

EMERALD CITY TASK FORCE

JULY 19, 2007 MEETING SUMMARY

On July 19, 2007, the Emerald City Task Force (ECTF) held their first meeting at the Seattle Municipal Tower. The meeting discussions focused on the goal of the task force, the Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP), the Department of Planning & Development's (DPD) role in achieving the goals of the UFMP, and Seattle's municipal codes related to trees. The task force heard brief presentations on the development and content of the UFMP and Seattle's tree laws.

Task Force Members in Attendance

Randy Bannecker, Seattle King County Association of Realtors
Dan Duffus, Soliel Development LLC
Deb Guenther, Mithun
Ann Hirschi, Tree Solutions, Inc.
Garrett Huffman, Master Builders Association
John Hushagen, Seattle Tree Preservation
Martin Liebowitz, The Madrona Company
Eric Pravitz, HomeSight
Paul Tomita, Weinstein A/U

Task Force Members Not in Attendance

Amalia Leighton, SvR and the Seattle Planning Commission

City Staff in Attendance

Scott Dvorak - DPD and Project Coordinator
Brennon Staley - DPD
Tracy Morgenstern - Office of Sustainability and Environment (OSE)
Eli Levitt - OSE
Diane Sugimura - DPD
Steve Nicholas - OSE
Diane Kelso - DPD
Janet Oslund - DPD
Samantha Updegrave - DPD
Steve Moddemeyer - DPD
Mike Fong - City Council Staff

Task Force Introductions and Welcome - Diane Sugimura, Director of DPD & Steve Nicholas, Director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment (OSE)

- The goal of future tree regulations and incentives is to balance Seattle's development with the goal of planting and protecting more trees in the city.
- The storm last November raised significant issues. People now ask us - are trees dangerous? What if my tree is located close to a building? How do I know if a tree poses a hazard?
- As noted in the UFMP, canopy coverage in Seattle has declined from 42% to 18% over thirty-five years. The task of developing recommendations to protect and plant

trees on private property is difficult. However, it is one of the most important tasks in the work to implement the UFMP.

- This group must search for a balance between incentives, regulations, and new programs.
- There are several positive indicators of change in Seattle: the release of Seattle's first comprehensive urban forest plan (the UFMP), the increasing portion of the city budget spent on trees and tree care, and a campaign to restore Seattle's forested urban parks known as the Green Seattle Partnership – a unique public/private partnership between the City of Seattle and the Cascade Land Conservancy.
- The goal of this task force is to answer the following question: how do we do better with the regulations we have and what new regulations and incentives are needed to protect and plant trees on private property?

Task Force Goal – Scott Dvorak, Urban Planner, DPD

Scott Dvorak reviewed the goal of the task force with meeting participants. The goal is to gather ECTF's insights and a critique of the City's existing tree regulations and discuss innovative ideas on tree protections in Seattle – given the tremendous value that trees contribute to our city and that they have to be balanced with competing demands for limited space.

An Overview of the Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) – Tracy Morgenstern, Urban Forest Program Manager, OSE

Tracy Morgenstern gave a brief overview of the Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP).

DPD's Role in Achieving the Goals of the UFMP

Scott Dvorak outlined three steps to develop task force recommendations: 1. Evaluate existing regulations, 2. Develop recommendations to improve the regulations, and 3. Submit legislation to City Council. There are five scheduled meetings of the Emerald City Task Force between mid-July and the end of September. Each meeting takes place from 5 to 7 pm at the Seattle Municipal Tower. The final product will be a package of task force recommendations:

- Recommendations will inform the DPD staff proposal for revised/updated legislation.
- Recommendations will be forwarded to the Mayor's Office directly accompanying the staff proposal.

More Detailed Discussion of the Emerald City Task Force

ECTF members briefly discussed their experience and perceptions regarding the challenges of improving urban forestry in Seattle. A brief summary of questions & discussion:

- Improving the city's urban forest is about space: the city needs to preserve space to have the opportunity to plant and protect trees. There is a need both carrots and sticks to do the job well. Perhaps there is a need to consider a general tax credit or property tax credit for trees of a specific size in single-family or multifamily zones. Currently there are a multitude of reasons for people to cut trees and not many incentives to protect them. There is a need for a range of incentives.

- A large education package is needed to reach Seattle's goals – people need and want to know how to prune, plant, and take care of trees in general.
- It is important to research and discuss tough questions; why did the canopy coverage decline? What are various reasons behind this dramatic drop? If people can clear an undeveloped lot without consequences, then clearly attitudes about trees need to change.
- The laws need to be clear & concise – there must be consistency from one planner to the next.
- The Green Factor program and the new rules on open space (as approved by City Council) seem to be at odds. A commercial building is not required to leave any open space. The same is true in many residential areas. The city and members of the task force need to focus on clarity in terms of what we want to do and how we want to accomplish it.
- There is frustration with the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) and the management of street trees. There will be an opportunity for ECTF to provide comments on the proposed street tree code and SDOT staff members will attend future ECTF meetings.
- DPD regulates private property and SDOT regulates the right of way or planting strip. It is important for the task force to clearly understand the roles and responsibilities of each of these departments in terms of regulating tree planting and management.
- These questions are about value – do we provide an extra parking space in off-street areas or do we shrink setbacks for homes or businesses? There are a lot of trees that can survive construction if there is more thought given to each situation.
- Very often developers and builders are asked to protect trees that are already in rough condition due to construction or other factors. We can do much better selecting which trees to protect and which to remove.
- There is interest in thinking about how Seattle can achieve a 40% canopy coverage goal as recommended by American Forests. We need to think about how programs like Green Factor may plug into the canopy coverage goal. In the long-term the city may to consider underground utilities to provide more room for trees.
- There is concern that the group will put something reasonable together and other groups or individuals will dislike or criticize the product.
- This group faces several tough questions: is there a way to get people to pay more attention to trees? Are there flexible and practical incentives to encourage people to plant more trees?
- In years past, people blamed the developers for cutting trees. If we support the density of current developments and planning, then the challenge is getting buyers to buy in to the product (i.e. a lot or home with more trees). We need to get to the point where people take ownership of trees – there is a role for a cheer leader in any plan or recommendation.
- The momentum to improve urban forestry needs to come from the grassroots. People do not realize that they need to care for trees. An important aspect of any urban forestry program is a strong educational component on the value of urban trees.

Introduction to Seattle's Codes Related to Trees - Brennon Staley, Land Use Planner, DPD Brennon Staley gave a presentation to review relevant tree regulations or rules in Seattle. A brief summary of questions & discussion:

- The message is not out on the protections in place for Seattle's trees. People do not know about current tree rules - especially those in place for exceptional trees.
- Green Factor is a program that provides flexible mechanisms for greening neighborhood business districts. Green Factor is a regulatory program. However, there could be incentives for going beyond a certain level.
- The city should speak with one voice on tree planting and protection, and the city must play by the same rules as residents.
- Despite the best intentions of developers, builders, and DPD - a new homeowner may cut trees that were protected during the construction phase.
- Many trees have been removed from homes built in the past ten years.
- The survival of trees is a factor of how the home or development is planned starting with the design and budgeting phases. The retention of trees also depends on the people who purchase the property. Some companies invest substantially in landscaping and trees. In general, the city's tree retention standards are absurdly minimal.
- In one situation, the fine for a 100 year old exceptional tree was roughly \$30,000. This illustrates that fines can be substantially less than the cost of protecting the tree during construction.

Wrap Up & Next Meeting

- The next meeting of ECTF is scheduled for **Thursday, August 2nd from 5 pm to 7 pm**. Please note - the meeting is moving to the **40th floor in Seattle Municipal Tower, room 4080**.
- Scott Dvorak will send out an email reminder with detailed logistics for each meeting. These reminders will include meeting notes and additional background information for upcoming meetings.
- City staff will provide briefing materials on the proposed street tree ordinance.