

SEATTLE URBAN FORESTRY COMMISSION

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November 13, 2019

Mayor Jenny A. Durkan
Seattle City Hall
600 4th Ave
Seattle, WA 98124

RE: Green Seattle Partnership budget

Dear Mayor Durkan,

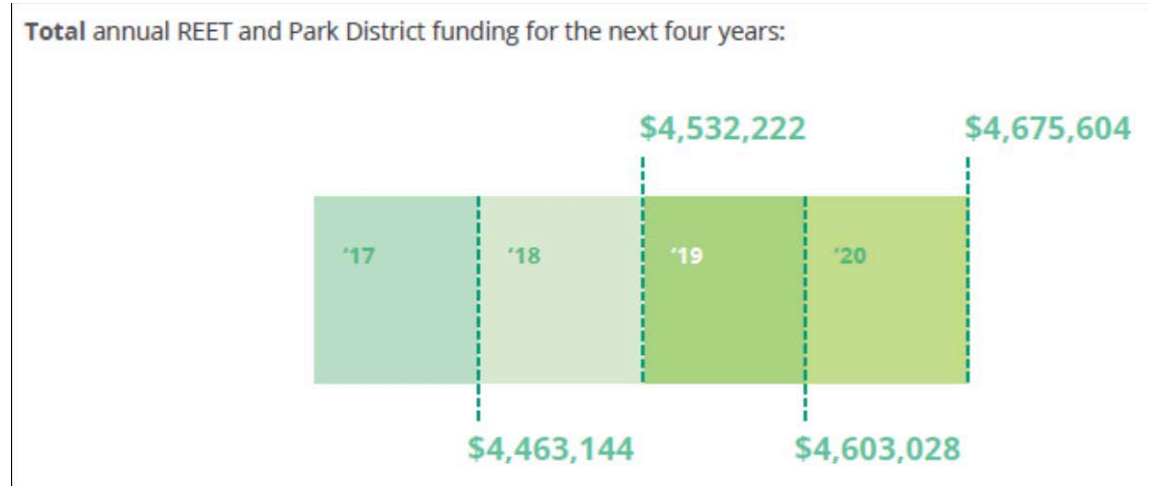
Thank you for your Office's [October 18 reply](#) to the Urban Forest Commission's (UFC) [October 9 letter](#): "Funding levels for the Green Seattle Partnership." The UFC sees this as a reflection of the importance you place on the Green Seattle Partnership ("Program") as well as your continued engagement with the UFC.

As is correctly noted in the letter, the UFC cares strongly about this issue. More importantly, the UFC's passion is matched by its unique expertise in the issues discussed here. UFC members were appointed specifically for their ability to provide recommendations on topics such as this program, including shifts from capital to maintenance funding as it relates to forest restoration. Moreover, the UFC is under explicit codified responsibility to take the time to provide input on these topics.

The UFC appreciates the clarification that the \$880, 000 reduction in program funding is coming from the General Fund, not the Parks District funding. The UFC is trying to better understand this important Program's budget and appreciates the briefing Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) provided on November 6. Specifically, the UFC is eager to understand two key issues: the connection between Program funding levels and their ability to achieve their recent strategic plan; and what decisions and considerations are driving the proposed budget reductions.

When the Program updated its strategic plan in 2017, it stated that to reach their 2025 goal, 141 acres would need to be enrolled annually moving forward, an increase from the 123 acres enrolled annually, to date ([GSP Strategic Plan Update p.21](#)). In the November 6 presentation, SPR shared a progress report showing that only 31 new acres were enrolled in 2019. Staff also confirmed that the most challenging and expensive acres (those requiring professional crews)

were still to be enrolled. This 2019-2020 budget reduction is therefore dramatically out of line with original planned spending and Program operation. This need of ongoing (if not increased) capital investment was supported by information provided to the UFC by SPR staff on [December 13, 2017](#), which included the following image:



This forecasted Program funding need, including General Fund REET, is shown as *increasing* in 2019 and 2020. Instead, the program experienced an \$880,000 reduction from a \$4,500,000 budget, representing a substantial change.

Based on what the UFC learned during the November 6 SPR briefing, the UFC sees several risks and concerns being introduced to the Program due to this shift in funding:

1. **Budget priority.** The City adopted the largest budget in history, yet the Program’s budget was cut. This sets a dangerous precedent for future cuts that would reduce support for urban forestry and Program goals.
2. **General Fund vulnerability.** The flexibility provided by General Fund also brings uncertainty for program funding levels. General Fund is also more likely to change with a changing economy. Parks District funding was intended to protect the program from these types of swings.
3. **Dramatic shifts in the Program commitments.** Saving our City Forests - funding intended for the Green Seattle Partnership –was identified as a line-item in the 6-year Parks District budget and voted on by Seattle residents. Additionally, activities undertaken by the Natural Area Crew do not reflect the Program goals, but wider Parks’ needs. Both these instances reflect going back on a series of commitments documented in the Program’s plans and will likely impact voter trust and support for future funding requests. It’s important to protect the significant investment in the Program done by the City, its partners, and Seattle volunteers.
4. **O&M usage.** This budget decision shifts Capital funding to O&M, which will not support the establishment phase of acres incorporated into the Program. Establishment is not the same as maintenance, and it’s likely to become more challenging given climate

change, homelessness, and other impacts that have arisen since the initial planning process.

The UFC also learned that hiring processes meant to support the Program in 2019 did not take place. If this reduction was not done to fulfill a necessary budget cut, then the UFC would recommend re-instating those funds to the Program budget.

The UFC has been a champion for the Program and believes transparency of any reduction in public funding is critical; especially for a program that is a line item in the voter-approved Parks District budget. SPR staff mentioned that City Council is asking SPR to respond to a Statement of Legislative Intent. The UFC appreciates this request and believes it will provide an opportunity for SPR to correct funding levels, both Capital and O&M, to support Program goals being delivered by 2025.

Thank you again for your continued work on this critical program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light beige background. The signature is stylized and appears to read 'W. Brinkley'.

Weston Brinkley, Chair

cc: Council President Harrell, Councilmember Bagshaw, Councilmember Gonzalez, Councilmember Herbold, Councilmember Juarez, Councilmember Mosqueda, Councilmember O'Brien, Councilmember Pacheco, Councilmember Sawant, Board of Park Commissioners, Parks District Oversight Committee, Jesus Aguirre, Jessica Finn Coven, Patrick Merriam, Michelle Caulfield, Urban Forestry Management Team, Urban Forestry Core Team, Aaron Blumenthal, Yolanda Ho, Amanda Hohlfeld

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