

**DRAFT**  
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May 12, 2021

Nathan Torgelson, Director  
Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections  
700 5<sup>th</sup> Ave  
Seattle, WA 98124

RE: Tracking progress of Seattle tree removal and replacement on public and private land.

**Objective of this letter of recommendation:**

- Comments on results of the recent tree removal tracking undertaken by SDCI, SDOT,;
- Considerations for how this data currently may be analysed and used; and
- Recommendations on the approach SDCI and OSE should consider relative to tree protections.

Dear Nathan and Sam,

The Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) appreciates the periodic updates that SDCI has shared with us, and are eager to participate in any way with these efforts. In September 2019 the City Council passed Resolution 31902 that included a timeline and requested quarterly reporting on the development of the tree protections legislation.<sup>1</sup> One of the items within the resolution, the Council requested prioritizing *“Tracking tree removal and replacement on both public and private land throughout Seattle.”*

The UFC recently received the second update of the tree removal tracking data sheet that included 1,399 removed trees from approximately 97 construction permits and 30 demolition permits (averaging about 11 trees removed per permit). It was not clear if these 127 permits were from unique trees on different properties or if there was some repetition within the account.<sup>2</sup> The data included at least 66 Exceptional trees with another 323 trees unidentified in terms of their stature, size or species. The largest tree removed was 72-inch diameter at breast height (DBH) with the average tree removed being closer to 13-inches DBH.<sup>3</sup> The time period for this data was not included, so forthcoming updates should include when the permit record has been initiated so the extent of overall permits is understood.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution actions beginning January 31, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> The UFC believes that more than one construction permit may be issued for a particular address, and that many of the construction permits (-CN) also include demolition (-DM) permits.

<sup>3</sup> Note that the UFC received raw data without the summary as described. There may be some discrepancies in this account. Tree loss tracking should include an executive summary of what the data means and a dashboard in order for the UFC and the Council’s Land Use and Neighborhoods Committee to ascertain the quantity.

<sup>4</sup> For example, does 127 permits represent a tenth of the average annual permits issued by the department?

<b>DM (demo permit)</b>	209	Trees lost	14.9%	on	30	projects	7.0 trees lost/project
<b>CN (construction)</b>	1190	Trees lost	85.1%	on	97	projects	12.3 trees lost/project
<b>Unidentified</b>	0	Trees lost	0.0%	on	0	projects	
<b>Total</b>	1399	Trees lost	100.0%	on	127	projects	11.0 trees lost/project
					2.442	projects/week	
<b>Tree Groves</b>	No records of trees within protected tree groves						
<b>Exceptional</b>	66	Trees lost	4.7%				
<b>Not Exceptional</b>	1010	Trees lost	72.2%				
<b>Unknown</b>	323	Trees lost	23.1%				
<b>Total trees on list</b>	1399	Trees lost	100.0%				
<b>Median Tree Lost Size</b>	12 inches DBH						
<b>Average Tree Lost Size</b>	13.1 inches DBH						
<b>Largest Tree Lost Size</b>	72.0 inches DBH						

*May 5, 2021*

### Comments on progress results of the recent tree removal tracking undertaken by SDCI.

In addition to a summary of the data included, the UFC suggests that future iterations of tracking sheet include the following information:

- Location (address and regional area of Seattle);
- Dates the permits were approved;
- Special site conditions related to the permit (such as ECA or incentive zone);
- Reference or link to arborist reports when applicable to the permit;
- Which trees were removed from groves<sup>5</sup>;
- Description of the abbreviations that delineate the reason for tree removal, including hazards.
- Account for trees retained and replanted as associated with the permit, if provided or required.<sup>6</sup>

Given the extent of missing data fields in the most recent progress, perhaps we may be consulted by the team members engaged in the tracking process to streamline data useful for inventories and policy recommendations.

### Considerations for how this data currently may be analyses and used.

Given Seattle's mission to avoid climate change and an objective to increase the urban forest canopy to 30-percent in less than two decades, the tracking and inventory of trees retained, removed, and planted on public and private land is essential to assure the city's goal and objective are achieved. Urban forests should equitably provide health benefits to all Seattle communities, not just a few. The current graphic display of tree canopy lot percentage data must be periodically updated as permits modify the quantity and size of the urban canopy cover. This information provides an estimated current extent of citywide canopy.

### Recommendations on the approach SDCI and OSE should consider relative to tree protections.

Categories and criteria should be used for optimal alignment with SDOT tree tracking systems as well as Accela permit tracking. SDCI and SDOT should file with OSE quarterly reports to the City Council and relevant City Departments regarding all data collected from its Tree Tracking Worksheet including trees

<sup>5</sup> Protected tree groves as defined under the Directors Rule 16-2008. Hazards exclude impacts from earthwork.

<sup>6</sup> Ideally suggest the resulting (30-year) mature canopy volume that planted trees will provide.

retained, removed, and planted relative to permits issued. As was shared with the City Council in late 2019, Portland Oregon has provided a good tree inventory model for Seattle to consider.<sup>7</sup>

Thank you,

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<sup>7</sup> Portland's Development Services Center includes a Tree Inventory Worksheet and Tree Inventory User Manual to assist in the process of tracking trees removed, retained, and planted: <https://www.portland.gov/trees/trees-development/capital-improvement-projects/create-tree-inventory-and-tree-plan>