

Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

2020 Annual Report

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Introduction

2020 was a very challenging year; the Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) worked to respond to the urgent needs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter protests. The UFC continued its mandate to advise the Mayor and City Council on policies and regulations governing the protection, management, and planting of trees and vegetation in the Seattle. The Tree and Urban Forest Protection Ordinance update, an effort eleven years in the making, continued to be at the forefront of the UFC's efforts. The UFC also issued recommendations on a range of topics to support the City's ongoing decision-making to continue to protect and grow Seattle's trees and urban forest, a critical piece of infrastructure.

In 2020 the UFC's primary objectives were to:

1. Support improvement of the City's Tree-related regulations and policies
2. Provide input to the [2020 Urban Forest Management Plan](#) update
3. Advise on City funding for urban forestry as part the budget process
4. Increase outreach and engagement with the public and City staff, and
5. Revise UFC internal operations with a focus on racial and social equity

UFC 2020 Accomplishments

Tree Regulation Ordinance Update

The UFC continued to support the City's work on updating the tree regulations through deliberative sessions with City staff and issuing letters of recommendation. The UFC emphasized its seven key recommendations captured in a [one-pager](#):

1. Expand permit program
2. Certify tree service providers
3. Replace significant trees
4. Track changes in the urban forest
5. Protect exceptional trees, groves, and trees on undeveloped lots
6. Encourage tree retention on already developed lots, and
7. Fund and enforce tree protection regulations.

The UFC was committed to actively share the one-pager with the community. An example of this was the Vice-Chair's attendance to the Magnolia Community Council to talk about the UFC's work, the one-page, and answer questions. The UFC continued to encourage Seattle residents to provide input on this effort through its bulletin (whose membership has risen to over 700 subscribers). In 2020, the UFC received 2,060 comments from Seattle residents, mostly encouraging the City to update and enhance tree protection regulations. All these communications can be found listed by date at the bottom of the UFC's Resources [page](#).

UFC Recommendations

The UFC issued the following letters of recommendation related to SDCI's tree protection update

work:

- [Tree Data Roadmap](#) (May 13)
- [Tree regulations update](#) (July 1)
- [Fee-in-lieu research project](#) (August 5)
- [Director's Rule 13-2020](#) Exceptional Trees (August 12)
- [Washington, DC urban forestry presentation](#) (providing an example of successful tree removal permit and fee-in-lieu program – September 9)
- [Director's Rule 11-2020](#) Landscaping Standards, including Green Factor (September 9)
- [Racial Equity Toolkit](#) for tree regulations update (December 9)

The UFC supported City initiatives and City departments' work with the following letters:

- SDOT's [Safe Routes to Schools](#) (February 12)
- SPU's [Ship Canal Water Quality Project](#) (March 4)
- Thank you [letter to the City's Navigation Team](#) (May 13)
- [Green New Deal](#) thank you letter (May 13)
- [Black Lives Matter statement of support](#) (July 1)
- SDOT's [Pest Readiness](#) work (September 9)
- [City's 2021 Budget](#) (November 18)
- [Draft 2020 Urban Forest Management Plan](#) (December 9)

The UFC had the opportunity to engage and support the work of urban forestry and community partners with the following letters of recommendation and thank you:

- [King County's 30-year Forest Plan](#) (March 11)
- [Forest Health Watch](#) Project (October 7)
- [iSea Tree application](#) (October 7)
- [Cambium Carbon Reforestation Hub Development Initiative](#) Thank you, and [letter encouraging the City's Urban Forestry Core Team](#) to apply for pilot city status

One of the areas the UFC focused on this year was to improve its internal operations by creating [Guidelines](#) for Briefing Coordination and Letter Drafting (April 8) and updating its [Coordinator Protocols](#) (April 1).

Over the years, the UFC has been monitoring several key Seattle Parks and Recreation initiatives. In 2020 SPR delivered updates for Cheasty Bike Trail Project, Viewpoint Policy, Colman Park Vegetation Management Plan, and the Green Seattle Partnership, including SPR's response to Council's [2020 Statement of Legislative Intent](#) about program goals and funding. The UFC will be issuing recommendations on these programs in early 2021.

UFC/ Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team Annual Meeting

The Commission and the Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team (IDT) pivoted from the traditionally in-person annual meeting to a remote training on racial equity and urban forestry. The meeting goals were to strengthen the partnership between the UFC and the IDT in order to accomplish the goals of the Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP); to understand the complexities of urban forestry work on the ground; share examples of good work; and discuss challenges.

The UFC added the following language to its website regarding accessibility options for Seattle residents wanting to engage with the UFC: "The City of Seattle encourages everyone to participate in its programs and activities. For disability accommodations, materials in alternate formats, accessibility information, or any other question please contact the Urban Forestry Commission coordinator: Sandra Pinto at Sandra.PintoUrrutia@seattle.gov or via phone at [\(206\) 684-3194](tel:2066843194)."

Commission Membership

The Commission successfully recruited two new members in 2020:

- Julia Michalak – Position #1 (Wildlife Biologist)
- Elena Arakaki - Position #10 (Get Engaged member)

Weston Brinkley was re-elected as Chair for 2020 with Sarah Rehder serving as Vice-Chair.

The Commission wants to thank Steve Zemke (Position #1 – Wildlife Biologist); Steven Fry (Position #8 - Development Representative); and Neeyati Johnson (Position #10 – Get Engaged) for their contribution to the Commission’s work in 2020.

Conclusion

The UFC had numerous successes this past year, advancing policy and partnerships for Seattle’s urban forest, again setting a new standard for the volume of recommendations, presentations, and meetings held. However, Seattle still continues a streak of now 11 years without an adequate tree protection ordinance. And as Commissioners we represent a City still imbedded with institutional racism. In 2021 the UFC will resume efforts on both these fronts.

Under weight of numerous Executive Orders and Council Resolutions, thousands of pleas from Seattle residents, and the urgent need of our local environment, the UFC will continue its resolve to see enacted clear, meaningful, and effective tree protections. Importantly, the UFC will also continue work incorporating race and social justice language into its protocols and work plan; and will revisit recruitment and other processes to encourage more diversity of perspectives and membership.

2020 Commission Members

- Weston Brinkley, Chair – Position #3 (University Representative)
- Sarah Rehder, Vice-Chair - Position #4 (Hydrologist)
- Julia Michalak/Steve Zemke - Position #1 (Wildlife Biologist)
- Elby Jones - Position #2 (Urban Ecologist)
- Stuart Niven - Position #5 (Arborist)
- Michael Walton - Position #6 (Landscape Architect)
- Joshua Morris - Position#7 (NGO Representative)
- Steven Fry - Position #8 (Development Community)
- Blake Voorhees - Position #9 (Real Estate Broker)
- Elena Arakaki/Neeyati Johnson - Position #10 (Get Engaged)
- Whitman Bouton - Position #11 (Environmental Justice)
- Jessica Jones - Position #12 (Public Health)
- Shari Selch - Position #13 (Community/Neighborhood)

Contact

Additional information about the UFC can be found at www.seattle.gov/urbanforestrycommission, or by contacting:

Sandra Pinto Urrutia
Urban Forestry Commission Coordinator
Seattle Office of Sustainability & Environment
P.O. Box 94729
Seattle, WA 98124-4649
Sandra.PintoUrrutia@seattle.gov