

Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

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

August 8, 2012

Mayor Michael McGinn and Councilmember Richard Conlin
Seattle City Hall
600 4th Avenue
Seattle, WA 98124

RE: Sustainable funding for the Green Seattle Partnership

Dear Mayor McGinn and Councilmember Conlin,

Seattle's forested parklands need intervention if we are to continue to enjoy the social, environmental, and economic benefits that over 2,500 acres of natural areas provide. Our forests are dying and without a concerted effort we are at risk of losing 70% of our canopy in natural areas within 20 years and over \$31M in investment that has been poured into restoration efforts.

Natural areas represent 7% of the city's land mass but account for over 20% of the city's canopy cover. According to the last canopy cover assessment all management units had small canopy cover gains with the exception of our developed parks and our natural areas, which lost 2% canopy cover from 2003 to 2007. The loss of canopy cover in our natural areas can be attributed to two main factors, the aging structure of this forest that is dominated by Big-leaf Maples and the highly invaded nature of the forest, mainly by English Ivy. Both of these factors contribute to death of our forest canopy and the necessity to remove hazardous trees. Green Seattle partnership is one of the only ongoing activities in our natural areas that can reverse this trend.

The Green Seattle Partnership (GSP) is the innovative 20-year effort to restore Seattle's forested parklands. The GSP has become one of the largest and most successful programs of its kind in the country primarily because of the amazing level of volunteerism demonstrated by Seattle residents, and the commitment of community leaders, agencies, non-profits, companies, and City government.

Over the past six years \$31M have been invested in our forests through the GSP effort and more than 800 acres are currently undergoing restoration. The investment includes \$11M in City funding, but most importantly it includes investment from the community. Seattle residents have volunteered an outstanding 580,000 hours to restore our forests (a value of \$11.6M), and our non-profit partners such as Forterra, EarthCorps, Nature Consortium, and Seattle Goodwill among others, have brought over \$9M to the table. City's funds have fueled a 2:1 match from the community.

The GSP is falling behind its targets due to diminished funding levels and, once the 2008 Parks Levy funding runs out, the program will be in serious trouble. It's crucial to put this effort back on track and find a sustainable funding path moving forward. The restoration effort requires \$3M/year, but more importantly, sustainable ongoing maintenance funding at the \$1.25 million/year level (once all acres are restored) will be necessary to avoid re-infestation of invasive species. It has been estimated that if we do not continue to manage this forest, it may be less than three years before parts of it are once again completely invaded by English Ivy and other invasive species.

Natural areas that are highly invaded and in decline pose a serious threat to public safety (hazardous trees) and create a monoculture of English Ivy and Himalayan Blackberry that only provide habitat for rats and other nuisance wildlife. By working to restore these areas we not only foster green jobs, but create a healthy and diverse habitat structure for native songbirds and other wildlife. These restored natural areas also provide access for our citizens, providing opportunities to enjoy these lush landscapes and escape the harsh realities of urban living (i.e., concrete and pavement).

The Commission believes that the funding requirements for this program are small compared to the benefits provided by this most important asset. In these difficult economic times even partially funding the program, at the \$1.5M/year level, would make a substantial difference. We encourage City Council to consider the importance of the Green Seattle Partnership for Seattle as you make your deliberations during the budget process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt Mega", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Matt Mega, Chair
Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

cc: Council President Clark, Councilmember Bagshaw, Councilmember Burgess, Councilmember Godden, Councilmember Harrell, Councilmember Licata, Councilmember Rasmussen, Councilmember O'Brien, Jill Simmons, Christopher Williams, Nancy Ahern, Leah Tivoli, Miles Mayhew, Mark Mead, Joanna Nelson de Flores, Michael Jenkins, Christa Valles

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