

Urban Forestry Commission (UFC)

April 4, 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)
Tom Early (TE)
John Floberg (JF)
Jeff Reibman (JR)
Peg Staeheli (PS)

Staff

Tracy Morgenstern (TM) - OSE

Public

Steve Zemke

Absent- Excused

Gordon Bradley (GB)

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 – called to order without quorum

Public comment

SZ – Seattle Times had an article on the blue trees. Artist to paint trees in Westlake and Magnuson for people to realize that forests are the lungs of the world and that society can't live without trees. The idea is to have people stop and notice the trees. Hopefully it will stir up more interest. Might want to put a link to this article.

Would like to urge UFC members to promote the UFC through Facebook you can put a link to the UFC webpage.

NB – good point.

MM we will skip the minutes for now. Since Sandra is not here I'm not sure about the review and comment on the 2011 UFMP Progress Report but John had some comments (*go to next agenda item*).

Approval of March 7 and March 14 minutes

ACTION: A motion was made to approve the March 7 meeting notes as written. The motion was seconded and carried.

ACTION: A motion was made to approve the March 14 meeting notes as written. The motion was seconded and carried.

Review and comment of 2011 UFMP Progress Report - introduction

JS – my comment was we should write a white paper or an introduction to the UFMP update on behalf of the UFC. This silo mentality of the City mentality is being carried forward in this update. It should be a long-term goal if not a short-term goal of the IDT to start to manage the forest resource as one body instead of conglomeration of different agencies with different missions. Specifically my biggest problem is with expenses by City Light that go against the urban forest, maybe re-directing a portion of that to better address forest health issues and future conflicts with utilities. I volunteer to get started on that. We might want to suggest to the IDT to include it?

NB – is this like a foreword?

JS – our support of lack thereof and recommendations for the update

JR – would love to see a foreword or message of the UFC in the UFMP update a number of people do read it.

NB – shows collaboration

JS – better place than a letter floating around on our website

JR – something different which is our official role is advisory to the Council and Mayor and I think we should do an assessment of the update that's a more critical look. A critique of the update and pass that along. I would suggest we do both.

MM – I agree with Jeff. I would like to see the UFMP have a foreword by the UFC that says we are all working on it

JR – I would like to see a message.

MM – in the current UFMP, Tracy, did Council put in a foreword or any kind of discussion?

TM – no

MM – it seems that as a City document there should be an upfront discussion from all the parties that worked on it.

JR – the goal was to create an update that would be officially recognized by Council and adopted. I think we should weigh in on things we would like Council to say while adopting it.

Long term goals, including in the resolution what points should be emphasized so it goes on the record.

TM – we are not talking about the work plan but about the UFMP update?

MM – correct. Anything else on the progress report itself or the update?

JS – the current document has a vision statement and a summary, then it goes on to the introduction.

Presentation of Audubon’s findings on city-wide canopy cover – Matt Mega

MM – I have been anxious to show you guys my canopy data for a while. This is the Seattle Audubon presentation not the UFC presentation. I want to show it to you guys to brainstorm on how to use the data to support the UFMP. Tried to replicate what the City paid for to analyze 2007 data. I used some other free software to do that.

JS – we now have a quorum.

MM – I’m going to stay at a high level. Not showing GIS. I’d like to blow through the presentation quickly and then have a conversation after. Audubon leading community that protects birds and natural environments. Works on connecting the bird protection with the community values piece. Tried to make things relevant to neighborhoods and raise awareness towards green infrastructure. We only conserve what we learn about and what we love.

We are looking at connecting the canopy with bird habitat. We have a program about wildlife gardening. Look at how neighborhoods can increase their canopy. It’s an incremental approach. Looking for interest. We have about 5,000 members with 2,000 or more in Seattle. Opportunity to do bird walks and tree planting. We provide the big-picture information and the resources below it too.

There is 13 neighborhood districts in Seattle and 89 mapped neighborhoods (right out of City data), with a lot of sub-neighborhoods. We can slice and dice the data as we like.

Object-based image analysis software was used: Spring. I pilot-tested the software manual in Columbia City last year. UW students did comparison and came out that Spring was more accurate than other free software but not as accurate as what the City used in 2009. (85-89% accuracy for Spring). Took 500 random points and came up with a consistent accuracy level.

NOTE: Matt elaborated on his study (presentation will be posted on UFC website).

MM - One the things that came up is that percent canopy cover is a good goal but we have to be careful and want other goals. The canopy cover allows for a quick snapshot and allows neighborhood by neighborhood comparisons; allows looking at steep slope and facilitates analysis. Another job for Audubon is to look at connectivity via corridors.

Next step is: I have 2011 data and now that I know how to do it I’d like to finish the analysis with the new data.

New business and announcements

NB – how are we doing with the work plan?

MM – Sandra already has set up next week's agenda

Adjourn

Community comment:

From: Michael Oxman [michaeloxman@comcast.net]
Sent: Wednesday, March 21, 2012 9:20 PM
To: Pinto_de_Bader, Sandra
Cc: SeattlePOSA@yahoogroups.com; Licata, Nick; McGinn, Mike
Subject: Unsafe tree work by Seattle Tunnel Partners

3-21-2012

Seattle Urban Forestry Commission.

Dear Commissioners,

The 2012 work plan indicates you are preparing a proposal for tree protection measures. There is an urgent situation that indicates such regulation is necessary for the health, safety and welfare of our community. I believe events like this are why the Commission was appointed in 2009.

On March 14, 2012 a Seattle Tunnel Partners contractor was removing about a dozen trees on Aurora Avenue at Thomas Street, just north of the Battery Street tunnel. City Light issued a stop work order to the contractor because the workers were too close to overhead electrical wires. The next day, City Light workers removed all limbs encroaching within the proximity limit. The Seattle Tunnel Partners contractor then removed the remainder of the trees.

The trees are publicly owned and administered by the Seattle Department of Transportation. SDOT policy is that all trees proposed for removal in the right of way will have a public notice posted on the trunk in advance of the work. The trees had placards attached to the trunks announcing their removal. SDOT was unaware the trees had been placarded. There is a question of whether Seattle Tunnel Partners had authority to remove the trees. The maximum fine for unlawfully removing city trees is \$5,000.

SDOT policy is that only certified arborists may do tree work in the city right of way. The contractor said there was no arborist present during the tree removal work. No supervising arborist is in the employ of the contractor doing the work for Seattle Tunnel Partners.

The workers were removing the trees using a 2 person articulating aerial work platform. The limbs were each tied with rope, and one worker cut the limb with a chainsaw. Each limb was then lowered to the ground from the railing of the lift basket. Safety regulations prohibit using such a lift as a rigging point. As the limbs descended, my video shows some of the limbs touched the wires. Use of a crane would have been the appropriate equipment to hoist and control the limbs while they were being cut, to ensure worker safety and the safety of the drivers passing underneath on Aurora Avenue.

I counted a half dozen things wrong with the scene I watched that day. Whether the tree is in the right of way or in the back yards of peoples homes, misunderstanding of regulations, inadequate worker training, and improper equipment plague the tree care industry.

In the last 8 days the Seattle Tunnel Partners public relations office has not provided satisfactory answers to questions. For example, I asked for a copy of the stop work order and the safety specifications. If this is a real partnership, then the public isn't a member, because a blanket of silence has been thrown over this incident. If this is what happens out on Highway 99, what will happen when a worker a mile down inside the tunnel is asked to do work in unsafe conditions?

I ask you to please help bring an end to the buck passing. I hope there are no further delays in sending a legislative recommendation to the city council on how respect for trees can benefit our community.

Thanks for your attention.

Arboreally yours,

Michael Oxman
8457 36th Ave SW
Seattle, WA 98126
(206) 949-8733

From: Michael Oxman [michaeloxman@comcast.net]
Sent: Tuesday, March 27, 2012 7:53 PM
To: Pinto_de_Bader, Sandra
Cc: SeattlePOSA@yahoogroups.com; Harrell, Bruce
Subject: Change to comp plan tree canopy language

Howdy, Urban Forestry Commissioners,

What does the Urban Forestry Commission hope to accomplish by changing the Seattle Comprehensive Plan? http://www.seattle.gov/council/comp_plan/amend/2012/03urban_forest.pdf

1) By removing the 1 year benchmark, the city is given a pass for it's failure to staunch the bleeding of massive tree removal. Huge old trees are being targeted for removal not for the purported safety risks, but for the ability to usurp the wide expanse of their root systems, which occupy valuable space for infill development. All record of a measurable rate of progress towards our 40% canopy cover goal is erased by this text amendment. If this comp plan amendment is passed, no one will ever know that Seattle once thought the massive trend of tree removal could be reversed and canopy cover could increase. The Tree Audit even states that city policy needs to add performance benchmarks to measure progress towards our goal of increased canopy cover. <http://www.cityofseattle.net/audit/docs/PublishedReport20090515.pdf>

2) The change to taking a tree census "at least" every decade is a smoke screen. The city actually has not yet taken a complete tree inventory as required by a City Council Resolution. It only looks thru infrared filters at snapshots taken by satellites orbiting a hundred miles in space. These aerial photos only note WHERE trees are located. A real tree inventory inspects each tree and records species, size, and condition and value of each tree, and can generate a work order to prioritize any maintenance action needed. The entire Urban Forest Management Plan is predicated on having this census to convince the City Council to act to fund the maintenance of our forest and intervene where proactive work can arrest

the decline of unhealthy trees. Instead, all we have is a pretty picture picture that tells WHERE, which is only one of the factors in tree assessment (SPECIES, SIZE, CONDITION, LOCATION, and VALUE). The rational about the excessive cost of having to take a tree census every year does not mention that since the existing comp plan was written, there has never been a tree census yet. A video is at <http://www.seattlechannel.org/videos/video.asp?ID=2150911> After watching the first 6 minutes of public comment by Steve Zemke, jumpt to the 18 minute mark for a panel discussion on trees by local notables, including wetland biologist Kirk Prindle.

3) The argument published in the above link states that there is confusion over multiple goals. How odd that the development code allows removal of any tree to build an expensive taxable structure? Of course there are multiple goals, this way the city council never has to say no to anyone and gets to collect income from increased assessed valuation and bulding permit fees. They say they have made great strides in protecting trees, but the 'Weasel Clause" in the Seattle Municipal Code still states that financial value trumps the integrity of ecological health. All this BS about environmental sustainability ignores the fact that government feels developers should be allowed to generate economic activity, which displaces trees and causes a sterile urban environment that has very poor qualities of livability.

Arboreally yours,

Michael Oxman
(206) 949-8733

www.SaveSeattlesTrees.com

----- Original Message -----

To: 'Oxman Michael'

Sent: Thursday, March 22, 2012 10:27 AM

Subject: change to comp plan tree canopy language

<http://web1.seattle.gov/dpd/luib/Notice.aspx?BiD=702&NiD=13427>