

# Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

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City of Seattle Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team  
PO Box 94729  
Seattle, WA 98124  
Att'n: Sandra Pinto de Bader – Office of Sustainability and Environment

RE: Urban Forestry Commission position paper on canopy cover goals for the industrial management unit for the Urban Forest Management Plan update.

Dear Interdepartmental Team,

The following position paper was produced to provide input regarding the industrial management unit as you work on the Urban Forest Management Plan update.

**Purpose of position paper:** In response to the December 12, 2011 Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team (IDT) meeting discussion with the Urban Forestry Commission on canopy cover goals for the upcoming Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) update and support the UFMP's vision:

*Seattle's urban forest is a thriving and sustainable mix of tree species and ages that creates a contiguous and healthy ecosystem that is valued and cared for by the City and all of its citizens as an essential environmental, economic, and community asset.*

**UFC recommendation 1:** The Commission recommends keeping the existing canopy coverage goals for the industrial management unit at 10% in the 2012 UFMP update. We recognize that the latest assessment of the canopy cover within industrial zones has indicated that the existing canopy is actually lower (4%) than currently documented in the UFMP (8%). The UFC believes that maintaining the 10% goal, which in essence increases the amount of canopy needed from the 4% assessment, is the right approach to growing the overall canopy in the City of Seattle. The following provides justification for this approach and why the UFC believes that increasing canopy within the industrial areas of Seattle is important for meeting the overall 30% canopy goals of the City:

**Justifications:**

1. **Capacity for growing canopy in industrial zones is untested.** There are many anecdotal observations that suggest planting trees in the industrial areas is overly challenging due to poor soils, cost of planting, and obstruction to industrial operations, to name just a

few. However, these assumptions that limit new tree plantings may not be true or other opportunities for plantings may exist given further analysis. Still other observations suggest that many businesses are planting trees to provide relief from an overly barren landscape. Because the industrial zone is the least canopied of all zones within the city, this zone may provide a significant opportunity for canopy coverage. All of these assumptions should be tested for further understanding across the variety of industrial areas within the City. More analysis is needed to verify challenges and determine opportunities before decisions are made about reducing the existing canopy goal.

2. **Return on tree and vegetation value in industrial lands is likely the highest of any management unit.** With the least canopy cover and highest level of pollutants, the industrial zone will realize the greatest benefits from trees and vegetation of any zone. This is in part because some species of trees can provide phytoremediation, or the absorption of dangerous chemicals and other pollutants that have entered the soil. Industrial zones in Seattle provide the highest percentage of impervious surfaces proximate to waterfronts, where water quality is already of concern. Trees provide multiple ecosystem service benefits including clean air, improved water quality, and soil remediation, as well as social benefits including increased worker productivity and health through enhanced feelings of well-being and a stronger connection to nature.
3. **Significant opportunity to improve habitat corridors.** Seattle's industrial zone is not only the least canopied management unit, it is also a conspicuously tree-deprived area that inhibits wildlife and ecosystem process exchange between Seattle's more forested zones in West Seattle and Beacon Hill. Hydrological and biological connectivity promoted by a connected canopy is fragmented because of the barren industrial zone that separates zone exchange in south Seattle.
4. **Need for a quality environment for industrial employment base.** A high percentage of Seattle's workforce is located in industrial zones. Employees working in industrial areas deserve tree lined streets, vegetated pathways, and green infrastructure similar to other employment centers of the City. Currently, much of this employment base does not have these features.
5. **Opportunities for filling street tree gaps.** It is the position of the Commission that significant tree planting opportunities may exist and can be quantified for the industrial management unit with basic GIS analysis. This analysis is currently being planned and pertains to right-of-way corridors, sightlines, and driveways in particular.

6. **Shifting standards.** Stormwater regulations in industrial areas may require updates per Washington State Department of Ecology, requiring property owners to improve stormwater treatment on site. Trees provide stormwater management services, along with numerous other benefits. In fact, the 2007 UFMP calculates the existing tree infrastructure in Seattle provides \$20.6M in stormwater services.
  
7. **Increasing precedents.** Industrial operators and other uses within industrial zones are beginning to see the value of trees and vegetation in these areas. The following are just a few examples where change is happening:
  - The Port of Seattle in its Green Ports Initiative aims to lower emissions from all types of maritime operations and has made significant investments in several environmental programs, including green buildings and landscape standards.
  - In tandem with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the City of Seattle, and property owners, the Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition (DRCC) has been working since 2001 to secure a thorough cleanup of south Seattle, Washington’s Lower Duwamish River for the Duwamish River Superfund Site. The DRCC works to restore environmental health and habitat restoration and has made significant strides in renewing vegetation along the waterfront.
  - The Port of Tacoma has implemented industrial rain garden projects, where trees and vegetation are serving to filter stormwater runoff pollutants.
  - Small private property owners and businesses have recently planted trees on their sites where eating establishments and smaller local stores are located.
  - The East Marginal Way street tree project.

These could be indicators that a more aggressive strategy for planting trees in industrial zones would be welcomed by some.

**UFC recommendation 2:** The Commission recommends establishing a revised and more aggressive strategy in the 2012 UFMP Update in the Action Agenda for industrial zones that reflects the opportunities for growing the canopy in the industrial management unit to ensure the 10% goal can be reached over time. This should be based on the following:

1. Conduct a specific study with a willing property owner or within the public right of way that is representative of industrial zones to determine challenges and opportunities.
2. Prepare environmental analysis to identify areas where trees can be planted.
3. Outreach to private property owners and major public industrial operators (Port of Seattle, King County, etc.).
4. Conduct a cost analysis of industrial tree zone plantings relative to other zones, or within different types of industrial areas.

5. Determine capacity for additional canopy.
6. Emphasize tree value to the City in goal evaluation.
7. Explore incentives for property owners in the industrial zones.
8. Explore off-site mitigation opportunities that could develop in the future from other sites within the City to target either the rights-of-way or potentially other sites in SODO.

Sincerely,



Matt Mega, Chair  
Seattle Urban Forestry Commission



Nancy Bird  
Recommendation author  
Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

cc: Diane Sugimura, Jill Simmons, Marshall Foster, Brennon Staley, Council President Clark, Councilmember Bagshaw, Councilmember Burgess, Councilmember Conlin, Councilmember Godden, Councilmember Harrell, Councilmember Licata, Councilmember Rasmussen, Councilmember O'Brien, Michael Jenkins, Christa Valles

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