

Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

2021 Annual Report

Text draft for 2-2-22 meeting

Introduction

It's never been more important to invest in our urban forest. In 2021, many of the challenges of 2020 continued including the COVID pandemic, on-going struggles to address racial and structural inequities, and a string of extreme weather events emblematic of intensifying climate change. Although it cannot solve these issues, protecting and growing the urban forest can help increase the health, equity, and climate resilience of Seattle. Throughout 2021, the UFC kept these issues centered as we worked to develop our recommendations.

The UFC continued its mandate to advise the Mayor and City Council on policies and regulations governing the protection, management, and planting of trees and vegetation in the Seattle. Updates to the tree protection ordinance, an effort now in its twelfth year, continued to be at the forefront of the UFC's efforts. The UFC also issued recommendations on a range of topics to support the City's ongoing decision-making to continue to protect and grow Seattle's trees and urban forest, which is a critical piece of the city's infrastructure.

In 2021 the UFC's primary objectives were to:

1. Support improvement of the City's Tree-related regulations and policies
2. Provide input to the [2020 Urban Forest Management Plan](#) update
3. Advise on City funding for urban forestry as part the budget process
4. Increase outreach and engagement with the public and City staff, and
5. Revise UFC internal operations with a focus on racial and social equity

UFC 2021 Accomplishments

Tree Regulation Ordinance Update

The UFC continued to support the City's work on updating the tree regulations through letters of recommendation in response to briefings from SDCI. The UFC continued to emphasized the seven key recommendations captured in the [one-pager](#) issued in 2019.

The UFC continued to encourage Seattle residents to provide input on this effort through its bulletin (whose membership has risen to over 1,100 subscribers). In 2021, the UFC received x,xxx comments from Seattle residents, mostly encouraging the City to update and enhance tree protection regulations. All of these communications can be found listed by date at the bottom of the UFC's Resources [page](#).

UFC Recommendations

The UFC issued the following letters of recommendation related to SDCI's tree protection update work:

- Draft Director's Rule 13-2020 – Exceptional Trees
 - o [Recommendations](#) (March 10, 2021)
 - o [Additional](#) recommendation (April 14, 2021)
- [Tree Tracking Spreadsheet](#) – tracking progress of tree removal and replacement on public and

- private land (May 12, 2021)
- Tree protection updates
 - o [Recommendations and feedback](#) on tree protection updates (November 3, 2021)
 - o [Recommendations](#) re: tree protection updates proposals and process (December 8, 2021)

The UFC supported City initiatives and City departments' work with the following letters:

- [Seattle Parks and Recreation initiatives](#) recommendations (January 13, 2021)
- [Office of Sustainability & Environment](#) – welcome those in new roles (May 5, 2021)
- SDOT use of [Permavoid](#) (May 5, 2021)
- Seattle's [Green New Deal](#) (July 15, 2021)
- [Seattle Public Utilities](#) restoration work (July 15, 2021)
- Urban forestry consolidation Statement of Legislative Intent
 - o [Recommendations](#) re: SLI (July 15, 2021)
 - o [Recommendations](#) re: SLI (September 8, 2021)
 - o [Recommendations](#) re: SLI process and collaboration processes (November 10, 2021)
- [Urban heat islands](#) project (August 4, 2021)
- [Yesler Terrace Proposed Action Ordinance](#) (August 4, 2021)
- [Seattle Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan](#) (October 6, 2021)
- [City's 2022 Budget](#) (November 10, 2021)

The UFC continued the focus this year on improving equity and inclusion in internal operations by amending recruitment processes to incorporate accessibility and broaden distribution. These changes were incorporated into the recruitment efforts initiated in fall 2021.

Over the years, the UFC has begun considering how to amend its work planning process to improve effectiveness and increase accountability. To this end, several discussions were held to strategize how to accomplish this, a survey was conducted to help renew and clarify work planning priorities, and a new template was created that can increase effectiveness and tracking. These efforts will help inform the work planning process for 2022.

In 2020, city staff, the Executive and the UFC were asked by City Council to collaborate to evaluate the city's urban forest management model and determine if changes were necessary, with a response due to Council in September 2021. The UFC had expectations of participating in an effective collaboration to this end. However, city staff and the Executive communicated that there was not staff resources or availability to begin this work. A report from the Executive was sent to Council in September, outlining thoughts on what would be necessary to begin and effectively complete this work. The UFC, in the absence of the work moving forward, and without the ability to collaborate with either staff or the Executive, prepared several letters of recommendation on this topic. The UFC still believes that evaluating urban forest management models relative to the existing model used by the City is necessary work that should move forward.

UFC/ Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team Annual Meeting

In 2020, the Commission and the Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team (IDT) had pivoted from the traditionally in-person annual meeting to a remote training on racial equity and urban forestry. This session was much appreciated by both groups, and the session also left the groups desiring additional training and engagement on this topic. Therefore, the 2021 joint meeting took a similar form, with staff from SPU's Community Connections team leading this second session of Racial Equity Training. The meeting goals were to strengthen the partnership between the Urban Forestry Commission and the Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team to accomplish the goals of the Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP), deepen our understanding of the relationship between racial

equity and urban forestry, and to continue to practice the application of a racial equity lens to urban forestry work.

Commission Membership

The Commission successfully recruited three new members in 2021:

- David Moehring – Position #8 (Development Community)
- Jessica Hernandez – Position #11 (Environmental Justice)
- Laura Keil – Position #10 (Get Engaged member)

Julia Michalak, Shari Selch and Joshua Morris were elected as Co-Chairs for 2022. This will be a new model of leadership for the Commission and serves to share responsibilities and introduce a more horizontal structure. The Commission will amend the bylaws to recognize this new structure.

The Commission wants to thank Sarah Rehder (Position #4 – Hydrologist); Michael Walton (Position #6 – Landscape Architect-ISA); and Elena Arakaki (Position #10 – Get Engaged) for their contribution to the Commission’s work in 2021.

Reflections – Highlights from the year and looking ahead to 2022

The UFC had numerous successes this past year, advancing policy and partnerships for Seattle’s urban forest. However, Seattle still continues a streak of now 12 years without an adequate tree protection ordinance. Under weight of numerous Executive Orders and Council Resolutions, thousands of pleas from Seattle residents, and the urgent need of our local environment, the UFC will continue its resolve to see enacted clear, meaningful, and effective tree protections.

In addition, as Commissioners we represent a City still imbedded with institutional racism. Therefore, the UFC will also continue work incorporating race and social justice language and action into its protocols and work plan; and will revisit recruitment and other processes to encourage more diversity of perspectives and membership.

Focus areas for 2022 will include the following:

- Tree protection
 - Updated ordinance –engage with SDCI and ensure this moves forward
 - Broadening tree protections outside of SFR
- City Attorney consultation regarding establishing legislation
- Tree tracking
- Urban forest-related statements of legislative intent – UF Consolidation SLI and Chief Arborist SLI
- Seattle Comprehensive Plan update
- Community Engagement work – engagement with groups, funding sources/fiscal sponsor to facilitate that
- Environmental Justice and Equity – utilizing this lens in the course of all work, and in specific actions (e.g. code amendments to incentivize canopy increases)
- Climate change

2021 Commission Members

Weston Brinkley, Chair – Position #3 - University Representative
Sarah Rehder, Vice-Chair – Position #4 - Hydrologist
Julia Michalak – Position #1 - Wildlife Biologist
Elby Jones – Position #2 - Urban Ecologist
Stuart Niven – Position #5 - Arborist
Michael Walton - Position #6 - Landscape Architect

Joshua Morris – Position#7 - NGO Representative
Steven Fry/David Moehring – Position #8 - Development Community
Blake Voorhees – Position #9 - Real Estate Broker
Elena Arakaki – Position #10 - Get Engaged
Whitman Bouton/Jessica Hernandez – Position #11 - Environmental Justice
Jessica Jones – Position #12 – Public Health
Shari Selch – Position #13 - Community/Neighborhood

Contact

Additional information about the UFC can be found at www.seattle.gov/urbanforestrycommission, or by contacting:

Patti Bakker
Interim Urban Forestry Commission Coordinator
Seattle Office of Sustainability & Environment
P.O. Box 94729
Seattle, WA 98124-4649
patricia.bakker@seattle.gov