Urban Forestry Commission (UFC)
September 5, 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
Tom Early (TE)
Leif Fixen (LF)
John Floberg (JF)
Peg Staeheli (PS)

Staff
Sandra Pinto de Bader - OSE
Deb Heiden (DH) - SPU
Brennon Staley (BS) - DPD

Absent- Excused
Gordon Bradley
Jeff Reibman
John Small

Public
Steve Zemke

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 – Good discussion. He would like the UFC to consider recommending keeping groves in DPD's tree regulation. Put a limit on number of trees to be allowed to be removed per year. How many native trees vs non-native trees are in the city. In terms of a letter to DPD, he urges the UFC to draft it using specific language, be very explicit. Oversight – has talked about SPU having oversight (keeps coming back to OSE in terms of mission). Already have Sandra coordinating the IDT, maybe just re-structuring. Who really speaks for protecting trees? Are they beholden to their department's mandate vs. tree protection? Discuss idea of promoting a tree wiki. UFMP – long term, right now we define canopy cover as two-dimensional and it's more three- or four-dimensions. Look at modeling and feed parameters to see what happens (research agenda – UW?) Recommend in UFMP and DPD ordinance that one way of dealing with this – have be mandated that there is a study done and report in a year's time.

Approval of August 1 and August 8 meeting notes

ACTION: **A motion was made to approve the August 1 meeting notes as written. The motion was seconded and carried.**

ACTION: **A motion was made to approve the August 8 meeting notes as amended. The motion was seconded and carried.**

SPU work on floodplain reconnection projects for 2013 – Deb Heiden (SPU)
DH – wanted to talk to UFC to give them a briefing on two projects SPU will be working on in 2013.

Thornton Creek Confluence:
There are problems throughout the Thornton Creek Basin, including property flooding, street flooding and closures, utilities and road infrastructure are at risk due to flooding, stormwater capacity is exceeded, landslides and erosion, and there are many areas with little habitat value. SPU has been working with the Fish and Wildlife Service to get suitable habitat for the whole ecosystem. They are concerned with fine sediments. There are 58 exceptional trees on the site. Some are large cottonwoods, some of them are hazardous (they might turn them into snags for wildlife habitat). There is one large wiping willow that is scheduled to be removed. The public would love to see that tree remain. They'll be doing outreach to explain why the tree needs to come out. 16 Lombardi poplars will be removed. They are choking the creek.

TE – has there been public comment on light house values from the neighborhood?

DH – people are more concerned about safety

MM – the project won't affect most houses. Are the exceptional cottonwoods in a grove?

DH – There is a grove on the eastern edge of the property

MM – I have received calls. They public thought there were 67 trees being removed. Is that the right number?

DH – there will be 18 trees removed and one of them is exceptional. The project benefit with re-planting will be greater than the current situation.

TE – with the re-grading proposed, will properties be affected?

DH – they are going above and beyond what's needed to protect properties.

MM – where is the project in relation to the creek?

DH – In the last 1/3 of the creek.

MM – interested in trees as infrastructure. How many trees would have had to be planted on the upper area of the creek to avoid this type of project?

DH – 86% of the watershed is on private property. There would have had to plan many, many trees.

JF – what's the canopy gain with this project? Have you thought about that?

DH – there would be gain but mostly the benefit is diversity and the introduction of conifers.

JF – what are the goals of the project? Stormwater management, water quality, aesthetic?

DH – we are trying a new model that could be used in other areas. Part of the funding is coming from a King County grant. This is a total budget of $6.2M and 3 acres. When Meadowbrook was first 'sold' to the community it was said that it would be a community play ground but that is not sustainable. She's been trying to incorporate what was promised but this is not a park and it can be dangerous during floods.

PS – are there any safety issues?

DH – yes. Vandalism, drug and alcohol use, assaults, animals being shot…

Knickerbocker Project:
Floor plain retention and slow flow. Minimize impacts downstream.

TE – does it have pedestrian access?

DH – a bridge that bisects the property. Are going to replace bridge and move it out of blood plane. There is large cedar that will remain. Mostly populated by second growth alder. This site will be managed differently than Meadowbrook (which will be 'adaptably' managed keeping flood areas open). This site will plan evergreens and let alders take over the site. Managing invasives. Because Sound Transit was looking to do mitigation. Will have SPU and GSP do a bunch of invasive removal . Planting forested wetlands on the site.

JF – this is a clear canopy gain

PS – it might be a canopy shift. From ornamental to more native.

DH – a lot of it is pure invasives

PS – you are going to maintain for 3 years

DH – through establishment and then Parks will take over for long-term management. SPU maintains management of channel and flood plain.

PS – One of the comments with the GSP was… is there anybody looking at a strategy to say now we are looking at this basin for invasives?

DH – has been working with Rory Denovan for years on coordination. But there isn't the staff to keep up.

JF – is the $1.5M UFC proposed for GSP is just a drop in the bucket? It helps with this work too?

MM – we could coalesce volunteers that would work on Parks property and then in SPU and then private areas. Lots of synergy.

PS – we need to move the success up a point in terms of GSP. Hit a watershed and focus on removing all invasives (in all properties).

DH – she would target the watersheds where there is more opportunity for success. There is some King County property that is all invasives. The example is the Cedar River watershed trying to get rid of knotweed.

UFMP update and DPD tree ordinance recommendation – discussion
MM – CM Conlin is coming next week.
Last week JF, Leif and Matt met to discuss both UFMP update and DPD tree ordinance. Put together some thoughts to frame discussion.

Main topics are:
Exceptional trees threshold
Tree removal and recording requirements
Tree groves
Tree removal mitigation

PS – let's hit your major topics

LF – what are you hoping to accomplish with this exercise?

MM– to put together a letter and to have some points to talk about with Conlin

JF – single department idea – it's a complex question. Can raise questions even if we don't have answers

PS – it has been talked about but not investigated

LF – the Mayor mentioned the issues with unions and color of money.

PS – is there a step to the process? There is a difference between a tree department and a tree czar. Currently there is no mechanism

LF – in Boston all trees are managed by the Parks department.

JF – how would you adapt that to Seattle?

LF – we would basically pull all tree people from all other departments and run all tree work from a single department.

JF – if we had a single position that might be more successful.

LF – that person would have to have a lot of power. He would see that as being a struggle.

TE – on a management idea this person would be part of the MO. Would it be a good idea to have this position be a politically appointed? Better to have a more stable position. We want leadership and stability.

JF – would OSE be the department where this position would reside?

LF – long term there would be one person above the City arborist and the Parks Forester.

BS – DPD has agreement with Bill Ames to review development proposals.

PS – we should frame it as, there is a problem and there might be several solutions.

LF – there is a problem with not having a forester in the utilities. It's a very complicated issue.

MM – there are different levels. Boston takes advantage of contracts and ways of making tree work more efficient. If SDOT is designing a street they might not put in trees.

LF – the issue might be maintenance of trees.

MM – likes Peg's idea to say there is a problem. Portland has a tree czar that oversees impacts to trees at all levels. A bit of a hybrid.

JF – we are dealing with multiple problems and we should define them.

LF – we are thinking of making a recommendation to the UFMP update, right?

JF – maybe a call to explore the issue in near future.

LF – the problem of 6-7 agencies dealing with trees.

PS –
Don't have focused leadership
Overlaps between departments which confuses responsibility
Have public that is very confused about tree responsibility
If you look at land area why have Parks doing the work on invasive insects. (move to OSE).

TE – there are outside elements that we can go to in these cases: State DNR, the Port, etc.

PS – if that kind of framework

MM – UFMP letter by saying there is a problem with how trees are managed. We want to explore different management strategies of the UF to enhance …. ASK Matt. Looking for unified management.

JF – want to make it flexible because we are not sure.

TE – talk about the problem, not solutions.

JF – trying to daylight the issue.

MM – any other concerns on the UFMP? Expanding some of the benefits discussions.

TE – A lot of the things, the metrics are not established. Will forward to Sandra his comments.

JF – we don't know canopy enough and we keep on hanging our hat on it. Error bar keeps us from knowing where we are. Research function recommended. Will touch base with John S.

MM – UFMP issues, management issues and metrics (canopy and health)

PS – we need something else, another metric, besides canopy cover.

MM – three levels. Canopy cover by aerial to help us see citywide trends. I-Tree for more detailed data. Pilot projects or neighborhood by land use to give us metrics on how we are doing to adjust.

LF- While we have Brennon here let's work on the DPD ordinance.

MM – look at Seattle's tree protection updates document.
24" is not the best for some of our natives. Leave a base of 24" have a second category of 8" to capture 17 natives.

PS – I have the idea. A little uncomfortable with the 24". My gut is that the 24" is not going to get us many trees. The smaller natives are not getting attention and they fulfill a different habitat issues, create the NW character (Madrones).

JF – is this going to be more complex?

MM – it's simpler than the current.

JF – when we met last week Matt brought a concern that, if the exceptional tree is to be removed, then get a permit and cut it.

BS - Regulation says what can or can't be done. Then set up administrative rules to implement. 24" or above can't be cut down unless is hazardous, causing damage to structure, invasive, for development. It's always going to be a subjective judgment.
Looked at i-tree data, at other cities

TE – one thing that troubles me is that codes fluctuate (there is elasticity built into the code) with trees that are below 24" there won't be data collected about that. There is an electronic

permit system with info for those 24” and larger. I would like to see ..if you are cutting a tree (any tree) in Seattle, you have to register and either pay for a permit or not. That way you have knowledge of what’s happening.

BS – concerned that people would not comply. We would be left with a number that is meaningless. Voluntary permit system wouldn’t be consistently used. And would require a lot of work on the City to spread the news.

PS – Other places are starting to use voluntary methods of tracking. Who do you know that is doing a voluntary tracking and why do you think it’s ineffective.

BS – I don’t think anybody is doing it. There are wikis but there are not comprehensive monitoring.

PS – I don’t know that I accept that reasoning. You could be cutting down a lot of trees in the next 5-8 years because they’ll affect a lot of people. Between 8 -18” people start worrying about the size of the tree.

MM – if it’s just a check box it would be easy.

TE – along with administering a permit system you’ll have those who will avoid it. One website, this is where you complain, get permits, pay, etc. It won’t be 100% but better than what is being proposed.

PS – that’s management; on the ordinance likes two tiered approach.

LF – we are all about canopy cover. How do we relate DBH to canopy. Where do we need to get to accomplish our goal.

PS – do we agree that there could be two tiers? Then the question is would 24” be one of them?

LF – how many trees could be saved by adding another tier? What’s the cost of adding that new tier?

PS – it’s expensive when you start complicating the tier system. If we are going to have exceptional trees and the threshold is 24” then it doesn’t pick up our native species.

LF – we can figure out how many acres on average annually are being developed (1% = 550 acres). I-tree tells us how many trees are in each acre, so this will show how many trees are being lost to development. Where do we set the bar.

PS – we need to project out. 20 years from now, what would out code do? How many new plantings today would make it to exceptional status.

JF – we all agree that the two-tier system makes sense.

TE – 8” for 17 native species. How restrictive? Same restriction as 24”

PS – it’s not that you can’t remove them, but it makes it difficult.

PS – we can separate the wiki and the City.

MM – wiki is advocacy approach. Putting software in place to let the public keep track of tree removals.

New business and announcements

Adjourn