

Urban Forestry Commission (UFC)

August 3, 2011

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) – vice chair
Nancy Bird (NB)
Gordon Bradley (GB)
John Floberg (JF)
John Hushagen (JH)
Peg Staeheli (PS)
Tom Early (TE) – not voting

Staff

Sandra Pinto de Bader (SPdB) - OSE
Megan Erb (ME) – Seattle Channel
Tasha Bassett (TB) - SPU
Miles Mayhew (MM) - SPU

Public

Steve Zemke (SZ)

Absent- Excused

Jeff Reibman (JR)

Call to Order

MM called the meeting to order.

MM – introducing Tom Early. He will be confirmed by Council to Position #6 next Monday. Welcome Tom.

Commissioners introduced themselves

Public Comment

SZ – Handed out something posted by the SeattlePOSA group. This can be a helpful tool for a tree inventory. In April Azavea a geospatial analysis software development company launched PhillyTreeMap.org, a wiki-inspired geographic urban tree inventory application that enables the general public to collaborate with Philadelphia Parks & Recreation, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and other local groups to map trees in the 13-county, 3-state Philadelphia region. The code of the project was released as an open source software under the name OpenTreeMap, and is freely available at <https://github.com/azavea/opentreemap>.

This information could be incorporated to a tree permit system.

MM – he talked about this with SDOT as a possible option as well.

PS – Great City is taking on the subject of trees as infrastructure as their agenda for this year.

Approve July 13 meeting notes

ACTION: A motion was made to approve the July 13 meeting notes as written. The motion was seconded and carried. GB abstained. TM not voting.

Media training – Megan Erb (Seattle Channel)

Megan Erb, senior producer for the Seattle Channel made a presentation on interacting with the media:

Interacting with the Media in a strategic way:

- Find your key message - i.e.: Promoting Trees for Neighborhoods program
- Think about your audience – are you reaching out to individual residents/community blogs and groups/etc.
- Create press release/media kit/ in a short, concise, creative way – i.e. something eye catching
- Follow up with a phone call
- Don't forget neighborhood bloggers/neighborhood papers – they are the ones many residents turn to for specific community news. Promoting a free tree program would be ideal for these types of media outlets

Getting the interview:

- Be clear with your message
- Keep it short
- It's ok to repeat yourself
- Be passionate about what you're talking about
- Be positive
- If you don't understand the reporter's question, ask them to explain/repeat it. You're the expert here

Press Events:

- Make it visual/active - i.e. something a TV cameraman/newspaper photographer wants to get a shot of – ex. Kids planting trees
- Make it at a convenient time for the press – mid-morning/mid-day/early afternoon – it gives them time to get your story shot/written/on the air that night
- For feature stories, it's best to have those events on a weekend when crews are traditionally looking for stories
- People like statistics. Make analogies that resonate with people
- For newsier stories (i.e. - latest stats on tree canopy coverage for Seattle), have many stats available. Viewers like to hear numbers they can “visualize” ex. “That increase in canopy coverage is equivalent to every Ballard resident planting a tree in their yard.”
- Have various experts on hand for the media to interview
- Also have “real people” on hand who've benefited from the program – i.e. a group member who received free trees & maintenance training from your programs.
- Give the media plenty of notice to plan for your event
- Follow up with a phone call reminder regarding your event

PS – what if a commissioner is at an event and the media is present?

ME – Make sure to give the media your name and information so they make it clear that you are there and are available to talk and answer questions. Make your voice be heard.

SPdB – What is the expectation of a volunteer body in terms of engaging with the media. What if a reporter calls last minute and want a commissioner to appear in a radio show?

ME – There are no specific expectations in terms of responding to this type of request. Be available if that's part of what you want to do. If they don't get response from you, they might not call again.

NB – how can we stay on message?

ME – You can be forthright and steer them back to the answer you want.

MM – Part of the issue is that the media sometimes puts the UFC in the role of decision makers, when in reality they are advising Council and the Mayor. When dealing with controversial issues, commissioners struggle to determine when it is appropriate to put the message out there.

ME – a lot of people don't realize that the general public doesn't understand advisory groups' roles. If you have something like that maybe reach out to Laura Lockheart the PIO for Council.

JH – what's the funding behind the Seattle Channel?

ME – The majority is the General Fund. They also receive cable subsidy for their arts programs.

PS – what if something was published inaccurately?

ME – let them know they made a mistake. They should do a retraction

MM – that only applies to factual information not to opinions

GB – People have different perspectives. Sometimes it's hard to engage in sound bite fashion

ME – Take the call and be positive and stay on message. A good journalist will present the story in a balanced way. Sometimes reporters chop things up and put things out of context. Stay positive and stay on message.

MM – when writing a letter that might be controversial we might want to write sound bites ahead of time to stress the positive things the UFC is doing and use that to diffuse controversial things.

ME – Talk to Laura

NB – whenever there is something controversial can use a positive community message out and get it out in advance. How many departments use the Seattle Channel to promote programs ongoingly?

ME – We are more news. It's a budgetary issue. Departments contact me about great programs and she passes them along to producer and pair it up with their programming. An option is to put something in Seattle News Now.

SPU's storm water facility credit program – Tasha Bassett

Tasha Bassett presented SPU's Stormwater Facility Credit Program. It is a credit program for property owners with stormwater systems that help reduce the impact of stormwater on the City's system. Systems that provide stormwater flow control and/or provide water quality treatment are eligible for the program.

Any parcel property owner with a fully functioning, well maintained stormwater system that is in compliance with the City Stormwater code (SMC 22.800) standards can qualify for the program. The credit goes toward the drainage portion of the property tax bill. It's a percentage of the property tax.

Trees are included in the code and they are looking at incorporating them in the program. The program has a high acceptance rate. Single family residences are eligible but they don't generally benefit the most from the program. Parking lots and big rooftop areas benefit the most. They have 347 applications and the program started in 2009. The application deadline is by October 1 of every year.

JH – has heard that some rain gardens in Ballard have failed.

TB – Tracy Tacket can answer that question

PS – this is unrelated because those were on public property

TB – the program is for private property only

PS – what's the threshold for older systems?

TB- There is no threshold as long as they meet current code requirements.

PS – it appears that if we did a 'stem' count, it wouldn't help the City's canopy cover goal. It's been a friction point. Some people don't mind planting trees but might prefer columnar trees that don't provide as much canopy. The idea would be to focus on stormwater credits vs. wildlife habitat credits.

TB – it has to abide by the stormwater code which lists size, type, and place of trees.

JH – does this apply only to project within Seattle city limits?

TB – yes this program is related to property tax in Seattle

JH – do you see the program growing beyond city limits?

TB – this is a new program. It might grow in the future.

MM – what if someone re-develops their property to maximize the footprint of the building

TB – generally SF only gets billed for roof area.

PS – If you follow the rules to apply there is a cost. If you want to do good, do so, but might not be worth asking for the credit

MM –will this eventually connect to Green Factor?

TB – can't say. We are just starting the program

PS – a potential issue is that the program sees it from the perspective of impervious surfaces. You would have to move the trees close to pavement areas, and loose root area.

TB – there is different credit for deciduous and conifers. Research is coming. There is also different credit for new and existing trees.

MM – might want to include lawn area to count as impervious surface as part of the credit program.

PS – in High Point the project got credit for meeting code. This is an ongoing credit with a dollar amount attached to it.

JF – is the credit ongoing?

TB – Yes, as long as you maintain the system. The maximum credit is 50% towards drainage fee. The program is for individual parcels. Townhomes pay drainage fees for their roof area. Owners need to apply to program not developers.

JS – what about the utility bill?

TB – there you pay for utilities, not for drainage.

JS – stormwater is mostly generated by SDOT. They own the most impervious surface in Seattle with the ROW.

TB – City' streets don't pay drainage fees.

JS – so the cost to manage runoff is move to parcels...

Finalize UFC talking points document

JH – would like to refer to this document with a different name.

SPdB – maybe 'messaging document'?

JH – yes.

JF – This is the messaging document for us to refer back to. It has the positions we all share.

JH – How often do we get approached?

MM – only when we release a recommendation. Maybe we should do more press releases

JH – City government could do a better job at being proactive. People just assume the City is not doing anything.

MM – I would like us to use our website.

JH – the City is always reacting

NB – it's also the role piece. If we are advising are we promoting? Sit down with Conlin and talk about our role.

MM – maybe we need to make it more of a public document

JF – maybe go back and define some of the terms

MM – we could add to the website a glossary of terms, say that we meet twice a month. And add FAQ in the back of the document

JS – this would also be helpful for the media

JF – how should remarks be used. We'll have minutes for the meeting. Would like to have a protocol for media inquiries

JH – take the call and say I'm speaking as a Commissioner.

SPdB – if the comment is about something that was already voted on by the Commission. Otherwise it needs to be clear that the person is speaking as an individual.

MM – read Section 13 of the by-laws – Acting as a body “The Commission acts as a body in making its decisions and announcing them. No member may use agency letterhead or speak or act for the Commission without prior authorization from the Chair.”

NB – the protocol we have in place is that if we receive a media call we’ll defer to the chair or the person that developed the position

MM – if there is a position paper out there is fine to speak about it. Feel free to speak about that. If we are in the middle of deliberating on a matter, then say so.

UF IDT/UFC meeting agenda items

MM – we are going into this meeting to share information and to share workplans

NB – we should talk about the goals for the different land uses and the overall canopy cover goal.

MM – canopy cover has been measured every five years. He would like to see where trees are being planted and maybe do a field trip.

JF – it would be good to know how is the UFMP being implemented and whether or not we have the same goals.

SPdB – City departments’ workplans are based on the UFMP

JS – it would be interesting to hear a presentation from each department on the costs and benefits of the urban forest to their organizations. For SCL is mostly a cost. For SPU there are some benefits. They are spending \$1.7 B to eliminate CSO discharges. What are their costs is the canopy cover is 15% vs. 30%?

JH – invite other institutions that have management of trees to the meeting to widen the thinking of urban forest as one. This is an opportunity.

MM – that might be a follow-up meeting after this first one.

New business and announcements

Adjourn

Public communications:

From: John "Hooper" Havekotte [mailto:4.hooper.4@comcast.net]

Sent: Tuesday, August 02, 2011 3:49 PM

To: McGinn, Mike; Harrell, Bruce; Godden, Jean; O'Brien, Mike; O'Brien, Mike; Licata, Nick; Conlin, Richard; Bagshaw, Sally; Bagshaw, Sally; Clark, Sally; Burgess, Tim; Rasmussen, Tom; DeCaro, Barbara; Pinto_de_Bader, Sandra; Donna Kostka

Subject: Cutting of trees at the Fort Lawton Cemetery

August 2, 2011

Public Affairs Officer

US Army Corps of Engineers
Seattle District
P. O. Box 3755
Seattle, WA 98124

Gentlemen/Ladies:

We are deeply concerned about the plan to cut down a large number of trees at Ft. Lawton Cemetery.

Our organization, Heron Habitat Helpers, is working to restore and protect Kiwanis Park, which is a natural area and wildlife corridor. This area is home to a diverse range of wildlife, including the largest active Great Blue Heron colony in Seattle. As an official "Adopt-A-Park" sponsor for the Kiwanis Ravine, HHH is committed to maintaining this critical habitat to support a thriving population of herons and other wildlife for current and future generations to enjoy.

This year we had over 80 Great Blue Heron nests in the Kiwanis Ravine. The birds have been seen perching in the cemetery trees and gathering sticks for their nests. The trees are protected for a distance of 500 feet from the nesting colony through the City of Seattle habitat management plan which includes the eastern part of the cemetery.

Last year the Kiwanis Ravine was declared a Wildlife Sanctuary. We are dedicated to preserving the Great Blue Herons and their environment. Please help us protect the tree canopy in Seattle.

Sincerely,

John "Hooper" Havekotte
President
Heron Habitat Helpers

cc: Mayor
City Council
Seattle Parks Department
Urban Forestry Commission
Donna Kostka

8-3-11 UFC
Steve Zinke
Public Comment

In April Azavea, a geospatial analysis (GIS) software development company launched PhillyTreeMap.org, a wiki-inspired geographic urban tree inventory application that enables the general public to collaborate with Philadelphia Parks & Recreation, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS), and other local groups to map trees in the 13-county, 3-state Philadelphia region. Today, Azavea announces that the code of the PhillyTreeMap.org project is released as open source software under the name OpenTreeMap, and is freely available at: <https://github.com/azavea/OpenTreeMap>.

Urban street trees have myriad proven benefits for communities including providing shade, improving air quality, intercepting stormwater runoff, raising property values, decreasing utility bills, and enhancing the look and feel of communities. While tree inventories provide municipalities with vital data to consult when managing the urban forest, creating a complete inventory is a time consuming and resource intensive process. OpenTreeMap provides an easy-to-use public inventory platform that enables individuals, organizations, and governments to collaboratively contribute to an interactive and dynamic map of a community's tree population. OpenTreeMap can be used in a single municipality or cover a broader geographic region with many communities.

After completing a free registration, users can add trees to the system, edit or add to existing tree records, and upload tree images. All changes are immediately visible in the system, but a group of trained administrators may also elect to review changes and new entries to ensure accuracy. Each tree is associated with a particular location and may include information such as species, diameter, images of the tree, and yearly ecosystem impact metrics. Calculated using iTree, an urban forestry analysis and benefits assessment software suite developed by the USDA Forest Service, these ecological impact numbers provide a clear illustration of the environmental and economic impacts that trees have on the urban landscape.

Created using Django, Python and PostgreSQL, OpenTreeMap's original code was developed by Urban Ecos and Umbrella Consulting for the award-winning Urban Forest Map project in San Francisco. Azavea adopted the software and extended it with support from a Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grant from the US Department of Agriculture National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) (Grant Number 2010-33610-20937). Azavea and Urban Ecos plan to collaborate on future urban forestry projects and are seeking additional funding to extend the software to smart phones and tablets, add social networking features, create curricular materials for schools and add new ecosystem modeling features.

"We could not be more pleased to collaborate with the Urban Ecos team. Kelaine Vargas was one of the original developers on the iTree Streets program and brings considerable knowledge about urban forestry and ecosystems. We hope that the OpenTreeMap code will be used by communities around the world to ensure our urban forests are valued and nurtured by the communities in which they grow." says Robert Cheetham, President and CEO of Azavea.

For more information about OpenTreeMap, visit: <http://www.azavea.com/opentreemap/>.