

**DRAFT**  
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May 18, 2022

Mayor Bruce Harrell	Seattle City Council	Julie Dingley, Director
Seattle City Hall	Seattle City Hall	City Budget Office
P.O. Box 94749	PO Box 34025	Akshay Iyengar
Seattle, WA 98124-4749	Seattle, WA 98124-4025	Akshay.Iyengar@seattle.gov

RE: City’s 2023 Budget

Dear Mayor Bruce Harrell and Councilmembers,

The UFC supports recentering the City’s focus on equity and human health, as demanded by environmental justice and equity within Seattle. These budget recommendations align with [Ordinance 123052](#) which established the UFC to “provide policy direction to the Mayor and City Council on preserving and protecting the City’s urban forest habitat and its trees and understory vegetation,” engaging in relative plans set forth by City staff. In the interest of responding to growing evidence of climate change, the Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) submits these recommendations to the Seattle proposed 2023 budget.

In summary, the UFC believes the budget must include the following funding objectives:

- The components of the Natural Capital Assessment of Seattle’s green infrastructure assets including carbon reduction, urban forest canopy cover, and resilience and sustainability providing racial and social justice to underserved communities;
- Creation of [Chief Forester](#) position and associated arborist, Office of Sustainability & Environment (OSE);
- Urban forest canopy analysis with climate change vulnerability assessment<sup>i</sup>, OSE;
- Urban forestry internship program development / interns, OSE;
- Planning to achieve the urban forest canopy of 30% per the 2035 Seattle Comprehensive Plan, Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD);
- Administration to adapt and enforce improved tree protection regulations<sup>ii</sup>, Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI);
- Administration of street tree maintenance, planting, and permits<sup>iii</sup>, Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT);

- Record the urban tree inventory, SDCI and SDOT; and
- Sustaining Green Seattle Partnerships and Parks, Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR).

### **Seattle's Urban Forest Value to Counter Climate Change**

With the January 2021 briefing on **Seattle Parks and Recreation Green Seattle Partnership**, with an update on the expected timeline of the program's restoration goals and proposed budget reduction, the UFC noted (1/13/21) "The UFC is concerned that budget cuts will compound existing problems, including the loss of volunteer and contractor momentum due to the pandemic and the challenging conditions, such as steep slopes, of the remaining acres." Respectfully, the UFC repeats its recommendation to restore original Parks District funding levels to the Green Seattle Partnership."<sup>iv</sup>

With the June 2021 briefing regarding **Seattle Public Utilities habitat management and restoration**, UFC noted (7/15/21) "The UFC would like to see that these sites receive adequate funding such that they can maximize these benefits. These sites can potentially be expanded to support not only SPU's goals but also the goals of the Green New Deal, the Urban Forest Management Plan, the Climate Action Plan and potentially other programs."

With July 2021 briefings from Seattle Public Utilities to the UFC on **urban heat island effects**, the UFC noted (8/4/21) that "We have worse tree protections, **less tree funding**, and non-existent tree tracking and data compared to even average urban forestry programs nationally, and we don't have a cohesive plan for how we will connect our canopy goals to existing planting efforts." Funding is needed for SLI SPU-002-A-001 in order for SPU to explore an expansion for the Tree Ambassador program as a cost-effective way to engage the public on trees and provide stewardship and maintenance of Seattle's canopy.

Also in July 2021 in response to the Statement of Legislative Intent MO-001-A-002, the Urban Forest Commission was tasked with reviewing the City's overall forestry management in the SLI MO-001-A-002. Specifically, "...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 UFC recommended we retain an independent consultant to review best practices for municipal urban forestry management structures. The UFC and staff would conduct deliberative sessions to share expertise and align recommendations to produce a coherent response to the SLI.<sup>v</sup>

With the autumn 2021 briefing on the **Seattle Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan**, the UFC noted (10/6/21) several items to be included in their Plan. The Plan now needs to be implemented which is only possible with sufficient funding. This includes **\_\_\_\_\_**.

The UFC would like to outline and prioritize four critical budget considerations: Revenue neutral Council actions, budget effecting Council actions, REET and Green Seattle Partnership (GSP) needs, and SDOT's capital budget.

The UFC recognizes the challenging nature of the 2023 budget process and appreciates your consideration of these recommendations.

Sincerely,

Josh Morris, Co-Chair

Julia Michalak, Co-Chair

cc: Jessica Finn Coven, Nathan Torgelson, Jesus Aguirre, Sam Zimbabwe, Mami Hara, Michelle Caulfield, Urban Forestry Management Team, Urban Forestry Core Team, Akshay Iyengar City Budget Office  
Akshay.Iyengar@seattle.gov

Patricia Bakker, Urban Forestry Commission Coordinator  
City of Seattle, Office of Sustainability & Environment  
PO Box 94729 Seattle, WA 98124-4729 Tel: 206-684-3194 Fax: 206-684-3013  
[www.seattle.gov/UrbanForestryCommission](http://www.seattle.gov/UrbanForestryCommission)

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<sup>i</sup> [CBA OSE-004-A-001](#): Add \$140K General fund to OSE for the Climate Policy Advisor position. This position that the UFC has supported previously; also of such importance that the sooner this investment is made the more benefits and costs savings can be realized by the City moving forward.

<sup>ii</sup> This item is currently not within Council's proposed budget. The UFC urges Council to reinstate it. [CBA SDCI-011-A-001](#): Proviso \$758,663 in SDCI for updated tree protection regulations. SDCI is now 11 years delinquent on fulfilling Council's request as stated in [Resolution 31138](#) for a strengthened tree ordinance. Additionally, failure to enact and enforce provisions outlined in [Executive Order 03-05](#): Tree Replacement, [Executive Order 2017-11](#): Tree Protection, [Resolution 31870 - Section 6](#), the City Auditors 2009 report, and existing [25.11.090](#) (Tree Replacement and Site Restoration) is leading to the continued loss of tree canopy, documented by the City in the [2016 canopy cover assessment](#). Given the length of time passed and severity of the issues, this proviso is warranted.

<sup>iii</sup> The UFC recommends restoring investments in our urban forests. Specifically, [SDOT- BC-TR-19001 - Major Maintenance/Replacement](#), went from \$309,342 in 2019 to \$86,627 in 2022. The Tree and Landscape

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Maintenance program provides services to implement the citywide Urban Forestry Management Plan through education, stewardship, protection and maintenance of SDOT's green infrastructure assets including trees and landscapes. Arborists, Foresters, and the Landscape Architect provide design guidance, construction management support, citywide policy guidance and implementation including street tree permitting. Urban Forestry field operations provides critical maintenance of more than 40,000 SDOT street use tree assets and emergency response to over 350,000 right-of-way trees. Field operations is also responsible for the maintenance and operation of more than 200 formally landscaped right-of-way areas such as medians along Beacon Avenue South and Sand Point Way NE. The UFC believes that additional funding for this line item is a worthy investment because of the relatively small cost to monitor and maintain trees planted during capital projects compared to the original investment to plant the trees. Properly caring for trees during the establishment period increases the likelihood that the trees will grow well and survive, reducing the potential for costly maintenance or replacement in the future. In addition, the UFC believes that providing guidance to developers on tree preservation is an area where City urban forestry policy and action is currently lacking.

<sup>iv</sup> The UFC contacted the City in October 2019 upon noticing reductions in the proposed budget to the **Green Seattle Partnerships**. UFC feedback included:

"The UFC believes cutting funding for the Green Seattle Partnership (GSP) is problematic for the following reasons:

1. If the program is to deliver its goal to restore 2,500 acres by 2025 consistent funding is key. The program is barely over the midpoint of its goal and the majority of the remaining acres are the most challenging and costly to restore. Acres that are on steep slope can't be worked on by volunteers and require professional crews' involvement.
2. The reason for what appears to be an \$880,000 program reduction in the Mayor's proposed budget is "a waning in the need for Capital dollars for restoration." This assertion is not supported by the recently updated GSP Strategic Plan which was shared with the UFC last year.
3. The GSP is the poster child for leveraging community involvement and non-profit partnerships. Seattle residents have invested over one million hours volunteering to restore our forested parklands since the program's inception. Reducing program funding runs contrary to the program's momentum, would send the wrong message to the community, and could jeopardize this valuable leverage.
4. This program is one of the few urban forestry programs in the City that has complete and relevant data on its work which has allowed it to become a successful program to date that has been replicated by many municipalities in the region. Changing course within an established plan inhibits effective future program management.

The UFC notes the Tree Remediation Funding Reserve is included in the REET-balancing budget reductions. Back in 2019, the reduced funding was already of concern and the resulting [response to the SLI](#) provided by SPR on 9/29/2020 details that the effort needed to restore Seattle's forested parklands has increased due multiple factors, and that the timeline of the current goal cannot be met. The GSP program was initiated in 2005 as a [20-year plan](#) to restore Seattle's forested natural areas. The [2017 GSP strategic Plan](#) update showed on-track progress to enroll all of the remaining acres into the program by 2025. The SLI response shows **we are now 17-27 years behind on the original timeline**.

<sup>v</sup> In 2009, a City Auditor's [report](#) identified inefficiencies that could be corrected through reorganizing urban forestry functions, currently spread across nine different departments. The UFC has commented on this topic numerous times over the last 11 years, most recently in its [7/1/20 letter](#).