

EMERALD CITY TASK FORCE

SEPTEMBER 6, 2007 MEETING SUMMARY

On September 6, 2007, the Emerald City Task Force (ECTF) held their fourth meeting at the Seattle Municipal Tower. The meeting included a follow-up to several agenda items that the group did not get to discuss at earlier meetings and a review of draft recommendations.

Task Force Members in Attendance

Randy Bannecker, Seattle/King County
Association of Realtors
Deb Guenther, Mithun
Garrett Huffman, Master Builders Assoc.
Martin Liebowitz, The Madrona Company

John Hushagen, Seattle Tree Preservation
Eric Pravitz, HomeSight
Paul Tomita, Weinstein A/U

City Staff in Attendance

Scott Dvorak, Dept. of Planning & Dev.
(DPD)
Brennon Staley, DPD
John Skelton, DPD
Tracy Morgenstern, Office of Sustainability
& Environment (OSE)
Dianne Kelso, DPD
Janet Osland, DPD
Robert Knable, DPD
Nolan Ruhnquist, Dept. of Trans. (SDOT)

Members of the Public

Favero Greenforest
Barbara Warren
John Barber

The notes below are meant to capture the various points made during the course of the meeting – they are not a literal transcript, nor are they meant to imply that there was agreement on any one point. Instead, they only serve as a reminder of the discussion and the points made.

Bonds

- Bonds should cover existing trees to preserve and not necessarily new trees being planted
- Return of bond money has been done by SDOT but only when requested by developer
- Process should be better managed with automatic release of bond money when conditions are met – too difficult for the developer to keep track of, especially if the bond is for a 3 year landscape maintenance plan, for example
- Developers have no control over landscaping once the property is sold - so it is difficult to hold accountable for what happens
- If bond is passed along to new owner it will raise cost of project - impacting affordability
- It is believed that building inspectors don't look at trees. Landscape/trees should be part of checklist before inspector signs off on the project
- Certificate of Occupancy is City's key leverage point
- Lots of cities require bonds and do it well - so there are plenty of lessons learned out there and we don't need to reinvent the wheel (check out Redmond's program)
- Create an incentive program with the bonds – if the tree requiring preservation is saved, at the end of the project return the bond plus a bonus payment
- In practice the landscape subcontractor returns at the end of the 1 year establishment period and just replaces the dead landscaping – bond doesn't necessarily create an incentive to care for trees during establishment – requirement is just a live specimen at the end of the bond

- Make landscape/tree preservation and care a code issue since developers have no control after the C of O is issued and the property is sold – unless the City wants to set up a landscape police
- Rather than landscape police, resources are better spend ensuring good sustainable landscape plans suited to site conditions in the first place
- Bonds really would only affect a small number of lots in Seattle as there aren't many developments with much space for trees– many projects are built lot line to lot line
- If there are no restrictions on current property owners, then increasing the burden on developers is merely nibbling around the edges of the problem as the owner can undo anything required of the developer anyway

Landscape Standards

- City should require a certified arborist sign off on landscape/tree plans so inferior trees or mature trees nearing the end of their lifespan are not saved - instead a comprehensive plan with a longer view which considers site conditions can be put in place
- Standards for single-family residential areas has to be the priority as most land in the city is single-family residential
- Currently a single-family property owner can pave their entire lot, multi-family is currently much more restricted
- Landscape standards are not enough - more creative approaches, like SeaStreets are needed.
 - Can SeaStreets concept be applied to individual houses instead of entire block for at least a landscaping portion if not drainage?
 - SeaStreets projects preclude parking in the parking strip leaving it for planting – incentive to keep a yard a yard
 - Could a street do a planting version of SeaStreets not drainage
- Could require single-family development over a certain threshold (e.g. 3,000 sq ft) to have a certain number of trees or amount of canopy cover to be preserved/planted or, alternately, be planted offsite/banked.
 - Threshold would put the burden on those who could generally better afford it rather than everyone.
 - Could reduce the number of sites clear cut for development – people wouldn't cut everything if they had to replace it later anyway.
 - Don't create any requirements which could preclude ADUs which are important to affordable housing
 - Master Builders could not support extending the Green Factor into single-family residential zones – too large a portion of city's land. Built Green standards already exist and City could create incentives to encourage different Built Green levels

Planting Incentives

- Need tree give-aways, like DON's program for R-O-W trees, but trees to plant anywhere on a resident's property
- The planting strip is a huge untapped opportunity for tree planting
- Stormwater rates/incentives tied to trees/canopy cover would be effective. Could create a similar program to SCL's energy efficiency rebate program – they avoid additional energy purchases by investing in customer's conservation. Facility expansion costs should factor into the avoided costs trees could contribute to.
- Question: Would a \$20k investment for more extensive and more mature landscaping on a \$500k house pay back at something like \$550k? Answer: Possibly

Comments on Recommendations

- This work needs a secured funding mechanism attached to it for implementation and enforcement. Otherwise it is just more paper/an unfunded mandate. Secure funding would help protect it in the long-run
- Consider a long-term plan to underground utilities to increase opportunities for trees
- Increase community awareness of value of trees - also provide some context about what the City is doing to illustrate that it is walking the talk
- Create a public tree planting day – perhaps an Arbor Day event – encourage people to think about what it means to have trees
- Tie the event to the city’s carbon footprint – could create future opportunities for funding as offset
- Emphasize flexibility and incentives over enforcement and penalties
- Offer tree removal and relocation in exchange for planting on site.
- Fee-in-lieu amounts should be commensurate with the value of the tree and there should be limits on how often an applicant can tap into that option
- Inter-departmental coordination
 - City staff should value mutually beneficial solutions rather than pursuing rigid requirements
 - Inter-departmental coordination is important – this is a city-wide strategy and different discussions should not be happening in SDOT, SPU, DPD, SCL etc.
 - One-stop process for tree issues would address the problem and facilitate engagement
- Limiting impervious surfaces could go against development goals and sidewalk goals. Include decreased impervious surfaces in incentive package
- Private utilities can do anything they want in the R-O-W – they have a blanket easement/permit so they can damage current trees and future tree potential
- City’s greenbelts are in dire straights due to invasive species – these areas have high ecological value including large trees – all the 2” trees in the world can’t make up for the loss of these areas
- Need to get more trees planted on public land, like schools - and not just planted but planted and cared for
- Public outreach is the key and City property has to be the example – there cannot be a disconnect between what the City is saying and doing
- If we want to collect/bank fees, there has to be a place to put the trees. New land needs to be acquired to meet the goals – each neighborhood should have an area of land to be its tree bank – requires a new way of thinking about tree banks
- Tree banks should be used to help pay to plant trees on private property not public property – that is already the City’s responsibility

Top Two Ideas from Each Task Force Member

- Incentives
- Easy access to tree planting and care information
- Vouchers for free trees
- Tie together stormwater management/trees/impervious surfaces so obvious connections are made and departments work together
- Need open space for trees
- Education – flood the public with messages that trees have values – this will go further than regulations that protect tree by tree or site by site
- Tree banks – fee-in-lieu process should provide tangible outcomes, not just hinder development
- Help single-family property owners get trees on their property – not enough development occurring to reach the City’s canopy goals through development regulations alone

- Developers are making money and should help pay the price – money should go into purchasing land in all neighborhoods
- City should not be selling surplus property – these properties are a good opportunity to preserve and plant trees – should be a moratorium on selling City-owned property. Reclaiming this public land is a better opportunity than trying to regulate on private land which is harder to control
- Tree removal permit process
- Incentives to create a carbon sink – City should increase landscape requirements and incentives to homeowners to plant and maintain – not enough residents are doing this on their own
- Incentives through an SPU program – trees/stormwater runoff benefits – like SCL program
- Multi-family zones – elevate trees in land use code so that meaningful trade-offs can be made between trees, parking, setbacks, facades, etc. – if we don't do this in a way that preserves development capacity, people will sprawl cutting down trees in outlying undeveloped areas
- In single-family areas require tree cover for houses being developed over a certain size
- Protect what we have (including restoration of area that have been ivy infested) – need the hierarchy of “preserve, protect and plant” like “reduce, reuse, recycle” for waste or “conservation, renewables, offsets” for energy
- Storm water incentives
- Need a levy like a green infrastructure levy – help convey the importance of trees and the City needs resources to make this happen

Audience Comments

- Sustainability is missing from the list – need to take a future point of view – look at Seattle from an ecological standpoint - be bolder and rethink assumptions
- Need more stewardship of what is already out there
- Stormwater incentives are important
- Tree banking on an Olmsted scale – city-wide/neighborhood-wide view
- Incentives for private property owners to maintain healthy canopy cover – permit to alter canopy
- Make choices with long-term view – what will be here decades from now
- Purchaser does not often know that any of the landscape is supposed to be saved after purchase as part of the project
- Create and distribute planting packets of information through local nurseries – get grants to support the development and distribution of this information