Urban Forestry Commission (UFC)
September 14, 2011
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
Nancy Bird (NB)
Tom Early (TE)
John Hushagen (JH)
Jeff Reibman (JR)
John Small (JS)

Absent- Excused
John Floberg (JF)
Gordon Bradley (GB)
Peg Staeheli (PS)

Staff
Sandra Pinto de Bader (SPdB) - OSE
Mark Mead (MMe) - Parks
Miles Mayhew (MMa) - SPU
Joanna Nelson (JN) - CLC

Public
Steve Zemke (SZ)
Nicholas Dankers (ND)
Margarett Thouless (MT)

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
MM – we have quorum, so let's start the meeting

Chair report
MM – Don't have much of a report. Trying to get more regular meetings with Council and the Mayor to get on the same page. He'll rotate Commissioners attending these meetings. He asked Jeff and Peg to join him on meetings with the Mayor's Office and Richard Conlin. Nothing earth shattering came from the meetings. After the joint meeting with the IDT, would like to focus on next year's work plan. We should carve off some time. Start thinking on some of the priorities you would like to work on.

Green Seattle Partnership update – GSP Management Team
SPdB – The members of the Green Seattle Partnership Management Team are: Joanna Nelson (Cascade Land Conservancy); Mark Mead (Parks), Miles Mayhew (SPU), and I represent OSE. To frame this briefing I'd like to mention that forested parklands, where the Green Seattle Partnership works, represent 7% of the land in Seattle. Because these lands have been neglected for so many years they are one of the two land-uses that lost canopy between 2002/03-2007 (the other land use was developed parks). The Green Seattle Partnership is a public-private partnership between the City of Seattle and the Cascade Land

Conservancy and it's an example of the sustainability model the Urban Forest Management Plan is based on.

Joanna and Mark presented the briefing document below:

Urban Forestry Commission briefing
September 14, 2011

Green Seattle Partnership: Building community to restore our forested parklands

Seattle's forest is dying

Without direct intervention, 70% of the forest canopy in our parks could be dead within 20 years. Our big trees are nearing the end of their natural lives, and invasive species like English ivy are smothering healthy, mature trees and choking out the seedlings that should replace them. This loss has significant costs. The forests in our parks provide more than $10 million of value every year by managing storm water, cleaning our air and water, raising our property values, and sequestering carbon.

The Green Seattle Partnership is part of the solution

The Green Seattle Partnership is a unique public-private venture dedicated to promoting a livable city by re-establishing and maintaining healthy urban forests. Formed in 2004 by a Memorandum of Agreement between the City of Seattle and Cascade Land Conservancy (CLC), the Green Seattle Partnership (GSP) is a one-time, 20-year investment in the restoration of our forested parklands. The GSP's goal is to restore 2,500 acres by 2025.

We celebrate GSP's accomplishments to date:

- Over 415,000 volunteer hours (representing more than 250 full time employees)
- Over 100 people directly adopted 70 parks
- The Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks) has invested over $6.8 million
- CLC has raised over $2.75 million
- SPU has invested approximately $650k
- OSE continues to actively participate in the Partnership
- We have proven this stewardship model works: 600 acres are in restoration

Almost every day of the year, neighborhood, business, nonprofit, school, and religious groups turn out to take ownership for the restoration of our forested green spaces. While volunteers are planting native trees, there is something else growing too: pride of place. The Green Seattle Partnership strengthens our communities and improves our quality of life by connecting people to nearby nature and their neighbors.

We are at a critical juncture

After six successful years, the Partnership is at a critical juncture. The GSP has become one of the largest efforts of its kind in the state, if not the country, primarily because of the tireless investment of citizens, community leaders, agencies, non-profits, companies, and the City. With all its accomplishments, this community investment will be lost in two to five years if the City cannot find sustainable funding.

Funding at the scale necessary ($4 million per year) will require direct political support from both the community and the City of Seattle.

Some of the main issues GSP is facing are:

- Cumulative Reserve Fund and Parks Levy Funding beyond 2012 is in doubt
- CLC budget for GSP is decreasing. CLC fulfilled their original private fundraising commitment and will no longer be raising funds for GSP at the same level
- Forests represent 50% of Parks land and receive less than 2% of the annual Parks budget
- Volunteers require one paid staff support hour for each four hours of volunteerism
- Parks trees are 20% of the city's overall canopy and their canopy cover declined 2.5% between 2003 and 2007, while the city as a whole remained constant
- If the forest is not restored our creeks and larger water ways will be degraded by increased uncontrolled stormwater.

Seattle's forested parklands are at risk of losing all that has been gained by the GSP if a dedicated funding source is not secured in the next two years. Without a funding commitment from the City for the GSP, we risk losing the confidence and energy of hundreds of dedicated community members that have volunteered their time to help restore our forests. The GSP relies on a network of resources and commitment from all partners to survive. The GSP is not an "outside" entity; the City has played a critical role in the Partnership's success to date, and it is important that City support and participation continues.

Our public commitment needs to grow

After thousands of events and six very successful years, it is clear the limiting resource is not volunteer commitment, or even private philanthropy; it's sustainable public funding. The volunteer and community contributions have been leveraged by more than $8 million spent by the City of Seattle. The Green Seattle Partnership currently stands as the most visible and successful model of public-private partnership in the region. However, its future is uncertain without dedicated funding.

JH - Read in the Seattle Times that large, green things are not cost effective. Are we doing this because it makes us feel good or is there an aspect of it that's cost effective?

MMe – These forested parklands bring a value of approximately $12 million per year to the city. There are benefits to air quality improvement, stormwater retention, home values, and aesthetic benefit. There is also risk associated with unhealthy forests that Parks has to manage with hazard trees falling on private property. When we planned the program in 2005 nobody was doing this in the country. We got 92-93% of the funding we were looking for and accomplished 94% of the goals. You don't see that usually. It's a very successful program built on a very strong model that works.

We need to have the conversation on how much does it cost to do the work. We continue to receive pressure to bring more volunteers. Volunteers cost money, they need support and the GSP is providing contractors, staff time, plants and materials, watering, etc. Volunteer hours are valued at $20/hour and we are receiving approximately 100,000 volunteer hours each year. That represents $2 million which matches the money brought to the project by the City. A 1:1 leverage for City funds.

Major funding for this is capital and it comes through some bonds or through a levy. The capital funding next year will come from REET coming from the sales of homes. We are down about 80% of capital revenue for the entire City. The $1.5M annual funding dedicated to this program used to represent 5-10% of the Cumulative Reserve Fund, now, with the CRF down next year, the money we need for the program represents 20% of the total and that's hard for people to take when we have community

centers that need to be re-built, etc. Our levy funding is ending next year. CLC met their goal of raising $3M in a capital campaign and they are now trying to figure out how to pay for their efforts.

We have 700 acres (out of 2,500) currently in the restoration process. We'll need about $1,000-$1,200 per acre on maintenance costs. We need to build out the O&M. When we ask for the money they say that it's a lot of money but we never had the dedicated funding. We are building a program from nothing. We are looking for dedicated funding. In 5-10 years we'll lose 5% of our forest. In 10 more years we'll lose 20% more. The forest is rapidly declining.

JH – What species are we talking about? We have logged overland. It grew back big leaf maple

MMe – since 1910 we have managed these forests by coppicing (to cut trees down to ground level periodically to encourage growth). When a tree grows from a decaying stump it carries the decay. We have trees whose bottom is decaying and their tops have been topped. 60% of our forest is big leaf maple and it's in decay.

NB – when you have ivy and invasive species are there tree species that will come up through it?

JN – No. natural areas will decline to ivy deserts infested with rats and low quality of life landscape that attracts negative activity.

MMe – there was a study on re-generation. Only invasives, holly, laurel, hawthorn are re-generating . We would end up with a forest like those of SE Asia. This is a long-term problem that needs a long-term solution.

JH – going back to restoration, what trees is GSP successfully planting?

JN – conifers, western red cedar, Douglas fir, grand fir, hemlock, spruce, also planting some deciduous trees such as Alders as successional crop to create shade and then plant conifers. Highest value trees are conifers, madrones, oaks.

JH – What about views. With the new forest composition

MM – We need to educate people that a view with a tree on a side is great and that it's safer to have healthy trees on slopes.

MMe – We are also considering climate change and adaptability for 50-100 years with most species being within the range

NB – Portland's new initiative is great. Take a look at their campaign to advance funding and organizational issues to better manage the urban forest.

JR – CLC is involved with other programs such as tree mapping by citizens and online restoration efforts.

Mme - GIS capabilities are different. There is a difference between an inventory and a management system (work management system). A forested area shows up as an area and a tree shows up as a point.

SPdB – SDOT is almost ready to release their online inventory and are also working with the Department of Information Technology on a wiki map similar to San Francisco and Philadelphia.

MMe – we looked at the "no ivy league" from Portland. It provided the conceptual framework for the GSP.

JS – where are funding decisions being made?

MMe – Mayor and City Council. The program was calculated to require $50M over 20 years. That is not a big investment for such a large resource being affected. We actively engage 15-20 thousand people in this effort every year. The youth program is starting a 9-month work program in conjunction with Goodwill to bring kids and introduce them to the forest. The program is working. Nature Consortium, Earth Corps, WA Conservation Corps, Audubon, they all leverage City resources with a minimum of 1:1 match. When we acquired these lands there was never the intention of putting maintenance dollars to service it. It was considered a natural area that didn't need management.

SPdB – we have been having conversations with other organizations such as the Seattle Parks Foundation and they are looking into options. Forested parklands are in trouble, the GSP has been doing a great job but we are at a juncture where sustainable funding needs to be found. As we move forward and identify potential funding sources we will come back and brief the Commission on the specifics.

JH – why not use the university model of someone funding a position to do the work

MMe – have not looked at that model. Sponsorships and partnering program. Parks to remain sign free is a City policy, there is an ethic about that.

Ecosystems metrics position paper - introduction

JS – this will be a brainstorming session on the elements of an ecosystems metrics position paper. Would like to use i-Tree data. He would like to use the following metrics;

1. Water quantity
2. Water quality
3. Air quality
4. Micro climate
5. Habitat
6. CO2
7. Contingency

JS – would like to use i-tree to justify the benefits of the urban forest. What's to cost of doing nothing. What's the value to the City of growing tree canopy from 23% to 30%.

JR – feedback received from Conlin when asked how can the UFC support Council, he said to provide ecosystem metrics to support and analyze programs. Provide a broad basis to analyze investments when resources are tight.

JS – infrastructure costs are incremental. Drops in bucket but costs are huge when you outgrow the existing system.

MM – Seattle is pretty much developed

JR – you can't improve on the forest but can improve a parking lot.

TE – add CO2? And property value?

JS – it's a slippery slope. There is a value but gets into more subjective, non-quantifiable services. Look at existing tools and data.

MM – identify 2-3 people to work with JS to move things forward.

Tom and Matt will participate

Public comment

SZ – the ecosystems metrics and values could be a PhD thesis? Heat island effect with impacts in the region. Could recommend having individual project with a metric attached to it according to certain values. Canopy loss is incremental. Mentioned the Ingraham School situation and announced the creation of a facebook page: Friends of Seattle's Urban Forest

MT – Encourages the UFC to write a letter to Council and the Mayor on behalf of GSP. Something that the presentation didn't stress is that the program empowers individuals about feeling that parks are their own and want to care for them.

ND – He is a consultant with Tree Solutions and has been doing networking. There needs to be an arborist network around urban forest goals. There are a few hundred tree services and not many certified arborists that are affecting the urban forest. Would like to present some ideas to the UFC beyond public comment.

Next month's agenda items

SPdB – already have an almost full agenda. Still awaiting to hear from SDOT to see if the street tree ordinance is ready to share with the UFC.

Adjourn

Community input

N/A