Urban Forestry Commission (UFC)
April 11, 2012
Meeting Notes

Seattle Municipal Tower Room 2750
700 5th Avenue, Seattle
3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

The Urban Forestry Commission was established to advise the Mayor and City Council concerning the establishment of policy and regulations governing the protection, management, and conservation of trees and vegetation in the City of Seattle

Attending

Commissioners
Matt Mega (MM) – chair
John Small (JS) – vice chair
Tom Early (TE)
Leif Fixen (LF) – non voting
John Floberg (JF)
Peg Staeheli (PS)

Absent- Excused
Nancy Bird
Gordon Bradley
Jeff Reibman

Staff
Sandra Pinto de Bader (SPdB) - OSE

Public
Michael Oxman (MO)
Steve Zemke (SZ)

NOTE: Meeting notes are not exhaustive. For more details listen to the digital recording of the meeting at: http://www.seattle.gov/urbanforestrycommission/meetingdocs.htm

Call to Order
Went around the table and Commissioners introduced themselves to Leif Fixen. Leif will be presented to Council's Planning, Land Use, and Sustainability Committee for appointment to Position #5 (Arborist) on May 23. He is participating without vote.

Leif is currently working for the Snohomish Conservation District as a resource planner. Before that, he worked as City of Boston Forester. He has been arborist for 10 years. Massachusetts has a state law that protects shade trees. Boston follows state law. The law doesn't apply to private property. On public land trees are protected. In Boston all street trees are City property. One of the big pushes he did toward the end was to divide the city into seven zones pruning each zone one year and having a 7-year pruning cycle avoiding reactive pruning. You would do a contract per zone. They contract out pruning, planting, and removing. This was not implemented beyond one zone pruning due to budget cuts.

Chair report

He is going to work on tracking the work plan closely to make sure we cover all the work. The 2012 Urban Forest Symposium will take place May 14. The international migratory bird celebration is happening May 12.

JF – let's make sure to take credit for all the things we've done

PS – All this time it has been theoretical and it's hard to explain to people. The information Matt delivered combined with other work we've done become stronger when considered together.

Review standards for UFC input for large projects – initial discussion
PS – discussed a couple of projects reviewed this year. It would be helpful to come up with a template to respond to comments needed for projects such as Yesler, Streetcar, Waterfront, etc. Doesn't have to be institutional large projects, it could be Bell Street.

JF – how do we deal with comments. How can we be better aware of things?

TE – discuss our role. Increase awareness. Providing input on how process affect the urban forest.

MM – it's a slippery slope in terms of choosing projects. Template serves two purposes make recommendations and show the public what questions we are asking.

PS – in terms of how to be more aware: talk about this with the IDT. What would be a mechanism to find out. Define thresholds: - staff member brings an issue to the UFC, take a look at agendas or meeting notes for the Planning Commission and Design Board and invite people to come and present. Look at scale or size, number of trees to be planted/removed, significant trees issues.

LF – had public works commission. All things trees are under Parks department in Boston.

MM – maybe there would be an automatic trigger if DPD checks with SDOT on projects with significant impacts. Ask Bill Ames/Nolan to inform UFC of projects.

TE – They review permits

JF – how to decide what projects will not be reviewed

TE – hesitant to set a number or a size

PS – could be special projects, ordinance related, unique (condition, tree, location, type), zone change or condition change.

MM – take a vote within the UFC and see if a Commissioner is willing/able to lead an effort.

TE – we see more the positive aspects of tree protection and projects accommodating to protect trees.

LF – close loop holes and write better ordinances

MM – Yesler did a very innovative approach to tree preservation.

PS – the reason for a template seems a bit random. Weren't sure of what we should look at. Look at a project through specific lenses. Three mayor areas:

- How does this fit with the tree protection ordinance?
- How does this work with landscape code?
- Is there anything about the project's existing or future trees that make it special?

MM – unique opportunity to look at tree aspects of projects. Mature trees, pre/post, structural issues, replacement, fruit, conifer, etc. and long term.

PS – large corridor projects is something we could have an impact on.

MM – do more specific plans for a specific management unit. Habitat, connections, species mix, etc.

JF – we could draw from other cities' example

MM – parks has vegetation management plans. Start with Parks first since they have the plans in place

JF – could be used as a planning tool

TE – would be helpful to have questions to ask during a presentation.
1. How does this project tie into the UFMP?
2. What are your goals for trees in this project?
3. Specific tree impacts of the project – positive, negative, numbers, etc.

Peg will work on a draft and will send it to Sandra.

Ecosystems Metrics position paper – initial discussion

JF – this is a position paper to follow the recommendation given for tree protection regulations and trend-tracking over time.

JS – this paper was originally envisioned after the UFC strongly recommended a permit system for tracking tree removal beyond DBH and stem count metrics to understand permitting and non-permitted tree cutting. Trying to come up with what are ecosystem functions and how to measure them.

JF – use DBH, species as proxy to capture values?

JS – DBH , species (groups), condition, location will be key, water quality

PS – include stormwater

JS – he somewhat included it in water quality.
MM – i-tree results could be used. The technology is moving forward and it gets very complex. Find high level numbers and then get into the details. Need to have a simple metric.

JF – hoping i-tree would be that high-level data to communicate

MM – simple metrics:

1. Percent evergreen – stormwater
2. Total canopy % cover – heat island
3. Age, species, size/DBH diversity
4. Small, med/large
5. Condition
6. Fruit bearing/non-fruit bearing
7. Patches/corridors/gap analysis
8. Height

Parking lot:
Different species list: heat island, soil volume, noise, air quality
Property values – economics

SZ – add also built vs. non-built environment (pervious vs. impervious)

PS – the trouble with relying on permit submittals is that the percentage of property under development every year is very low.

MM – is the City working on getting more information from i-tree?

SPdB – we are working with them to get more usable data from the study to use in the UFMP update.

Next steps: Sandra and Matt will sit down and compare to i-tree.

JS – is the goal to determine the financial cost of the private development dollar-to-dollar equation? Or is it more here a snapshot of what the value is and how to protect it?

MM – need more dollar numbers

PS – what if we do the benchmarking?

JS – prioritize monetization of things the City spends money on – stormwater, green space, city life, health benefits

LF – There is more on the social side besides ecosystems

MM –Kathy Wolf has done some of this analysis. Number can be huge.

JS – prioritize what City is spending money on

TE – currently assessors don't look at trees on properties to increase value.

PS – how much is SPU currently spending on gray infrastructure?

JS – the City is spending a lot on CSO (combined sewer overflow) elimination

PS – it's not gray vs. green infrastructure. Have to acknowledge both in an urban environment. We are playing catch up with the green. How much lawn exists in the city?

MM – Thornton Creek is an example for gray and green infrastructure.

Public comment

SZ – Going back to your first discussion on what projects are significant to get involved. The important of tree ordinance that passes and it gets interpreted in Client Assistance Memos. At Ingraham HS no trees were considered significant because at the time a Douglas Fir had to be 36" in diameter, and there were many trees that were not yet 36" DBH, but were close. Keep in mind trying to anticipate what should be in a tree ordinance. UFC needs to take the initiative and put out some ideas.

Ecosystem metrics – think in terms of parameters starting with UFMP, what type of UF do we want in 50 years? What does it looks like in 2060 and how can we get there? Are we moving in the right direction? Air quality, this is also an instance on being proactive. What are the component we want to see? The Puget Sound Air Quality Association did a study on air pollution concentration in the City and impacts on schools near highways. Look at that and see the impact having on kids and propose planting trees there (next to highways). Look at institutions potentially figuring out where to plant trees to reduce pollution.

MO – He proposed to SPU to plant trees instead of building a gray infrastructure (large vault). You could say that all capital projects should have a net increase in trees. The Seattle Times building is for sale and it has large trees. What will the UFC do? He sent a letter last month around the issue at Aurora Ave. with contractor removing trees. He talked to Seattle Tunnel Partners and SDOT and hasn't seen a permit. No arborists are required to remove trees. What does WA state law say?

Next meeting agenda items
We'll continue today's conversations and might be ready to vote.

Adjourn

Community comment:

Richard Conlin
Seattle City Council

April 13, 2012

Matt Mega, Chair
Urban Forestry Commission
C/o Sandra Pinto de Bader
700 Fifth Avenue, 27th Floor
Seattle, WA 98124

Dear Urban Forestry Commissioners,

Thank you for your work to ensure that the proposed Tree Regulations Update helps the City meet our urban forestry goals. As you know, it is a difficult task to craft tools that can grow our urban forest while also giving property owners choices that balance other important priorities, such as gardens, recreational space, sunlight, and safety.

I have reviewed your correspondence and position papers as part of our review of the Department of Planning and Development's (DPD) original policy proposal. I really appreciate your commitment to work with DPD to bring additional perspectives to their process and to develop specific policy papers that address key issues.

I would like to encourage the Commission to take a holistic approach to how we can achieve our urban forest priorities, considering a full range of strategies to make the most of both public and private property in achieving the goals of the City's Urban Forest Management Plan. It is my belief that we should embrace ecosystem thinking, and that our goal should be to foster the growth of a diverse, multi-age, multi-species forest in the city with appropriate understory. The Seattle forest should be focused on native or native-adapted trees, and self-sustaining to the extent possible, with minimal requirements for pruning and management, especially on public property. Recognizing that individual trees and small groups of trees can be great assets to property owners and communities, I think our focus should be on providing a set of incentives and parameters that will encourage groves and stands of trees, whether in linear form along streets, in backyards where property owners are willing participants, on larger parcels of land including parks, or in cooperating neighborhoods where neighbors can come together to steward these groupings.

On private property, I believe that an incentive based approach to encourage private property owners to plant and retain more trees is the best strategy, including creative ways to engage private property owners as partners early in recognizing the inherent value of trees on their property. I am very interested in exploring neighborhood based conservation approaches, such as LIDs, tree easements, community covenants regarding tree maintenance and preservation, and tree cooperatives, where maintenance and preservation can be planned and shared in the

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community. In areas being developed, I suggest that the Seattle Green Factor is a great model of how we can best support the maximum amount of trees and an ecosystem approach. While I appreciate the appeal of a 'tree removal permit' and similar regulatory approaches, I believe that an approach based on a regulatory model will be insufficient to meet our city's goals. I do want to consider how we can best maintain exceptional trees that are currently protected, and would not exclude regulation from the toolkit, but I think it should not be the centerpiece of our strategy.

I look forward to hearing your comments and creative thinking as our efforts to implement an updated Urban Forest Management Plan continue.

Sincerely,

Richard Conlin

Richard Conlin
Chair, Planning, Land Use and Sustainability Committee

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