

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

July 17, 2013

Meeting Notes

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

Attending

Commissioners

John Small (JS) – vice-chair
Gordon Bradley (GB)
Tom Early (TE)
Jeff Reibman (JR)
Erik Rundell (ER)
John Floberg (JF) - chair
Leif Fixen (LF)
Peg Staeheli (PS)

Staff

Sandra Pinto de Bader (SPdB) - OSE

Public

Steve Zemke

Absent- Excused

Matt Mega (MM)

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

Chair report

JF – we are going to be talking to Portland’s UFC. The questions that we will be asking during our call are:

- How does your tree ordinance work and how did you set it up? What challenges are being faced in implementing it? Are there areas of improvement you would recommend?
- How did your UFC become a forum for responding to citizen appeals with your city forester? What authority does the UFC have to act and what form does your action take?
- How do you interact with and influence city staff and elected officials and the mayor, and do they even attend your meetings?
- Does your UFC have sources of funding? We’re wondering how you operate the heritage tree program, Bill Naito Award, newsletter, etc. without support.

Wanted to hear how the UFC interacts with city staff and elected and what type of relationship they have. Then we’d like to hear about their funding and how they are able to give an annual award, have a heritage tree program, write an annual report and would be nice to see how they do all of that with just volunteers.

TE – it would be interesting if they listen to arguments around tree removal it might be that the composition of the commission is different.

JF - they are all appointed by the Mayor and approved by City Council. They don't appear to all have necessarily urban forest knowledge. It would be interesting to hear more about the composition of the Commission. Sandra sent a link to the Title 11 that came into effect in February. They have a \$35 permit fee and they have a site visit for every tree to be removed. On private lands it gets more complex.

ER – would like to bring back the conversation on UF departmental funding.

JF – are there any big, general comments about the Plan?

TE – I read the plan and gave Sandra some minor edits. I like the overall composition and expansion of the Plan. The change in name to Stewardship is fine with me and the issue was resolved in the meetings. The change addressed some of the concerns we talked about in the past especially the monitoring piece.

LF – I have not read the plan in the last week but the last time I was at one of the meetings I felt the Plan was going in the right direction.

Portland UFC call

JF – Hi Meryl, I'd like to read the questions for Commissioners to know what we'll be talking about during our call.

Meryl - Our new tree code at this point there is only a couple of components that are being implemented. Because of budget cuts they have not been able to implement the full new code. This is very disappointing to the Commission and other advocates.

We have an existing code that had a lot of problems, flaws and gaps. Primarily in areas of big tree protection, mitigation opportunities, and development conflicts. It was a grassroots effort from the community and the effort was about strengthening language for development, strengthening mitigation and protection of large trees. One of the most important components was about regulation of private trees (that was a big win we got). The private piece was a big win, we were not 100% happy with the final regulation. Homeowner can take out up to 4 trees up to 20 inches per year per parcel (right now trees are not regulated on private property). I'm not happy with that. I think it goes beyond what should have been implemented in the code. Once code is implementing there will be tracking of what's working or not. The Commission will be watch dogging. If it's not working then we'll go back to the electeds with changes. Will have to develop systems to track what's working and what's not working. If the trees are over 20 inches there will be a permit that will involve neighbors and city.

JF – budget cuts – what were the impacts. The only thing implemented is the one-stop information website with information on permits of trees. That website was funded. 1.5 FTEs were funded to continue the work. Many hours were volunteered to create this code but we still have to roll it out and communicate it. To let people that private trees are now regulated. It's a big disappointment for us that

the City voted to delay this to next July. We need increase levels of staffing (in the UFC) to fully implement the new code. It's over \$1M to implement but below \$3M (don't have the exact figures on hand).

We were always hopeful that because we had a lot of support from MO and CC at the time, but we are now facing larger budget cuts than expected.

JF – when the new code came out did you have any media blowback about the private property portion?

Meryl – we had a lot of public comment and we heard all the comments and took them into account and together with the sustainability commission they recommended to move forward the new code.

JF – Tell me more about the single point of contact.

Meryl – the single point of contact is a website but we would like to have a person that would be answering calls and answers.

JF – how did the Portland UFC regulates removals of row trees.

Meryl – have authority to hear an appeal and make a decision about it. If someone doesn't like their decision they can take it to the Mayor or City Council. They do have regulatory authority. The UFC has been around for at least 20 years.

JF – do elected sit in at meetings?

Meryl – we've had a change in the UF professional member. Our commission meetings are attended by a City attorney who advises. We are advisory body but we deal with code. The attorney helps in legal matters. We work closely with the director of Parks (UF department). Parks is under one of the 5 commissioners, every number of years the commissioners portfolio changes. When we got a new mayor he appointed a new commissioner, he gave Parks to a different commissioner. Community partners also attend meetings. Meets with the Commissioner of Parks. I'm an ex-officio member of the Parks board.

JF – who is responsible for the urban forest management plan?

Meryl – lots of people provided input. Led by Parks and UFC.

JF – how do you support such a large effort?

Meryl – staff person takes minutes and organizes agendas and acts as liaison.

JF – does the UFC have funds for their projects?

Meryl – it's part of the urban forestry budget. The larger part of the meeting is reports from committees. Each one gets 5 minutes for reporting. Some of the committees have not met. The big

challenge for us is recruitment. Tries to have presentations from different bureaus or partner organizations so the UFC knows what's going on in the city. Wants to get away from being reactive and becoming more proactive by knowing what's going on.

JS – does Parks in Portland play a role in terms of management of trees outside or Parks property?

Meryl – they don't get involved in ROW trees.

JS – does the Commission have a similar role with the transportation of power utility?

Meryl – there are ex-officio members in other areas and they look at mitigation measures if trees have to be taken out. Department of Development Services also. The City forester works with and collaborates with his peers/colleagues in other bureaus. Bureau of Environmental Services (General Fund and also rates). Those rates have allowed the department to develop robust initiatives like bio-swales. They have put Portland on the map for being sustainable.

LF – how are they elected?

Meryl – They recruit them. We want people who represent diverse parts of the city, equity and diversity are important elements. Have an arborist and just lost a landscape architect. Have a utility person. Other people that are in non-profit and academia.

JR – Have you have any successful partnerships with non-profit or for-profit organizations. Our Friends of Trees group has been instrumental. Biggest recipient of a green program contract that planted 80,000 trees. Other partner is Verde, organization made of Latino men and women and contract with Friends of Trees and plan on ROW and do tree maintenance. There is a number of other organizations in the region a lot for native tree restoration in natural areas.

JF – Verde – is that paid positions?

Meryl – yes

JF – where does the funding come from?

Meryl – water rates fund the Bureau of Environmental Services – health of water sheds is part of their mandate. It was a large contract (around \$7M) which included eco-roofs, bio-swales and tree planting in both public and private property.

JF- what's your canopy goal?

Meryl – 35%. Currently are at 30-31%.

JF – we are currently working on updating our urban forest plan and we are calling it the urban forest stewardship plan. We will send you a copy. We are also working on the ordinance for private property

and will continue to do so gaining good insights from Portland. Would like to know how much it would take to fully implement the ordinance.

JF – did you guys think it was a good exercise?

JR – especially the funding on their Greater Green campaign. Interested in the funding use. Paid positions and job programs created with that funding. There is an opportunity to spend funds in neighborhoods with high immigrant populations.

Peg – it would be interesting to see the breakdown of canopy cover in the City of Portland. They have watersheds inside the city.

JS – Seattle has 70% more density.

LF – they also don't have such a large industrial area.

JS – Title 11 is 186 page tree ordinance. We need to push for something clearer and shorter. If it's too large it will not be accessible or understandable. When she explained what she thought was the upshot (cut 4 trees up to 20 inches) is not great protection.

PS – is there something more robust inside the 186 pages?

JS – a lot of it is programmatic.

JF – I'm surprised that they were able to pass legislation without knowing how much it will cost to implement.

JS – regulation was effective Feb 1, 2013.

Letter of support for City Fruit - vote

JF – we went over the changes that included some of your comments to reflect the fact that there is money that is made in selling to restaurants and to separate the two. Sales of fruit helps defray harvest cost.

JR – would like to see them develop their revenue side as well.

JF – talk about the cost efficiencies that could be realized from work being done by trained volunteers vs. city staff.

ACTION: A motion was made to approve the letter as written. The motion was seconded and carried.

Urban Forest Stewardship Plan – initial discussion

JF – got feedback from Leif and Tom and they like the plan.

Peg – a few things I saw. A lot of statements with big caveats. Human impacts are significant but only part of the impacts. Making statements and then making excuses. The one-size fits all ...

Sandra asked for Peg to use track changes.

Condition assessment – doesn't say the source of the assessment ADD THE FOOTNOTE OR REFER TO i-TREE.

JF – confused by the stewardship message in the Executive Summary. We really can't do this without changing attitudes about trees.

TE – I think it's helpful that the plan introduces some of the challenges. So it acknowledges the challenges.

Peg – one question, I don't quite see why we sometimes use a specific department and sometimes is the IDT.

JR – having two audiences is a challenge. In the current framework the most important audience is City departments. We need to err on the side of talking to the departments in a clear way.

Peg – the Plan needs to respond outside City departments. Not necessary to tweak now, but the majority of trees are in private property.

PEG – DO A SEARCH AND REMOVE 'BUT' AND CHANGE TO 'AND' – no regulation fund education, for example.

Gordon – The organization makes sense. The way pieces were moved around. The plan itself refers back to the Clark model. It would be useful if there was a brief discussion of why is important.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS UF IS NOT PART OF THE CHALLENGES. NEED TO INCLUDE.

STRATEGIES – WHAT DO THEY HAVE TO DO WITH THE FRAMEWORK – FIND A WAY TO LINK THEM.

Specific things that he will send to me separately.

2,500 vs. 3,800 acres one page apart – correct or explain

Put action agenda items related to the Community Approach upfront.

JS – pretty fundamental question. In the shift from Management to Stewardship something has been lost. Integrated approach – I don't see that in this document. I feel it's a step back from the last one. In terms of how the departments are to work to build value vs. working on their own needs. It feels like it's changing the responsibility to the public.

Peg – include DPD in some of the actions that have to do with comprehensive planning. Action – expand incentives to planting, include SDOT.

JR – I agree with both statements. This document primary function is going to be to drive departmental behavior – if it guides departments to then engage community, that doesn't make this an appropriate way to communicate with the public. Make that a priority for departments in their actions to look at the public and engage to move goals forward.

Peg – the community is the check of our agenda and they don't have a way of monitoring. Tell Council that as they review to assign to specific departments some of the actions.

Leif – I have a problem with the title of the document. I thought we were bringing in a lot of specificity.

Public Comment

Steve – I agree on the UFSP with the discussion. It's a document directing on how the City is going to deal with trees. It's a direction on what the City would like to do to engage residents.

On the Portland conversation. I don't think Meryl touched on all the components of the proposal such as tree replacement. Half of the 186 pages are explanation. She didn't discuss the permit aspect. A lot of things were left out of the conversation. They put trees in a single place in the code, that's why it's so long. There are different ways to look at how to plant trees in a city.

Next month's agenda items. Good of the order.

Adjourn

Community input