

Friends of Cheasty
3820 Cheasty Blvd South
Seattle, WA 98118
October 21, 2014

Seattle Urban Forestry Commission
City of Seattle Office of Sustainability & Environment
PO Box 94729. Seattle, WA 98124-4729

Attn: Steve Zemke

Dear Urban Forestry Commission Members,

I am writing to ask that the Seattle Urban Forestry Commission become involved in the city-wide planning process for the allowable uses in Seattle's Greenspaces and Natural Areas. As you may know, such policies have yet to be defined, despite the considerable history Seattle through which has worked to acquire parkland for open space.

Your leadership in developing such policy appears perfectly congruent with your purpose statement on your website: *The City passed Ordinance 123052 in August 2009 establishing an Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) to advise the Mayor and City Council on policy and regulations for protecting, managing, and conserving trees and vegetation in the City of Seattle.*

Recently, the Superintendent of Parks and Recreation, in dialogue with members of the Seattle City Council, agreed to develop such policies citywide.¹ (The text of his email correspondence to CM Clark on August 4, 2014 is provided in a footnote). The absence of a clear city-wide policy describing approved and prohibited uses for Greenbelts, Greenspaces and Natural Areas came to light during citizen questions to the Parks Department around their decision to develop a mountain bike park in Cheasty Greenspace. (The outcome of that Cheasty planning process is still undecided as a Public Advisory Team (PAT) process is in the middle of its work.)

Attached is the letter from Christopher Williams to City Councilmember Sally Clark in which she asked Supt. Williams to describe his process for developing a city-wide policy. Her question precedes his answer in the footnote. In the letter, Supt. Williams commits to developing such a policy. It has been nearly three months since Supt. Williams' letter at there has been no public process set in place for the planning process that we have been able to uncover. Further, we are seriously concerned that no public involvement process has been identified for this significant policy. It seems very fitting for key Urban Forestry Commission leadership, consultation and input. That is why we are presenting it to you for your consideration.

Through our research we have uncovered a number of documents such as Best Management Practices, City Council resolutions regarding the acquisitions of parcels for Greenspaces, Department of Planning and Development guidelines for steep slopes, wetlands and potential slide areas. While these many documents may guide discussions about future uses, none of these comprise a specific policy on use, based on our 'lay person' review. You doubtless could bring great insight to this background and any future policy.

4. ¹ Request by CM Clark of Supt Williams and response from Parks Department in August 4, 2014 memo: **Please outline the timeline and process for how DPR will create a citywide policy describing approved and prohibited uses for Greenbelts, Greenspaces, and Natural Area Parks.** [New Citywide](#)

policies will require significant development time as well as public input. Tree-related policies for Parks and Seattle Department of Transportation have taken several years. The tree protection ordinance for the Department of Planning and Development has been in process for over six years. Work on a department-wide policy regarding greenbelts and natural areas would begin in the fall of 2014. There is a fair amount of research and outreach to forest stewards, natural area supporters and other interest groups. After working with a broad constituency and Parks staff, a draft policy could be ready for review by the Board of Park Commissioners in the late spring 2015 with adoption by summer.

How would the timing for adoption of a citywide policy affect the work on the project? *Provisions could be made in the policy to cover the Cheasty pilot so the adoption of a greenbelt/natural area policy would not be affected. Keep in mind that at the end of the Cheasty pilot, assuming the project moves forward, Parks will take final action on the bicycle and pedestrian trails that will have to be consistent with any adopted greenbelt/natural area policy. One of the purposes of this pilot project is to enable Parks and the public to understand the impacts of a mountain bike trail in a greenbelt; there are already existing pedestrian trails in our greenbelts and natural areas and we anticipate a three-year window for evaluation.*

This proposed policy has significant implications for the future of Seattle as a city, for its quality of life and for sustainability. If future policies for Seattle's Greenbelts, Greenspaces and Natural areas allow for the creation of active parks or in any way change the current use from 'passive' and peaceful enjoyment and wildlife habitat areas to active uses, that would deal a significant blow to Seattle's commitment to retain and grow the tree canopy and preserve our limited open space for future generations.

The timing for this issue is critical. Our City is planning for the addition of 125,000 new residents by 2030. The pressure to turn our open spaces and natural areas into active parks will only grow more intensely in the coming decades. By allowing development in these parks we will lose the natural understory, the quality habitat and the wildlife that enjoy spaces in the city. Development is also a specific threat to the tree canopy. We believe that the Urban Forestry Commission is the right body with the vision of sustainability and that you are uniquely capable of weighing in and shaping our future policies in this area. We look forward to working with you to see how we can help frame this important city-wide policy.

Of course, we are committed to restoration of these Greenspaces. It seems that Parks believes that a 'quid pro quo' exchange of Greenspace for volunteer labor in the restoration effort is a defensible exchange. We respectfully disagree with this approach. We have a robust team of volunteers throughout the City working for restoration and feel strongly that we don't need to trade user group development of Greenspaces for labor.

Members of our group and representatives of other organizations committed to preserving our Greenspaces and natural areas are available to speak to the Commission about why this issue is so critical and why we believe you should look into it and assume leadership roles in the conversation. Please contact Sarah Welch sarahwelch@comcast.net or 206-359-2588 of our Friends of Cheasty group to get more information or to arrange for someone to talk to the Commission.

Sincerely,

Friends of Cheasty