

Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

2022 Annual Report

Text draft for 1-4-23 meeting

Introduction

Many of the challenges of the last two years started to ease in 2022. The COVID pandemic was declared over, and Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) meetings opened up to offer in-person attendance options in addition to continuing to be conducted remotely.

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 thirteenth 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 2022 the UFC's primary objectives were to:

1. Support improvement of the City's Tree-related regulations and policies
2. Provide input to the process to update the city's Comprehensive Plan
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 2022 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 emphasize its seven key recommendations captured in the [one-pager](#) issued in 2019:

1. Expand permit program
2. Certify tree service providers
3. Replace significant trees
4. Track changes in the urban forest
5. Protect exceptional trees, groves, and trees on undeveloped lots
6. Encourage tree retention on already developed lots, and
7. Fund and enforce tree protection regulations.

The UFC continued to encourage Seattle residents to provide input on this effort through its bulletin (whose membership has risen to over 1,880 subscribers). In 2022, the UFC received 1,010 comments from Seattle residents. These comments included continued encouragement

for updating and enhancing urban forest protection regulations, as well as concern for particular trees and tree groves potentially at risk from development or city action. All these communications can be found in the UFC meeting notes for the meeting period in which they were received.

UFC Recommendations

The UFC issued the following letters of recommendation related to city work as well as work of external partners:

- Sooty Bark Disease recommendations
- Seattle Comprehensive Plan update
 - o Recommendations on the process
 - o EIS scoping alternatives recommendations
- Urban forest protection ordinance update
 - o March 2022 recommendations
 - o July 2022 recommendations
- Tree service provider registration ordinance
- Canopy cover assessment
- Chief Arborist Statement of Legislative Intent
- Housing density and trees recommendations
- The Nature Conservancy urban forestry work

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

- SDCI omnibus - ECA code updates
- SPR Tree Management Policy
- Ship Canal Water Quality Project
- City's 2023 budget
 - o Initial recommendations
 - o Supporting recommendations
- SPU Taylor Creek restoration project

Additional Highlights

The UFC recruited many new members this year and is pleased to be increasing the diversity of voices on the Commission and maintaining a roster of excellent Commissioners bringing broad knowledge of and passion for the city's urban forest.

In 2021, city staff, the Executive and the UFC were asked by City Council in Statement of Legislative Intent XX to collaborate to develop a plan for creating a new city position of Chief Arborist. City staff coordinated with the Mayor's Office and with the UFC for this process. Incorporating input from Commissioners and other input from UFC meetings, as well as Urban Forestry Core Team staff, the Office of Sustainability prepared a response to this SLI which was delivered to Council on September 30, and describes a position of City Urban Forester. This position was added to the City's budget by City Council, and was adopted with the approval of the 2023-2024 budget.

One of the main recommendations the UFC has emphasized regarding updating and improving urban forest protections is establishment of a tree service provider registration. Support for this work paid off as City Council this year passed an ordinance establishing that process. The UFC followed the development of the ordinance and provided additional recommendations for establishing this process.

As the City embarked this year on a several-year process to update the Comprehensive Plan, the UFC received briefings from the staff team running the process regarding the expected steps and timeline for the process and regarding the Environmental Impact Statement scoping process. The UFC will continue to monitor and be involved in this important effort.

The UFC this year provided recommendations to the city earlier in the budget process, regarding investments in urban forestry. This was followed up with additional supporting recommendations during the budget deliberations phase. Successful urban forest-related budget adds to the 2023-2024 budget include the City Urban Forester position, the Canopy Equity and Resilience Plan, continued industrial greening efforts, and additional resources for planting trees in developed parks and natural areas.

UFC / Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team Annual Meeting

The 2022 joint meeting between the UFC and the city's Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team incorporated an in-person component for the first time in three years. The remote participation option was also retained, providing hybrid options for attendee participation. Around 20 members joined in-person at Jefferson Horticulture – the first opportunity to meet and network with each other in person in three years! – with several folks also joining remotely.

The goals for these meetings include strengthening the partnership between the UFC and the IDT to accomplish the goals of the Urban Forest Management Plan, deepening our understanding of the relationship between racial equity and urban forestry, and continuing to practice the application of a racial equity lens to urban forestry work. In this meeting, the teams focused the working sessions on canopy cover assessment, associated potential updates to urban forest strategy, and needs for citywide planning for equity and resilience. This brainstorming yielded long lists of suggestions to guide management of our urban forest in light of new canopy information, which will be incorporated into upcoming processes such as development of the Canopy Equity and Resilience Plan.

Commission Membership

The Commission successfully recruited four new members in 2022:

- Becca Neumann – Position #4 – Hydrologist
- Falisha Kurji – Position #3 - Natural Resource Agency
- Hao Liang - Position #6 - Landscape Architect
- Lia Hall – Position #13 - Community/Neighborhood

Julia Michalak, Shari Selch and Joshua Morris were elected as Co-Chairs for 2022. This is a new model of leadership for the UFC, and serves to share responsibilities and introduce a more

horizontal structure. The Commission amended its bylaws to recognize this new structure, which has proven to be an effective leadership model in practice through the year.

The UFC wants to thank outgoing Commissioners Weston Brinkley (Position #3 – University Representative) and Elby Jones (Position #2 – Urban Ecologist) for their contribution to the Commission’s work.

Reflections – Highlights from 2022 and Looking Ahead to 2023

The UFC had numerous successes this past year, advancing policy and partnerships for Seattle’s urban forest, again setting a new standard for the volume of recommendations, presentations and meetings held. However, Seattle still continues a streak of now 13 years without an adequate urban forest protection ordinance. And as Commissioners we represent a City still embedded with institutional racism. In 2023 the UFC will continue efforts on both these fronts.

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. Importantly, the UFC will also continue work incorporating race and social justice language into its protocols and work plan; and will revisit recruitment and other processes to encourage more diversity of perspectives and membership.

Focus areas for 2023 will include the following:

- Urban forest protection ordinance – ensure this moves forward by continuing to work with SDCl, as well as with the Mayor’s Office and City Council
- Continued involvement in the Comprehensive Plan update process
- Work with city staff and partners on development of the Canopy Equity and Resilience Plan
- City urban forestry funding Statement of Legislative Intent – work with city staff and the Executive to prepare a response to this SLI
- City Urban Forester hiring process – work with city staff to refine job description and support hiring process as necessary
- Community engagement – continue to develop plans and implement next steps for engaging with the community around the UFC’s work

2021 Commission Members

Weston Brinkley, Chair – Position #3 - University Representative

Becca Neumann, Co-Chair – Position #4 – Hydrologist

Joshua Morris – Co-Chair – Position #7 - NGO Representative

Julia Michalak, Co-Chair – Position #1 - Wildlife Biologist

Elby Jones – Position #2 - Urban Ecologist

Falisha Kurji – Position #3 - Natural Resource Agency

Stuart Niven – Position #5 - Arborist

Hao Liang - Position #6 - Landscape Architect

David Moehring – Position #8 - Development Community

Blake Voorhees – Position #9 - Real Estate Broker

Laura Keil – Position #10 - Get Engaged
Jessica Hernandez – Position #11 - Environmental Justice
Jessica Jones – Position #12 - Public Health
Lia Hall – Position #13 - Community/Neighborhood

Contact

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

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