

Urban Forestry Commission
June 2, 2010
Regular Meeting Summary

Seattle Municipal Tower Room 1940
700 5th Avenue, Seattle 3:00pm – 5:30pm

| Attending | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <u>Commissioners</u> | <u>Staff</u> |
| Elizabetha Stacishin-Moura, Chair | Brennon Staley - DPD |
| Gordon Bradley | Tracy Morgenstern – OSE |
| Kirk Prindle | Brent Schmidt - SCL |
| Nancy Bird | Rory Denovan - Parks |
| John Hushagen | David Graves - Parks |
| John Small (by phone) | Mark Mead – Parks (by phone) |
| Jeff Reibman | |
| Peg Staeheli | |
| Absent- Excused - Matt Mega | |

Community sign-in sheet (name and topic addressed in public comments)

Steve Zemke- provided written comments and commented at the meeting

Margaret Thouless

Rich Ellison – provided public comment

Michael Oxman – provided public comment

Nicholas Dankers – provided public comment. Comment topic as noted on sign in sheet- “I offer public support to the Urban Forest Symposium’s recommendations: To provide clear dis/incentives to energize the tree ordinance. Specifically, offer community service on City trees that being overwhelmed by invasive species. Thank you.”

Written comments were also provided by Cheryl Trivison

Parks Tree Policy Briefing – View Pruning Permits

Seattle Parks & Recreation staff provided a briefing memo and their full policy document. Additional comments from Parks staff supplementing the briefing paper: About 3-4 permits per year are granted to allow private pruning of parks trees for views. The permits typically involve 4-5 trees each. Tree removal and topping are not allowed. Most the trees for which pruning permits are requested have been previously impacted by more significant pruning done prior to the current Parks permit process. Mitigation is required in all permits. Park’s has placed a moratorium on these permits pending input from the Board of Parks Commissioners and the Urban Forestry Commission.

No formal recommendations were made by the Commission. The following comments were made by individual commissioners:

- The fee charged for permits is too low should cover all associated costs.
- Permitting tree pruning for views is an acceptable compromise, it provides an avenue for responsible pruning (as opposed to topping or removal) which benefits the City and private property owners.
- The policy should more directly state that the sections addressing the permit for private pruning are related to views.
- The policy should clearly state that removal and topping are not allowed, but view enhancement is possible through limited pruning.

- Pruning for views shouldn't be allowed. But it is a reality and it's impact on the canopy is not significant given the low number of cases per year.
- The benefits of the required vegetation plan intended to mitigate for the canopy impact could be years away while the canopy loss is immediate. Therefore, the mitigation should be greater than the loss, and it should account for the loss in ecological function as well as the time it takes to restore that function through mitigation.
- There should be clear, objective standards established for how the mitigation is determined so that it is commensurate with the loss of ecological function.
- The public benefit of the mitigation should be greater than the loss and should be expanded to include removal of invasive species.
- Require that mitigation plan be done by a qualified professional.
- Views are important but trees grow and views may be lost - people will get used to that. It is not necessary to provide a means of approving pruning of trees for views. This permitting process is not preventing illegal activity anyway.
- Having no mechanism for controlled view pruning encourages illegal cutting.
- This policy is good because it provides some opportunity for Parks to capitalize for public benefit. Eg. removal of invasives etc.
- Policy does not cause significant destruction of habitat given the number of permits processed in a year. Important to provide a legal means of pruning for views since it will occur anyway.

Low-Rise Code Proposal

Comments were given on the letter drafted by the Management Committee responding to CM O'Brien's questions on the low-rise code proposal. The Commission recessed to allow Kirk and Jeff to make revisions to the draft. Adoption of the revised version was moved and approved.

Committee Reports

Community Committee- Nancy reported that Tracy would be providing an overview of OSE's existing and planned outreach and incentive programs.

Ecosystems Committee- Kirk reminded the Commission that the Ecosystems committee was established as a forum for public involvement and that they will next meet June 16th at 5:00 and that in July there will be the additional every other month wildlife/tree interactions meeting at 4:00.

The focus of the Ecosystems Committee is on structural review of the code, a guiding principles document, and review of coordination issues.

Management Committee – Jeff reported that an ad hoc committee to the Management Committee is meeting only to do research and report back to the Management Committee. They are looking at background information including Resolution 31138 to understand Council's expectations.

Elizabetha reminded the Commission that while the committee meetings are standing meetings, if there are no topics for the agenda, they can be canceled.

Commission Workplan

Elizabetha noted that a workplan is needed to help guide the commission's work. The Commission needs to be able to review issues as they arise and to explore means of capturing the community's knowledge and expertise. So far the Commission has been reacting to issues such as reviewing code changes but can take a more creative approach to help meet the Commission's and the City's goals. Responding to department requests to review policies and legislation forces the Commission to accept the status quo rather thinking more broadly.

Elizabetha suggested that a facilitator could help the Commission develop a 2-3 year plan. It was noted that a lot of background information that should inform the workplan was presented at the January retreat and that information/work should be folded into the work plan process.

New Business

Elizabetha noted that this is a good time to raise flags on issues related to budget to Council and asked Commissioners to send her ideas of priorities and potential revenue sources to support urban forest work. Suggestions during the meeting included:

- Mitigation fund
- Budget for enforcement of interim regulations

There was some discussion of the need for additional funding to support code enforcement of tree protection requirements. Brennon summarized the code enforcement process and noted that the system is complaint based and the City receives 10-12 complaints per year and all are followed up on.

Kirk noted that the staff time is available but there is no follow through and suggested that DPD simply had a different priority and that Council should prioritize staff time for roving inspectors.

Approval of May 5, 2010 Minutes

Kirk proposed amendments to the May minutes. Commissioners strongly disagreed with Kirk’s interpretation that the commissioners’ intentions were exclude the public when they created the tree code ad hoc committee. Several members complained of demanding personal schedules and the need for more flexibility in scheduling meetings. It was also explained that these ad hoc meetings were necessary for doing research and to allow the commission to move efficiently through their workplan. Finally, after 20 minutes of discussion, John H. proposed an amendment - that amendment passed, and the minutes were approved.

The meeting adjourned at 5:45 p.m.

APPROVED: _____ DATE _____

Elizabetha Stacishin-Moura, Chair
Urban Forestry Commission

Attached: Written Comments Received from Community

Written Comments Received from the Community

From: Cheryl Trivison [mailto:ctrivison@richhaagassoc.com]
Sent: Wednesday, June 02, 2010 1:07 PM
To: Morgenstern, Tracy; kirkprindle@comcast.net; 'Matt Mega'
Cc: Raup, Ethan; 'James & Diane Snell'
Subject: Department of Parks and Recreation Tree Management Policy

Tracy, please forward this email to Commissioners. Thank you, Cheryl

Seattle Urban Forest Commissioners:

It is a good move to put a moratorium on permits that allow homeowners to cut public trees. It is also a good move for the Urban Forestry Commission to review Department of Parks and Recreation's Tree Management Policy.

However, just because we have historically allowed property owners adjacent to parks to use parks as 'property- private-to-them', half-measures to rectify the bad-policy are not necessarily the best ways to proceed. Over time, DPR has been neglectful and turned a blind eye to park encroachment and tree/plant abuse. **Trees and plants growing on public lands are public property, for public benefit; private pruning, taking out trees, topping or drop-crotching trees, digging plants for personal use, all of these and other private tree manipulation activities in parks for whatever reason should be considered vandalism.**

If according to David, house assessment value is tied to unencumbered views through public properties, then assessors need to update this policy and work to give more value to the view of 'parks/trees canopy', the 'verdant landscape'. Health is also an issue and should be investigated—air quality, temperatures, etc. Trees grow and we want trees in parks [particularly] to grow to maturity.

Park/tree/plant stewardship is critical in times of economic constraints. Private view enhancement is not stewardship. Removal of hazardous trees in parks should be the responsibility of DPR.

I sent an email to Mark Mead asking if DPR Policy #060-P5.6.1 is the one and only tree related policy. I'm concerned that this policy is reactive rather than proactive. Let's start afresh with a new Purpose Statement that would read: **"to nurture, preserve, enhance and maintain the urban forest within parks for ecological, environmental, aesthetic value, and health related public benefits.**

Cheryl Trivison
Seattle Urban Forest Stakeholder
June 2, 2010

From: Steve Zemke [mailto:stevezemke@msn.com]
Sent: Wednesday, June 02, 2010 12:06 PM
To: Morgenstern, Tracy
Subject: public comment Seattle Urban Forestry Commission June 2, 2010

Comments to Seattle Urban Forestry Commission on June 2, 2010
Steve Zemke - Chair of Save the Trees Seattle

We strongly agree with the preparation of a workplan to facilitate and focus the efforts of the Seattle

Urban Forestry Commission.

Save the Trees-Seattle believes the primary focus should be on advising the Mayor and City Council on the changes that should be made to Seattle's current tree ordinances to update them and to take advantage of what is working in other cities. This includes reviewing and evaluating and prioritizing tree and urban forestry practices that will increase Seattle's ability to protect existing trees and urban forest, ways to increase sound urban forestry practices in Seattle, ways to increase the planting of trees and associated shrubs and ground cover and reach tree canopy goals.

We believe to be successful that this process of developing a new tree ordinance needs to be transparent and open to the public. The Urban Forestry Commission was proposed as a way to open up the public debate and discussion of what had been a closed process in the past. For the last 10 years discussions have taken place behind closed doors with minor public input and involvement in dealing with Seattle's trees.

Besides the two documents posted now on your website from a 2008 environmental and tree advocates meeting and a 2007 Emerald City Task Force little else exists. No records have been disclosed that I know of, regarding the closed door meetings of city staff comprising the interdepartmental urban forest group. But rumors persisted for years about draft legislation for a new tree ordinance which never materialized.

Finally after much discussion last year the Seattle City Council acted by both creating the Urban Forestry Commission and passing a resolution giving guidelines and a directive for creating a new updated tree ordinance.

After years of no action and closed door discussions we oppose the creation now of a closed door ad hoc committee to specifically discuss guidelines for a new tree ordinance. This is one of the most important issues that the Urban Forestry Commission will deal with and we believe the creation of a new tree ordinance to be successful be as open and transparent as possible.

Make these meetings public regardless of how much of a nuisance you may believe citizens listening in may be. You are a public agency and if you want the public to be supportive of your efforts you need to conduct your business in public, not continue the closed door policies of the past in dealing with a new tree ordinance.