



Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

2010 Annual Report

INTRODUCTION

The City of Seattle set a goal of achieving a 30% tree canopy cover by 2037 to increase the environmental, social, and economic benefits trees bring to Seattle residents.

In 2009 Seattle's Mayor and City Council created the Urban Forestry Commission through Ordinance 123052 to advise, provide recommendations, and monitor implementation of plans, policies, and legislation related to the protection, management, and conservation of trees in Seattle.

The Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) convened for the first time in December of 2009 and has been holding monthly meetings since then. Over the course of its first year the UFC has volunteered over 1,300 hours in service of a greener Seattle.

The annual report as required by ordinance outlines the Commission's goals and objectives and progress towards achieving them. The 2010 UFC Annual Report reports on our first year of service. Significant energy has been invested during this first year to creating a Five-Year Work Plan to help guide our activities and gauge our performance. Much of our efforts have also been focused on following, reviewing and commenting on DPD's proposal for a new tree protection ordinance as well as other issues.

BACKGROUND

The Seattle Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP), completed in 2007, is a comprehensive strategy for increasing Seattle's tree canopy cover to meet the 30% target. The UFMP lays out goals and a broad range of actions to be implemented over time to preserve, maintain, and plant trees as well as restore the public



forested areas remaining in the city. The City drafted an implementation strategy for the UFMP setting out our priorities for action over the next five years.

To create a baseline for measuring progress and support planning efforts, a high resolution satellite study was conducted in 2009 to map the extent of tree canopy cover across Seattle. The results of the canopy study imply that after decades of tree loss the city may be seeing a stabilization of tree loss, however, much work is still needed to achieve the 30% canopy goal. The canopy study also shows that we need to double the pace of canopy gain without experiencing new losses in order to meet the 30% goal by 2037. Finally, the study has helped identify neighborhoods where tree cover is low and areas where there is significant potential for tree planting. This information is intended to inform urban forest outreach messages and program priorities.

Retreat and Departmental Briefing

The Office of Sustainability and the Environment coordinated a retreat to introduce the new commission to the City's Urban Forest Management Plan and the existing





interdepartmental structure responsible for implementing it. The 5-hour session gave the commissioners an overview of the existing regulatory framework as well as a summary of each department's role in the management of Seattle's urban forest. The retreat provided a much-needed context for the work ahead. We will continue to explore interdepartmental function and cooperation, because we believe that the sum of these departments' activities comprise the City's ability to effectively manage its canopy, particularly in public lands.

2010 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

UFC Internal Structure

The eight founding members of the Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) were appointed on December 1, 2009 and met for the first time on December 10, 2009. In January, 2010 the UFC elected the ninth Commission member and created UFC by-laws. In February the UFC formed three standing committees:

- Ecosystems: to work on issues related to habitat, canopy cover, and tree inventory
- Management: to work on Department of Planning and Development (DPD) rules and regulations, City budget, and City Operations and Maintenance issues, and
- Community: to work on information, outreach, private funds, stewardship, permits, and economics

Urban Forestry Management Plan Five-year Implementation Strategy

City Staff presented a draft of the Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) Five-year Implementation Strategy for Commission's input. This strategy provides a shorter time horizon than the 30-year UFMP needed to guide City departments' actions.

Heron Rookeries Management

The UFC provided a recommendation for a specific revision to the language of Director's Rule 5-2007, the code interpretation pertaining

to the management of the City's two identified heron rookeries. The UFC proposed a more adequate definition and preservation of critical screening trees to be consistent with the original intent of the code. The Commission also recommended year-to-year retention of screening trees as most important to the continued use of a rookery by breeding herons, as opposed to the simple 'breeding season' retention requirement

mandated in DR 5-2007. The Department of Planning and Development declined to act on the recommendations of the Commission. In a letter dated July 23, 2010, DPD Director Diane Sugimura explained the Department's rationale for not moving forward with the recommendations.



Multifamily Code Changes to Low-rise Zones and Green Factor

Councilmember O'Brien requested the UFC's comments on the proposed updates to the low-rise portion of the multi-family code. The UFC provided responses to the following questions posed by Councilmember O'Brien:

1. How effective is the Green Factor as a tool for preserving trees in low-rise, multi-family zones?
2. Does the UFC recommend any additional policies for the preservation of significant trees in ways that do not deter good development in low-rise, multi-family zones?

In its response, the UFC stressed that encouraging the preservation of existing trees is one of the UFC's most important





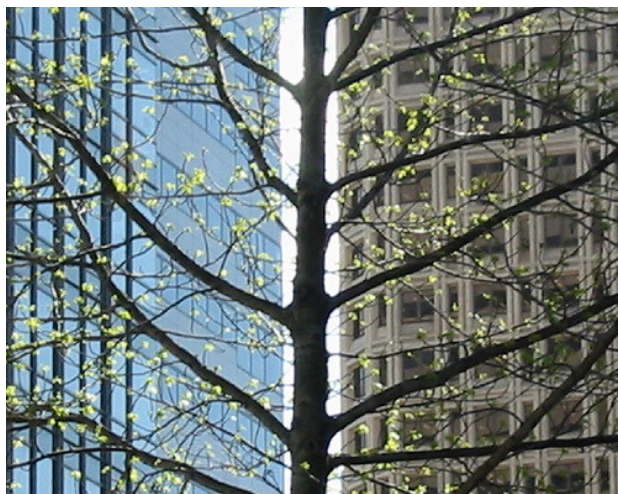
goals, but that tree preservation alone is not enough to meet the city's canopy coverage goals. Preservation must go hand in hand with mechanisms that promote tree planting and proper maintenance. Many elements – including the Land Use Code, the upcoming Tree Protection Ordinance, the Storm Water Manual, the Green Factor, Street Improvement Standards, and city Design Guidelines – should work together, in an integrated fashion, to achieve the 30% canopy cover goal.

2010 Urban Forest Management Plan and 2011 OSE Urban Forestry Work Plan

City staff presented the 2010 Urban Forest Management Plan and the 2011 Office of Sustainability and Environment Urban Forestry Work Plan. The UFC provided input and informal recommendations on both documents.

UFC Five-year Work Plan

Monthly commission and committee meetings allow only limited resources towards our mission. As a result, the number of relevant requests for briefings and comment from City leaders and departments can easily overwhelm our ability to respond. While most of the requests are legitimate, they risk pulling the Commission away from efforts that may be more effective in getting us closer to Seattle's Urban Forestry goals.



Therefore, to ensure that the Commission's energies are directed towards its highest and best use, the UFC developed a five-year work plan to guide its efforts. The Work plan was the result of facilitated discussions during the course of four special sessions beginning in August and with subsequent discussions with the commission chair, vice chair and City staff.

These work sessions were extremely helpful; they went beyond creating a five-year "to do list" and explored the greater purpose and role of the Commission itself. This is evidenced in the five key categories created for benchmarks and tasks; Legislation/Protection, Programs/Evaluation, Comprehensiveness/Effectiveness, Engagement/Outreach, and Process/Operations. We expect several of these categories be used in prioritizing future commitments of time and resources, beyond the five-year mark.

DPD Proposed Tree Regulations

Seattle's new tree ordinance presents a once in a quarter century opportunity to reorient our City codes to align with Seattle's new canopy goals, and to reflect the principle that Seattle's Urban forest is an essential and valuable piece of infrastructure.

The Commission has carefully followed and reviewed DPD's progress on the





proposal for new tree regulations. Extra Commission and Management Committee meetings were held once the proposal was released to specifically review and evaluate it. This resulted in several UFC members dedicating extraordinary volunteer hours and attending twice the number of meetings as usual. In August, just a month after the proposal's release, the UFC expressed its numerous concerns in a letter to Council.

A follow up letter was later sent to City Council reiterating the proposal's shortcomings and providing more detailed suggestions for improvements. Our comments were divided into three broad categories: the process (both public and internal) of assembling a tree protection ordinance, goals of an effective tree protection ordinance, and the tools for implementing an effective tree protection ordinance.

It is vital that code changes create a clear, consistent, and comprehensive approach to trees in Seattle. And for this reason, the Urban Forestry Commission intends to continue its scrutiny of the new Tree Protection Ordinance as DPD's work moves forward into 2011. Seeing this project through to a successful conclusion will continue to be our number one priority.

CONCLUSION

The Urban Forestry Commission celebrates the conclusion of its first year of existence with a respectable record of achievements. The commission has made great progress in organizing its internal structure, electing a new commissioner, chair and vice chair, crafting its bylaws and establishing standing committees. The UFC also took upon itself to further define its mission and goals, as well as its priorities for the next five years, an investment that has given us a stronger foundation.

The Commission has reviewed issues such as the Green Factor in low rise zones and has spent considerable resources reviewing and commenting on DPD's proposed new tree ordinance. As we move forward into a new decade City Council and the Mayor can count on working with a committed Urban Forestry Commission to protect and enhance our green infrastructure.

Contact

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2010 Urban Forestry Commission

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