



Seattle Urban Forestry Commission 2022 Annual Report

Introduction

2022 was a busy year for urban forestry policy, planning, and financing in Seattle. The City adopted a new Tree Service Provider Registration ordinance, released a draft update to Seattle Municipal Code 25.11 (the tree and urban forest protection code), approved funding for new urban forestry staff, and discovered, through an updated canopy cover assessment, that the City is moving in the wrong direction relative to its canopy cover goals.



The Urban Forestry Commission (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 Seattle. Updates to the tree and urban forest 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 the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (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
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.

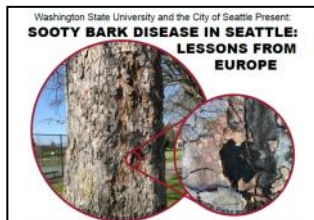




UFC Recommendations

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

- Seattle Comprehensive Plan update
 - * [Recommendations on the process](#)
 - * [EIS scoping alternatives recommendations](#)
- Urban forest protection ordinance update
 - * [March 2022 recommendations](#)
 - * [July 2022 recommendations](#)
- [Sooty Bark Disease 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](#) and [Trees for Seattle Parks program](#)
- [Ship Canal Water Quality Project](#)
- City's 2023 budget
 - * [Initial recommendations](#)
 - * [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 SLI MO-001-A-002-2022 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 additions 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. The UFC is also pleased to see our recommendation regarding understanding the city's total investments in urban forestry be included in the subject of Statement of Legislative Intent OSE-301-A-002-2023.





Urban Forestry Commission/Urban Forest Inter-departmental Team Annual Meeting

The 2022 joint meeting between the UFC and the city’s Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team (IDT) 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:

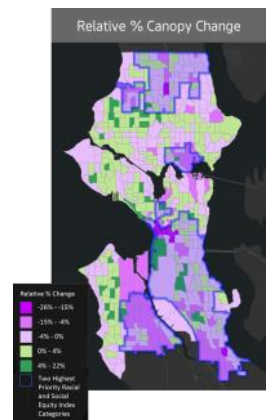
- Becca Neumann** – Position #4 - Hydrologist
- Falisha Kurji** – Position #3 - Natural Resource Agency
- Hao Liang** - Position #6 - Landscape Architect
- Lia Hall** – Position #13 - Community/ Neighborhood

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. We see this reflected in tree canopy distributions and patterns of tree loss, which we learned from the canopy cover assessment are hitting our vulnerable communities the hardest. 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 the ordinance moves forward by continuing to work with SDCI, 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

2023 Seattle City Council Statement of Legislative Intent			
Tab	Action	Option	Version
OSE	301	A	002-2023

Council Budget Action: Agenda

Budget Action Title: Request that OSE provide a report on Citywide funding for tree planting, stewardship, and other urban forestry-related activities

- 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

Contact

Additional information about the Urban Forestry Commission can be found on the Commission’s [website](#), or by contacting:

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2022 Urban Forestry Commission

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

