

Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

Peg Staeheli, Chair • Tom Early, Vice-Chair
Gordon Bradley • Leif Fixen • Matt Mega • Jeff Reibman • Erik Rundell

February 11, 2014.

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

RE: Preservation of the Seattle Times Park

Dear Mayor Murray and Councilmember Bagshaw,

With the recent sale of the Seattle Times property, the open space known as Seattle Times Park is now in danger of being lost to development.

The City of Seattle has taken a bold stand to protect its urban trees by adopting the 2013 Urban Forest Stewardship Plan that, among other goals, strives to increase canopy cover in Seattle to 30 percent. The downtown zone has a goal of 12 percent and currently is about 7 percent - we need a stronger push to meet these goals.

The continuous canopy provided by the “park’s” mature trees is over a quarter of an acre that provides habitat for fourteen species of urban birds. In addition to the importance of preserving tree canopy and wildlife habitat, the significance of this open space to understanding the relationship between urban nature and human well-being as well as the historic connection of a workplace to a green space that provides a restorative experience during the work day must be recognized. This treed open space is enjoyed by this changing neighborhood as a much needed respite from its busy urban environment.

The Commission believes that a key strategy to accomplish the Plan’s canopy cover goal is to find creative ways to preserve mature trees while accommodating competing uses such as development.

At our January 8 meeting we heard a compelling presentation by the Friends of Seattle Times Park group who believe the treed open space can be saved and still give the developer a successful project. The conversation brought up several ideas to preserve these trees with the open space that we would like you to consider:

1. Funding is available from different sources to purchase urban pieces of land including Conservation Futures, Washington Wildlife & Recreation Coalition, and Federal funds. Transfer of development rights at a local level, potentially to the adjacent parcels to the north, could make the purchase more feasible financially.
2. There are incentives for affordable housing and for food-shed. Create a new incentive for preservation of mature urban canopy, thus making preservation of the tree zone an incentive for additional height on the two 240 ft. towers in exchange for preserving the open space.
3. Request identification of potential departures through design review to preserve the trees while maintaining the site's overall development potential (both the developer and DPD could do this evaluation).

4. Apply a “below grade” street vacation under the Boren Street right of way to accommodate the project's sub-grade parking in exchange for preserving the open space (this retains public use of utility zone and street surface but provides space for the developer to recapture parking).
5. Provide a credit for the value of the park and deduct this from the fee to be paid into the affordable housing fund in the existing incentive zoning structure.
6. Due to the proposed density of the development, and the increased population in the nearby blocks have Parks Department re-look if this open space fits within its gap analysis if population is considered.

The above are a brainstorm of ideas that could be enlisted to help preserve this open space with a mature evergreen canopy cover. If Seattle is to accomplish its 30 percent canopy cover goal, we need to consider creative ways of accommodating competing uses.

The Commission emphasizes the importance of open space and tree canopy in the downtown zone. We recommend the creation of an incentive zoning height and FAR benefit to encourage the preservation of mature trees and adequate public open space for their long-term health and public enjoyment.

Sincerely,



Peg Staeheli, Chair



Jeff Reibman, Commissioner

cc: Council President Burgess, Councilmember Sally Clark, Councilmember Godden, Councilmember Harrell, Councilmember Licata, Councilmember Rasmussen, Councilmember O'Brien, Councilmember Sawant, Diane Sugimura, Marshall Foster, Christopher Williams, Doug Critchfield, Mark Mead, Jill Simmons, Meg Moorehead, Eric McConaghy, Lisa Rutzick, Michael Jenkins

Sandra Pinto de Bader, 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