

SEATTLE URBAN FORESTRY COMMISSION

John Floberg, Chair • John Small, Vice-Chair
Gordon Bradley • Tom Early • Leif Fixen • Matt Mega • Jeff Reibman • Erik Rundell • Peg Staeheli

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

April 10, 2013

Meeting Notes

Seattle Municipal Tower Room 2750
700 5th Avenue, Seattle
3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Attending

Commissioners

John Floberg (JF) - chair

John Small (JS) – vice-chair

Gordon Bradley (GB)

Tom Early (TE)

Leif Fixen (LF)

Erik Rundell (ER)

Staff

Sandra Pinto de Bader (SPdB) - OSE

Jana Dilley – SPU reLeaf

Nolan Rundquist - SDOT

Public

Steve Zemke

Michael Oxman

Absent- Excused

Matt Mega (MM)

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

JF – let's get started.

Chair report

JF – we don't have quorum but we are not voting on anything so there is no problem. We'll talk about the UFSP update process. Thanks Gordon for sending info on Alliance for Community Trees. In their last newsletter they talked about non-profit City Fruit. We are going to have that group present to us in May. We'll be meeting on the 8th and the 22nd of May. We were going to have a conversation about tree protection in small developments. She will be sending the draft tonight and we'll pick it up at the next meeting. We've been reviewing budgets. Erik is helping put together a position paper on sustainability of the budget. How realistic the budget is and does it allow us to fulfill the goals of the UFSP. Maybe share the big numbers at the May 22 meeting.

reLeaf budget presentation

Jana – Most of you are familiar with reLeaf. Is the Interdepartmental outreach effort residing in SPU. It has three elements:

Outreach

Tree Ambassador (TA)
Trees for Neighborhoods (T4N)

Main focus is residential areas. Low hanging fruit being that it is the majority of the land mass in the city. The budget is pretty lean. The numbers are the non-staff portion. The big change this year is that the program will be getting help from an intern for the T4N program.

JF – is that an Americorp person?

Jana – it will be a graduate person. And will be serving from June – December. Non labor items for Tree Ambassador are in Forterra since it's a USFS grant. At this point the program is funded through 2013.

JF – is the program supposed to keep on going through the end of the year?

Jana – it can be extended. Forterra continues to look for grants. When I got my budget this year I had enough to hire an intern.

JF –are you happy with your budget and will it be enough to meet your goals?

Jana – there are a number of things the program could do. It would be a matter of figuring out priorities. At this point the body of work I have is all I can handle with the current staffing levels.

JF – have there been conversations about expanding the program based on the direction the UFSP is taking with more focus on stewardship?

Jana – once the UFSP is final, that would be the time to have this type of conversation.

Erik – what does the support contract cover?

Jana – help holding the T4N workshops, help delivering trees, providing storage space, etc. Each year we go out with an RFP for the support contract. This year we are doing some of the work with the intern.

JF – if you were to get additional \$100K what would you do with it?

Jana – probably hire another staff person.

JF – to do what?

Jana – probably work on Tree Ambassador. We have not studied the impact of TA as canopy gain.

JS – I wouldn't think that the cost of giving trees away is the most impact, it would be more education with TA, bring awareness to trees, and preserving existing trees.

Jana – we have found that the barriers to planting are not the cost of the tree but the lack of knowledge. The T4N program is more about holding residents' hands through the planting process. T4N is incredibly popular because we make it simple and fun (not because trees are free). Most people like trees (especially in their neighbors' property). It also brings community. I have received very positive feedback.

JF – this also focuses on the kind of positive energy CM Conlin was talking about.

Jana – both programs speak to that. The TA requires more committed volunteers. Both programs are great together. We are doing TA tree walks that are very popular. The NE Seattle group did a tree walk with more than 80 people in attendance.

GB – your program seems like the primary program in the city focused on putting new trees in private property. IF the UFSP has the goal of 33% canopy cover in private property. How do you feel in terms of making headway with your program? What's the contribution you think you are making?

Jana – you thought me that I need data to answer your question. I need another aerial canopy cover assessment and long-term data of survival rate of trees planted. I have made follow up studies asking people whether the trees they planted are alive or not in July. The program is young (4 years) and trees are not yet established, so we need.

In terms of scale the TA program can be scaled. Planting and maintenance. T4N is planting and TA is maintenance. Mulching of trees in their neighborhood. T4N in terms of planting would be hard to scale up. The idea is to build a culture of tree planting.

The purpose of the program was not to do all the planting needed in private property. It's about removing barriers, reaching out to people, and encourage them to plant trees. It's about changing the culture and putting good ideas out there.

Scale other pieces that would bring visibility to trees. I think the TA program could engage in very fun projects. Fremont neighborhood is coalescing to reduce crime. Build community by taking care of the trees in Fremont. They will be doing maintenance on an SDOT landscape for Earth Day. That sort of thing that we would have not been able to do ourselves as the City. But TA members can figure out what projects make sense for their neighborhood. SDOT is very supporting of our programs.

JS – it strikes me you should do more of the good work you are doing. The T4N presents a problem because the City gets into the logistics of tree delivery. Maybe some sort of hybrid program could be done. Maybe through vouchers?

Jana – it's not more planting, it's more building the awareness and long-term appreciation of mature trees. The T4N is so established that I don't think it's the area needing support.

JS – Get people to approach the TA program and decide to plant on their own.

Jana – A lot of this work gets done by non-profits. In terms of communications we could benefit from a newsletter (that would cover all the City UF work).

JF – that would be valuable if you had more resources?

Jana – outreach and communications. For example, the reLeaf website is a good tool. Building those pieces across departments in the City. I can come up with jobs for 10 people.

TE – Are you involving a more diverse part of the community?

Jana – Forterra is looking for grants all the time and they flag things. Grants that I am aware of are usually Forest Service and State DNR.

Erik – do you target certain parts of the City based on diversity.

Jana – we do target outreach but the T4N program is open to anyone that lives within city limits.

SDOT Urban Forestry budget presentation

Nolan – responsible for regulation for trees in the ROW, do maintenance and have landscapes in the ROW. UFSP goal for ROW is 24% in the last assessment we show as gaining canopy.

Division Mission:

The Street Use and Urban Forestry Division manages the City's rights-of-way, operating under the authority of SMC, title 15. This is done through the review, permit issuance, inspection and enforcement of non-traffic related activities in the public ROW,

Maintain approximately 40,000 SDOT-owned trees. Maintain 123 acres of landscapes and irrigation systems. Manage Bridging the Gap funded tree planting and establishment period.

The Division has three sections:

Arborist services

- Participate in UFMP
- Provide planting, pruning, and removal permits
- Utility and hazard tree inspections
- Administer City-wide 684-TREE line (receives an average of 4,000 calls per year)
- Maintain master street tree list
- Coordinate volunteer efforts (such as traffic circle program)

Landscape architectural services and

- Provides landscape architectural design and plan review
- Tree, vegetation, and soil protection – plan review and implementation
- Landscape construction inspection for SDOT capital projects.
- Funded through permit fees

Field operations

- Installation and maintenance of trees
- Landscape and irrigation systems
- Three-year establishment of BTG and CIP funded trees and landscapes
- Storm and emergency hazard response. We support the Street Maintenance division of SDOT.

Performance measures:

Prune 3,000 trees

840 landscape maintenance events

50 tree pits restored

GB – through Green Factor, your authority applies to streets in ROW?

Nolan - WE also consult with DPD. WE are getting permits fees for ROW Green Factor now. This will be collecting fees.

JF – have you had capacity issues?

Nolan – sometimes we've had to hire a temp person to support the effort.

Nolan – working on shoreline street ends. Partner with communities and SDOT Street Use to plan for and maintain 149 shoreline street ends. 2013 budget \$304,000 for two gardeners and a vehicle.

SDOT Urban Forestry prioritizes customer requests for pruning and removal in the ROW based on priorities: safety, traffic visibility, time-sensitive development projects clearances; maintain trees in ROW.

Total budget is almost \$5M. Have an overhead rate pays for fixed costs (150% overhead on top of salary). There is a lot of support money that goes to the general City infrastructure and general services. WE are at 85-87% salary, the rest is equipment and trees.

Erik – can you provide a breakdown?

Nolan – Sure.

JS – the \$5M number with the overhead?

Nolan – yes.

Inventory data shows close to 40,000 trees in 2012 and a pruning cycle of close to 13 years. Before we added a crew with BTG funds we were able to go from 24.3 years pruning cycle to 11.3 years. Before adding the other crew most of our work was reacting to emergencies. With the new crew we have been able to be proactive. If we can do between 15-20 trees the per-tree cost drops from \$1,200 to \$200.

GB – how did you do the tree inventory, was it a census?

Nolan – yes, we had a contractor do a census of every street tree. I'm still finding trees that were not included, so I'm working on updating the inventory. After we plant, we get trees in the inventory to be able to do the watering routes. I have found places where the map is showing trees but are not actually there. The old data is still being cleaned up. 1/3 of our landscapes are in good condition. Most are maintained for safety. We are trying to work with WSDOT to develop ways to ID long-term maintenance goals and maybe contract out the work.

Jana – SDOT has been working with Tree Ambassadors to maintain some of those ROW landscapes that need maintenance.

Nolan – we deal with encampments through Street Maintenance.

Erik – do you have a standard for LOS that you are trying to target.

Nolan – the industry standard is 5 to 7 year rotation. An additional crew would bring us to around 8+ years. It varies a lot depending on how many trees are being established (they require more work, more often). Typically spend 20-25% of resources on privately maintained trees that have issues that need to be corrected.

LF – what % of your budget is for storm calls?

Nolan – around 15% of our time on an average year. Got BTG funds in 2007 and by mid-2008 we had the new crew up to speed. LOS is going up because we have been adding trees.

JS – is BTG money going to sunset in 2015.

Nolan – working on a tool box for decision making when there are conflicts between trees and sidewalks, moving forward the St Tree ordinance, updating asset inventories, updating and managing long-term UFSP, continued efforts to educate and inform the public about benefits and responsibilities related to Seattle's UF, work with Jana.

It takes around \$500 to purchase, plant, and water a tree for 3 years. Size is 1 – 1.5 inch. In Fall 1.5 – 2 inches (cost a bit more). If need to construct a tree pit it adds around \$1,000 per tree.

JF – we are doing a position paper about how realistic and sustainable the budget is? Are there any issues with the budget that you foresee?

Nolan – we have accomplished BTG goals and have been very supported by department leadership. Have not taken larger cuts as other areas have. We are hoping for BTG 2. I'm planting 600 instead of 800 trees this year so I can use some BTG funds to maintain newly planted trees. IF we get more BTG funds we can ramp up again.

JF – is there any other areas where you are not meeting your goals, besides pruning cycle?

Nolan – would like to provide better customer service. We are short one staff.

LF – is your backlog two months?

Nolan – if we are doing a corridor a pruning request will be handled or if it's an emergency situation. Otherwise, we probably won't be addressing it.

Nolan – have been working on training staff to be able to work around lines. It's an issue of personnel classification.

Nolan – we are stationed out of West Seattle. We are doing space planning to try to find other locations to house the crews.

JS – coordination with City Light and Parks – they all have tree crews. If you are trying to service a north Seattle issue out of West Seattle it's going to take a long time to get there and back. Many in Seattle are contemplating a parks district. Do a more holistic approach at managing trees.

Nolan – in an ideal world we would be able to address line clearance issues like that. Locally owned utility that would work on the top of the tree and UF would do the bottom. Challenge due to sources of funds.

GB – what's going to happen with Seafair parade this year?

Nolan – we are not tying or pruning trees.

JF – can you comment on the long-term saving from going to a 5-year cycle?

Nolan – IF you spent \$50 every 5-years your tree would be able to keep your tree in good condition. If you defer maintenance to 10 years it increases the cost to \$215.

OJO: Nolan to share detailed breakdown of budget and slide on maintenance.

JS – I didn't see a 684-TREE to report a downed tree.

Nolan – it would be going to voicemail. We need to have the 24-hour response line take those calls. There is a lot of value for all calls coming to the same number so we don't have to cross check.

TE – what's the purpose of the 684-TREE line?

Nolan – it's a general clearing house to give residents options for other departments. Spend ¼ of my time explaining tree regulations to callers. If it's a private tree we pass it along to DPD.

Recommendation to DPD on tree preservation in small development projects – possible vote MOVED TO NEXT MEETING

Public Comment

Steve Z – Council is going to vote on the ST Tree ordinance on 4/24. I think it will be confusing to people the issue of major pruning. Why removal of roots is not included.

Nolan – generally when we are dealing with roots it's not associated with root pruning. We don't get requests to prune roots unless there is a development project. When that happens we go out there evaluating the type of pruning being done. Standard plans speak to those cases. If you are dealing with a bigger tree, cutting a 2" root is pretty insignificant in larger trees. WE have not seen it to be a problem. If this needs more clarification we'll make things clearer in CAMs and Director's rules.

Steve – I think it's critical to have it in the ordinance. People are likely to get confused.

Nolan – we are going to have illustrations in our street tree manual showing levels of pruning. And yes, it could be confusing and hard to get a clear idea of percentages. AINSI standards are going to be doing away with percentages because there are cases when removing more than 25% of the tree might make sense and be beneficial for the tree. We might still continue to use percentages.

Steve – I had question on the area of tree replacement issue. It says 'if site conditions allow.'

Nolan – if I have a cotton wood in a narrow planting strip and it's buckling the sidewalk , the site conditions would not allow for tree replacement.

Steve – are you being consistent with DPD's ordinance. It would be good to have the permit program pay for itself through fees. Set up a fee structure to be able to bring in funds.

Nolan – taking fee in lieu, then we get into the complication of the administration of those funds.

Michael – Cost of tree maintenance deferral. How much does it cost to remove a very large tree compared to doing maintenance on young trees?

Nolan – Less than 10% of tree population is getting to that point where a tree is really so big that it will be very expensive to cut down. 45% is 5" or less. We have a very young tree population. ADA now requires a 4 foot sidewalk.

Michael – should we have a policy to increase canopy with all the sight triangle trees going away. Where is the place to get extra canopy to replace that canopy.

Nolan – we have an intern working on evaluating planting strip width in the ROW to ID the most valuable areas to plant trees, then we'll confirm whether or not there are trees there. Would like to bring intern in the summer and do a presentation to the UFC.

Next month's agenda items

- Recommendation to DPD on tree preservation in small development projects – possible vote
- DPD letter to CM Conlin on Small Lot Development in SF zones
- UFSP update process

Adjourn

Community input