Urban Forestry Commission (UFC)
May 2, 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)
Nancy Bird (NB)
Gordon Bradley (GB)
Tom Early (TE)
Leif Fixen (LF) – non-voting
John Floberg (JF)

Staff
Sandra Pinto de Bader - OSE

Public
Steve Zemke
Michael Oxman
Kyle Stetler

Absent- Excused
Jeff Reibman (JR)
Peg Staeheli (PS)

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

Public comment

SZ – disappointed on Richard Conlin's letter. His approach doesn't work. There aren't many incentives out there. This is a DPD-driven ordinance and they shouldn't be driving legislation. They have no interest in protecting trees. They have an incentive on people building and cutting trees down. UFC needs to stick to its guns and persuade RC of the value of trees. There are several good things in letter such as the Eco-systems thinking. We are not the first ones to have a permit. SDOT already has it.

There is value in pushing the native tree aspect. Came across one tree book that talks about native species: Douglas Tallamy's "Bringing Nature Home". Maintain bio-diversity. Planting non-native trees presents problems including becoming them potentially becoming invasive.

Michael Oxman – Thank you for doing all the reading and work. UFC is at the forefront of the battle to save trees in the city. Tidy up your act. Last month gave public comment. UFC got fooled by SDOT's ordinance. It allows non-certified arborists to remove trees. Should not be the case. Fiasco in Aurora Ave. People not knowing how to use equipment and having unsafe work practices.

Sent letter about tree planting density in the industrial district related to the 100% error rate in the UFMP in 2007. It's 4% instead of 8%. Freight movers should be consulted prior the planting of trees. Should have gone to Freight Advisory Board and ask what they think about how many trees should be planted. So letter is not valid. Ignore Conlin's letter. It's up to you guys to pass that law protecting trees. He pretty much meant you guys can go home now. You are capable or making the decision. CC is not willing to entertain any proposals that cost money. Don't be cheap and stand up for the trees.

Approval of April 4 and April 11 minutes

> **ACTION**: **A motion was made to approve the April 4 meeting notes as written. The motion was seconded and carried.**
>
> **ACTION**: **A motion was made to approve the April 11 meeting notes as written. The motion was seconded and carried.**

Review Richard Conlin's letter

JF – it's not black or white. We can ask for clarification. He seems open to other options

TE – trying to turn away from a regulatory

JF – he was playing it down but the last paragraph mentions that 'an approach based on a regulatory model will be insufficient…"

NB – she takes letter as the permit being problematic for them. Veiled but there.

MM – the issue is that if we still are promoting the permit system, we'll have to come up with it and put it together. We are on a pretty tight timeline.

JS – I'm a little confused with Richard Conlin's thinking in terms of cost and wholistic approach. Without an enforcement or tracking component I fear that the trees will be up there until the occupancy permit is signed. We'll have the density but not the trees.

MM – Does a tree permit have to be a regulatory approach? When we talk about tree permits we said to phase them in, find creative ways to make them be perceived as not mainly regulatory. Trying to find a compromise.

NB – reframe what we are trying to get at. Part of the objective is to slow down the tree cutting process. Tracking could do that. Maybe it's a volunteer thing.

TE – I don't think a volunteer basis effort will give us the accuracy we need.

JF- A permit system, because people have to pay attention to it, it would have more accuracy. If it is nice to do, it won't provide the information we need.

TE – within a year we would know if we are tearing down more trees than we are putting up.

LF – in the past, trees have been viewed as decoration. We are talking about them transitioning to utility (this is the cake, not the frosting). Trees should be no different than sewer line.

MM – we took that tack already

GB – what that does…the intent is tracking, the problem is that the permit has the regulatory approach. There is value to this thing if you explore the alternatives.

NB – unless you can incentivize to track. Track tree species, etc. using incentives. Not just one track option. Use engagement and incentives besides a permit.

JF- what if we are tracking decline?

TE – then we would know we are losing and need a regulatory system.

JF – do we need to track further decline?

MM – The jury is still out in terms of decline in residential areas (SF). We know we are losing trees due to development. According to my data we are all over the map with some areas losing canopy and others gaining. I wonder if we could implement a pilot with a permit system in these four neighborhoods that have experienced loss in canopy in the past. We need a matrix that lists out what Ruth Williams mentioned in her letter. It allows us to get ahead of the game to assess the new ordinance. It would be a lot of work in a short time.

NB – couldn't we get what the incentives are?

MM- the incentives are going to be not just part of the ordinance but will be in different places. Ruth pulled out from City website what's already in place. We have to do that and add the regulation piece too. Richard Conlin wants to protect exceptional trees.

NB – Enforcement is the tricky part.

JS – Almost every exceptional tree in private property is a threat to a structure. If you have to do a risk assessment that's what it would show. Part of it is health of tree and also risk to infrastructure. I don't think protection of large trees is all that easy.

TE – development will impact large trees.

MM – when a project goes to design review they have to show location of trees that are coming down. But just as an X, not drip line.

LF – is there a way to disincentivize people to remove trees without regulating. Maybe if they are removing trees on their project then they get bumped to a different process. Might allow for publication somewhere… such that the homeowner knows that by signing on the line, the project will be published somewhere for the community to comment.

JS – with i-tree we could calculate canopy loss.

LF – it could be a box to check are you removing trees, are you planting trees? With removal being more important.

JF – Is Richard Conlin expecting our input prior to the UFMP being complete?

MM – I think it's a general comment as we provide input to both the ordinance and the UFMP update. The matrix could be helpful.

JS – the matrix could look at what has a direct or indirect cost to the City. A lot of these incentives have a cost to the City. The same holds true with replacement.

JF – we could show a couple of Green Factor projects that have not been successful and that can be a teaching moment. We could then make the argument that more needs to get done.

MM – We would need to clone more Janas to plant more trees. Money would need to be re-directed. Who would like to take the lead and work on this matrix. Could be done electronically.

NB – we could do it electronically. I would like to be part of the discussion.

Nancy, Matt, John S, Peg for now.

NB – I could do the framework and get it started.

MM – if DPD ordinance won't go to Council before the fall we have a bit of time.

Review standards for UFC input for large projects – continues and possible vote
MM – Peg put together a template.

NB – could add a couple of things.
ADD - How does this help support the canopy cover goals of the City.
What are the issues around this, major challenges to supporting the canopy cover goals. Ideas they have for us.
Data collection, is there a way we can collect the information and add info to our inventory.

JF – really like the last bullet. We need this type of thinking.

MM – for any project that impacts trees, fill this out. We can plug it in a map. A service the UFC could provide.

TE – we are not pulling in each and every project.

MM – what's the filter for projects coming to us?

TE – do we want this to be another precise input or just something to keep us informed on new changes and trends?

MM – I would err on the side of getting more info than less. If it's a large project ask all the questions, if it's smaller ask fewer questions. There is not much building going on. Once things pick up, how easy will it be to identify projects impacting trees?

LF – we could do it like a survey money that we use as a database.

MM – the value would be to have a single place to capture information and use it as a database.

LF – we don't have time to look at 100 of these forms a month.

JS – how does planning commission get the projects they review? An ordinance?

JF – we need a filtering process.

MM – I like that but I'd like to go away from stem count. That's why we want that data.

ADD FROM RUTHS: Are there any Environmentally Critical Areas or associated buffers, unique conditions, or unique trees associated with this project? Into two bullets

TE – liked that we start diving into connectivity issues. I thought we were using this as a general survey. Not an accurate way of gathering data. Add the positive piece of creative design solutions reached at.

MM – send to Peg your comments and she can create the next iteration for vote next week.

JF – who is going to collect this information?

MM – we can use this as a guideline for departments to fill out before briefing. Then we can start getting presentations from departments that hit the same issues. WE can then expand to collect more data and who's going to collect the data.

JF – There will be a lot of projects we'll miss.

MM – we can ask Brennon. It's hard to pull data from DPD's database. I don't think we can search the DB for exceptional trees.

NB – the flip side of the regulatory approach. If people understood more about trees people would act differently. It's hard to do enough outreach. GSP is doing a great job. If you can do something like that to focus on canopy citywide… wholistic approach should be part of the matrix.

JF – we should present RC with incentives and ways to engage people AND a regulatory approach.

MM – agree. If we don't have the data, how do we do it? Maybe have a series of questions and go back to RC with. We could also ask the question and provide our answer.

JF – we are not the only city dealing with this. We have others we can learn from

GB – We had a conversation with Jill Simmons. Since Jana has gone to the utility and they do such a good job with their newsletter… There are many messages you can send out in the utilities newsletter and bill inserts.

SPdB – when SPU came to brief us on their outreach efforts they mentioned that space in the newsletter or bill insert costs money. Anybody that pays for the space is welcome to place a message there.

MM – outreach is a big item

New business and announcements

Adjourn

Commissioners continued the meeting to work on the matrix.

Community comment:
From: Michael Oxman [mailto:michaeloxman@comcast.net]
Sent: Saturday, April 21, 2012 11:04 AM
To: Pinto_de_Bader, Sandra
Cc: SeattlePOSA@yahoogroups.com
Subject: Why Tree Inventory is needed: Reason #120108

Dear Seattle Urban Forestry Commissioners,

Our urban forest canopy cover is shrinking, and we don't know at what rate this decline is occurring because we do not have an accurate tree inventory. It is time for the Seattle Urban Forestry Commission to point out that the Emperor should get measured for a new suit of clothes.

I have 3 comments that zoom in from general process to the microscope of specific content.

1) GOAL
The attached Seattle City Council Resolution 120108 contains a number of tasks that were due in September 2009, but have not yet been accomplished, such as posting an online tree database that can be accessed across city departments. I do not believe this resolution was included in the archives of the Commission's documents on the seattle.gov/trees website, otherwise the tasks would be included in the work plan. Please note this resolution recognizes the canopy cover goal of 40% of the surface area of the city. If we want a net zero carbon policy, we can certainly also have a lofty environmental component of that Comprehensive Plan goal.

2) PROCESS
Each and every member of the Urban Forestry Commission should tackle the elements that are discrete to their specialty position. For example the Economist should submit the requested report on Transfer of Development Rights, and the Hydrologist should provide the requested "mechanisms for an incentive program that would allow property owners to receive stormwater credits for the planting and retention of trees" that the City Council asks for in Resolution 120108.

3) TASK
In particular, the amount of impervious roofing, slabs, and building foundations should be the basis for the stormwater fees. The current fee structure for calculating residential sewer rates is unfair. Water bills contain a miraculous jump in logic that erroneously infers that every drop of water that comes out of the tap goes into the sewer.

Citizens with large lots should not be charged for irrigation water that nourishes the urban forest, then enters the soil and recharges the aquifer, never entering the drain. They are paying for a service that the city is not providing.

The double whammy is that the current fee structure discourages citizens from watering their gardens because they feel they are being charged double by this city's monopoly on water and drainage. This fact of human nature was well known, but nothing was done about it when the 20 year old stormwater ordinance was revised immediately following the appointment of the Urban Forestry Commission. The stormwater ordinance should never have been adopted without review by the fledgeling Urban Forestry Commission.

People who want their yards to look their best add supplemental irrigation during Seattle's dry summer season. They know that they are providing a public service because large overstory and midstory trees and associated groundcover vegetation provide environmental, social and financial benefits that accrue, not just to their own property, but to the entire community.

Thanks for listening.

Arboreally yours,

Michael Oxman
(206) 949-8733
www.treedr.com

From: Anna Nissen [mailto:nnarch2@gmail.com]
Sent: Sunday, April 29, 2012 3:44 PM
To: Pinto_de_Bader, Sandra
Subject: Trees in Pavements

Where Bridgeway meets Stoneway, magnolias and dogwoods are being planted in the sidewalk in the usual Seattle way– tiny hole, construction still under way. So sad.

Please bring to the Urban Forestry Commission's attention that satisfying the Green Factor without accounting for the fact that trees are alive, not just commodities, would be rejected and its the Board's job to do so.

See the following for one way to provide growing soil and stormwater capture as well: http://www.on-line-seminars.com/index.php?p=1_33_Archive-38#Using%20CU-Structural%20Soil%AE%20to%20Grow%20Trees

Thanks,

Anna Nissen, Nissen/Nissen Architect

From: Ruth Williams [mailto:ruthalice@comcast.net]
Sent: Tuesday, May 01, 2012 1:52 PM
To: Richard Conlin
Cc: Pinto_de_Bader, Sandra
Subject: Your Letter to the Urban Forestry Commission

Hello Richard,

I agree with the holistic approach you discuss, and I realize as well that there are numerous valid and competing issues that must be respected as we move forward in rebuilding our lost natural infrastructure where we can. I think we have about the same vision, and anyone who comes across this e-mail probably holds ideals similar to ours.

The problem is that a large part of the public doesn't seem to have the education or background to share or even consider these ideals, but I think a lot more of them would if they understood the value and the need. For example, last December the natural area I steward was vandalized by a neighbor who cut the lower limbs from 60 young trees and cut down many mature shrubs. Two people who identified themselves saw him at work and didn't ask him to stop. He has not been charged. Most of the other neighbors who wrote in the blogs said they liked what he did. This incident points up how little understanding people have of the work trees do for us.

Additionally, there is the issue of Transit Oriented Development and its attendant density. This is happening now and lends a great deal of urgency to the need for public education about trees and natural infrastructure. I have been to several of Sound Transit's community presentations, and the natural features at least at Northgate are getting no mention. Only the built environment is considered.

We tree advocates also like the idea of creative incentives. In fact, we drew up a list of them that has been sent to the SUFC. If you would like a copy we can get it for you.

Nevertheless, the need for education has become urgent. It is this that brings us to why I believe a permit system has a beneficial role to play in the new tree ordinance. A permit system in most cases could be mostly about education. Requiring people to communicate with their government and with each other about why they want to remove their trees would be a very useful teaching tool and have the significant benefit of saving more good trees.

Thank you for your consideration!

Best,

Ruth