the spirit of the role of Boards and Commissions within the City, nor is it best practice for City engagement with community representatives.
- 2. Relationships between City staff and the UFC are strained.** Without coordination Staff and the UFC often produce conflicting materials, decisions and ideas are collected second and third hand without explanations or rationale, and no relationships or communication is fostered. Each of these leads to poor relationships and ineffective work.
- 3. Recommendations Council and Mayor receive are disjointed, uncoordinated, and ill informed.** With poor collaboration between staff the UFC often is uninformed and ill-equipped to make meaningful recommendations. Additionally, the UFC sees instances where staff recommendations are lacking expertise or practical application. Finally, Mayor and Council are often provided conflicting or diverging recommendations from staff and the UFC that make meaningful policy difficult.
- 4. Urban forestry operations and the environment are negatively impacted.** Poor coordination amongst staff, UFC, and policy makers leads to delays, inefficient use of time and resources, and ineffective policy and programing. Each of these negatively effects our urban forest, and in turn negatively impacts our human health and well-being and the natural environment in the city of Seattle

The UFC’s purpose is to advise Mayor and Council on urban forestry management. A key set of important actions the City can take on urban forestry are to 1) be transparent, accessible, and utilize all

available resources, 2) appropriately resource forest management, 3) have clear lines of authority and responsibility. The collaborative SLI is an opportunity for the City to engage on each of these.

Therefore, the UFC would like to set up a clear plan for collaboration with City staff to deliver a meaningful consideration of the urban forest management authority, as requested in the SLI. The UFC feels that the 2022 budget, 2022 Chief Arborist SLI, the ongoing Tree Ordinance Update, and initial SLI provides an opportunity to remedy challenges with staff resources the City is able to devote to this important issue. Establishing a collaborative scoping meeting and devising a timeline for delivering joint responses should be an effective way to begin this effort.

Sincerely,



Weston Brinkley, Chair

/signature/

Shari Selch

cc: DM Shefali Ranganathan, Adrienne Thompson, Casey Sixkiller, Michelle Caulfield, Sharon Lerman, Urban Forestry Management Team, Urban Forestry Core Team, Christina Ghan, Chase Kitchen, Yolanda Ho, Austin Miller, Maritza Rivera, Pete Holmes