

Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

Peg Staeheli, Chair • Tom Early, Vice-Chair

Gordon Bradley • Leif Fixen • Donna Kostka • Joanna Nelson • Jeff Reibman • Erik Rundell • Steve Zemke

September 10, 2014.

Mayor Ed Murray and Councilmember Sally Bagshaw
Seattle City Hall
600 4th Avenue
Seattle, WA 98124

RE: Retrofit of Downtown tree grates choking street trees

Dear Mayor Murray and Councilmember Bagshaw,

The Urban Forest Commission is requesting immediate funding and action to retrofit the tree grates from our downtown trees. All over downtown street trees are being impacted by this old style of “tree protection.” Tree grates are designed to be cut out as the trunk grows but this action rarely occurs and our trees are getting strangled. Many of these grates are now embedded on tree trunks so that grates will require specialty cutting and leaving the harming grate pieces embedded in our trees trunks (the portion that is embedded is left in because the removal would increase the damage.)

The Commission recommends SDOT to:

- Put together a crew to review each street tree grate downtown,
- Retrofit grates within 5” of tree trunks, and
- Produce a tree grate inventory and database for future ongoing proactive and scheduled maintenance.

This action would help the City avoid liability for both tree grates affected by tree growth and potentially damaged and unsafe street trees. It would also support our 12 percent canopy cover goal for the Downtown management unit according to the Urban Forest Stewardship Plan.

The Commission is aware that many of these downtown trees are technically the responsibility of the adjacent property owner, but these trees cannot wait for the “complaint” process to take place.

Once the necessary retrofits take place, SDOT could seek partnerships to implement ongoing tree grate management. Partnering with the Downtown Seattle Association may be an option but again, we strongly believe that time is of the essence as each year more trees are

permanently harmed. It is our view that the best way to address this issue is a through a center city grate retrofit and maintenance strategy that accomplishes this action within a three month period this winter.

Please consider this special funding and intervention request as a proactive effort in retaining and growing the downtown tree canopy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peg Staeheli". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Peg Staeheli, Chair
Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

cc: Mayor Ed Murray, Council President Burgess, Councilmember Clark, Councilmember Godden, Councilmember Harrell, Councilmember Licata, Councilmember Rasmussen, Councilmember O'Brien, Councilmember Sawant, Jill Simmons, Scott Kubly, Barbara Gray, Darren Morgan, Nolan Rundquist, Eric McConaghy.

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