

## SEATTLE URBAN FORESTRY COMMISSION

Leif Fixen, Chair • Tom Early, Vice-Chair

Gordon Bradley • Mariska Kecskes • Donna Kostka • Richard Martin • Joanna Nelson de Flores • Jeff Reibman  
Erik Rundell • Steve Zemke

*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*

**December 9, 2015**

### Meeting Notes

Seattle Municipal Tower, Room 2750 (27<sup>th</sup> floor)  
700 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Seattle

#### Attending

##### Commissioners

Tom Early – vice chair  
Gordon Bradley  
Mariska Kecskes  
Donna Kostka  
Richard Martin  
Joanna Nelson de Flores  
Jeff Reibman  
Erik Rundell  
Steve Zemke

##### Staff

Sandra Pinto de Bader - OSE  
Leah Tivoli - Parks

##### Public

Linda Murtfeldt – Seattle Audubon  
Cass Turnbull – Plant Amnesty

#### Absent- Excused

Leif Fixen - chair

**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

Tom, acting as chair, called the meeting to order.

#### Public comment

Linda Murtfeldt – She is the chair of the conservation committee at Seattle Audubon. They have been talking about the Dogs in Parks strategy and are concerned about safety of older people, children, and smaller dogs on leash in parks. Had lots of personal interactions with dogs off-leash and they are concerned about what could happen with those groups. They are also concerned about wildlife such as squirrels and also plants that might be impacted. They were not aware of the focus groups and are concerned about not having had the opportunity to comment. Would like clarity about whether this policy will allow off-leash dogs in existing parks or whether it is about creating new off-leash areas, which they could support.

#### Chair report

None

### **No Place for Old Trees Presentation – Cass Turnbull**

Cass is the Executive Director of Plant Amnesty. She produced this presentation about the fact that trees need space in our urban areas. Development affects our ability to preserve trees. Multiple dwelling units are making it more difficult to preserve trees.

Cass believes that it is possible to have more density and have trees. That would be by building higher buildings and keeping areas for trees. By keeping trees we make our city more livable. Seattle's other commitments include environmental justice and human health. Diseases we are prone in cities: asthma, obesity, etc. are related to heat island, stress, and dirty air/water. Trees provide solutions for all of these issues.

The total good provided by the urban forest is superior than the value provided by individual, isolated solutions such as green roofs, bioswales, etc. Benefits of trees are cumulative. When dealing with individual situations trees will always lose.

Cass would like to receive feedback to this presentation. Commissioners will send feedback via Sandra. She is working on a public service announcement funded through a Washington State DNR grant. She wants to let people know that there is a crisis around trees and open space coming to Seattle. She wants to raise awareness about this issue.

### **People, Dogs, and Parks Strategy – Leah Tivoli (Parks)**

Leah works in the policy and performance unit. She would like to give the UFC an overview of the process Parks is following on this issue. There are questions about what's going on. The project's timeline has been pushed back. A first draft will be available January 4. Park Board meetings to talk about this issue are currently scheduled for 1/14, 1/28, and 2/11 but will get re-scheduled due to the high level of interest. Audubon and other groups have sent comments. They have done an environmental review in preparation for this work. There won't be any loosening of safety restrictions around off-leash dogs. The plan talks about designated off-leash areas (currently 14 areas). Existing facilities are all fenced and have specific servicing. Parks has been researching other jurisdictions that have tried a whole array of alternatives. The results of the analysis will be released January 4. It's going to be important to determine level of enforcement.

They started the process with a survey focused on dog owners. 4,000 people responded. Results provided a good baseline to understand how people use these areas. Survey results geographically mimic the license data, so it was representative of the city's population.

They had seven focus groups geographically spread. 300 people applied to participate. They tried something different and worked with EnviroIssues to determine the makeup of the focus groups. Results will be released with the draft. The demographics: tried to make 50-50 men and women, people with children, with interest in the environment, people with and without dogs. Only 25% of dog owners use off-leash areas. There is a trend across the US and internationally to create off-leash designated facilities. The smaller the household, the more people look at their pet as a family member.

UFC question: how did you advertise?

Response: they did very little advertising because they did not have the capacity to respond to a large number of applications. Used Camp Long and Discovery, listservs, community centers, flyers, GSP forest stewards.

Focus groups are not intended to be a public process. They are intended as research to create a dialogue between very different people and the facilitator manages the interaction to find common themes. For example there was interest in physical separation (such as fences).

Each off-leash area has a stewardship group. Parks wants to make sure there is enough volunteer interest in the off-leash areas.

UFC question: did you do research on enforcement?

Answer: Yes. They found that there are five themes for why they get public input in the form of letters. The website has a heat map for violations (e.g. Magnuson, Woodland, and Alki). They are ramping up compliance. Also, animal control is re-staffing and ramping up in parks. Most complaints are by dog owners walking their dog on leash encountering off-leash dogs. There are a lot of complaints about feces in athletic areas. They also receive complaints about disruption of plants and birds. They know they need to make investments to solve these issues and it's not about designated areas.

UFC question: will there be priority for areas such as nesting areas?

Answer: yes, protecting these resources and assets is of paramount importance. Seattle has one of the more restrictive policies. Dogs are not allowed in shorelines with the exception of Magnuson Park.

UFC question: will there be an area within the strategy to deal with enforcement and have recommendations?

Answer: yes. There has been a lot of interest in this area.

UFC question: related to the heat map. When looking at location for violations have you looked at access to off leash areas as a reason for the high incidence? Magnuson and Woodland both have off-leash areas and they are among the highest incidence of violations. What kind of environment are people choosing to go to with their off-leash dogs? How can they be better served?

Answer: the majority of violation is on the beaches and large grassy areas. People like to go running with their dog or play fetch in the water. The problem is that off-leash dogs scare and bother enough people that it becomes an issue. They have learned from San Francisco, Portland, etc.

UFC question: would it be possible to add trees to some of these areas to make it more enjoyable for people?

Answer: environmental elements were one of the top things that people think are missing: logs, trees, etc.

UFC question: there are some off-leash areas that are a muddy mess. Are you looking at including solutions for that type of problem?

Answer: yes, they are exploring some solutions, including artificial turf.

**Major Institution Master Planning (MIMP) process – initial discussion**

Tom walked the UFC through the document. Commissioners discussed proposed comments. Would we want to achieve equivalency of canopy? When a tree is removed there should be a requirement to replant and that the newly planted tree(s) has/have the ability to replace the same amount of canopy 20 years into the future (or in some other specific timeline). If there is no mechanism in the code to accommodate institutions to contribute, for example, to a tree fund to mitigate canopy loss, then it's not workable to include a requirement in the MIMP.

Tom will add comments and send a next iteration to the UFC. Sandra will include in a January agenda for further discussion.

**ECA letter of recommendation – discussion and possible vote**

Donna did a first draft of a letter of recommendation about the ECA. The draft ECA update is a large document and she has not yet received input from Heron Habitat Helpers.

Commissioners brain stormed ideas around site restoration requirements and noxious weed removal. There would be an issue in steep slopes. A geo technical review of the restoration or enhancement would be in order.

**Chair and vice-chair vote**

The Commission elected Tom Early as the Chair and Steve Zemke as the Vice-chair for 2016.

**Public comment**

None

**New business and announcements**

None

**Adjourn**