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Hao Liang (Position #6 – Landscape Architect – ISA) • **David Moehring** (Position # 8 – Development)
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Mayor Bruce Harrell
Seattle City Hall
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Seattle City Council
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Julie Dingley, Director
City Budget Office
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RE: Urban Forestry Commission feedback to 2023 proposed budget

Dear Mayor Bruce Harrell and Councilmembers,

Duwamish Lands (Seattle, WA) – In June 2022, the Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) provided [recommendations](#) to inform the 2023 budget process, urging funding for the urban forest to promote environmental justice, promote public health, and increase climate resilience.

The UFC has reviewed the Mayor’s proposed budget. For the purposes of this letter, the UFC is limiting comments to proposed allocations in 2023.

From what the UFC can glean, the 2023 proposed budget contains up to \$0.825 million in new funding for urban forest management, planning, and enhancement, including:

- \$55,000 to increase a vacant, half-time housing/zoning inspector position to full time at SDCl, in part to work on tree protection;
- \$150,000 for a Tree Canopy Equity and Resilience plan;
- \$300,000 for greening industrial properties;
- \$320,000 to increase urban forest tree crews’ capacity to plant and maintain new trees in parks.

The budget would also restore \$0.97 million to the Green Seattle Partnership (GSP), whose funding was disrupted by the City’s COVID response.

There are undoubtedly more allocations to urban forest management within the budgets of the nine departments and offices that play a role in urban forest management, but the proposed allocations are not presented at a level of detail that allows the UFC to understand the City’s overall allocation to urban

forest management. This is a problem that needs to be resolved. Financial resources are key to urban forest governance; we need a full accounting of our allocations if we are to make informed investment decisions to improve outcomes for our urban forest.

The UFC therefore repeats its earlier recommendation that the City create a system to track urban forestry-related expenditures, including:

- How many urban forest-related positions are supported by the budget?
- How much is allocated to support tree maintenance?
- How much is allocated to support new tree planting?
- How much is allocated to urban forestry policy and planning?
- How much is allocated to other projects that focus on trees or vegetation?

The UFC appreciates and supports the proposed new funding for urban forestry and the restored funding to the GSP. However, those allocations combined are still lower than funding for the City's funding for golf programs (\$13.7 million), the Amy Yee Tennis Center Renovation (\$4 million), or the development of a pickleball site and increased maintenance on racquetball courts (\$2.5 million).

Not to pick on golf, tennis, or pickleball, but these services and programs serve relatively few compared to the urban forest—which promotes health and climate resilience, controls pollution, and cools neighborhoods—yet each seems to enjoy more funding. To truly address the inequalities that exist across our urban forest, the City is going to have to ratchet up funding for urban forest projects and management.

The UFC therefore recommends increasing funding for urban forestry management and projects, including:

- Increased funding for tree planting and maintenance. The UFC estimates the cost of planting and nurturing a tree through a five-year establishment period to be approximately \$1,000. Given the scale of canopy inequity across Seattle, the City will need to plant and nurture a lot of new trees. The proposed budget's allocation of \$320,000 for trees in parks and \$300,000 for industrial greening is a good start, but is unlikely to result in replanting efforts that compensate for tree loss. In the last five years, Seattle has lost 255 acres of tree canopy, an area the size of Green Lake, despite the city's current investments. We need to do more. Please allocate more funds for tree planting and maintenance, including for SDOTs street tree planting and maintenance.
- Funding for a City Urban Forester. The UFC collaborated with OSE to develop a job description for this position, which was designed to improve coordination between departments and add capacity to align a Citywide, strategic approach to urban forestry, and to further the goals of the Urban Forest Management Plan, the Climate Justice Agenda, the Green New Deal, and other policies and frameworks. Please fund this position starting in 2023.
- Funding for at least two additional arborist positions at SDCI. The Department of Construction and Inspections currently employs two arborist positions that help review tree removal permit applications. Increasing the vacant half-time zoning/housing inspector position to allow more capacity for tree permit reviews, as the current budget proposes, may help, but the UFC does

not believe this will provide adequate support for this important aspect of tree protection. The UFC advocates for adding at least two new arborist positions at SDCI.

- Funding to expand operating hours for SDCI's complaint line. SDCI's complaint line is currently staffed during weekday business hours. Since enforcement of the tree code is largely complaint based, this creates problems. Community members have documented and shared stories of individuals or companies waiting until weekends or after hours, when the complaint line is not staffed, to illegally remove trees. Please fund expanded services hours to cover weekdays and weekends during daylight hours.

Additional funding for urban forestry projects could potentially be sourced by transferring funds from tree-code violation fines into a "tree planting and maintenance fund." The fines collected are currently funneled into the General Fund. The UFC has heard from CM Strauss that fines should support a tree fund.

The UFC was pleased to see funding in the proposed budget for projects that can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, investment in green job pathways, and funding to support community-driven environmental justice projects focused on the Duwamish Valley.

Sincerely,



Josh Morris, Co-Chair



Becca Neumann, Co-Chair

CC: Adiam Emery, Christa Valles, Yolanda Ho, Akshay Iyengar, Saroja Reddy, Jessyn Farrell, Sharon Lerman

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