SEATTLE URBAN FORESTRY COMMISSION

Peg Staeheli, Chair • Tom Early, Vice-Chair

Gordon Bradley • Leif Fixen • Donna Kostka • Joanna Nelson de Flores • Jeff Reibman • Erik Rundell • Steve Zemke

*The Urban Forestry Commission was established to advise the Mayor and City Council
concerning the establishment of policy and regulations governing the protection, management,
and conservation of trees and vegetation in the City of Seattle*

DRAFT October 1, 2014
Meeting Notes
SMT 2750
700 5th Avenue, Seattle
3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Attending

Commissioners	Staff
Peg Staeheli - chair	None
Tom Early – vice chair	
Gordon Bradley	
Leif Fixen	
Donna Kostka	
Joanna Nelson de Flores	
Jeff Reibman	
Erik Rundell	
Steve Zemke	
	Public
Absent- Excused	None
None	

NOTE: Meeting notes are not exhaustive. For more details listen to the digital recording of the meeting at: http://www.seattle.gov/urbanforestrycommission/meetingdocs.htm

Call to Order
The Chair called the meeting to order and reviewed the agenda.

Public comment
None

Adoption of August 13, September 3, and September 10 meeting notes
> **ACTION: A motion to approve the August 13 meeting notes as amended was made, seconded and approved.**
> **ACTION: A motion to approve the September 3 meeting notes as written was made, seconded and approved.**
> **ACTION: A motion to approve the September 10 meeting notes as amended was made, seconded and approved.**

Scott Kubly, new SDOT director, welcome letter – review and possible vote
Commissioners provided input on the draft letter. An amended letter was approved.

ACTION: A motion to approve the welcome letter as amended was made, seconded and approved.

Upcoming letters of recommendation – initial conversation

- **SDOT planting or key tagging a sample street tree corridor – Steve**

Commissioners discussed the letter and made revisions to the draft provided by Steve. A new version will be presented to the Commission at the November 5 meeting.

- **Open Space Management Policy revision?**

This came out of the Cheasty Greenspace pilot program. The UFC thought we would review Parks' Open Space Policy Management. This is not so much to produce a letter of recommendation but it's a topic to discuss.

Some questions that arose from the conversation:
- How do these decisions get made?
- Are pilot project requirements defined?
- Do they require other alternatives?
- Should the current natural area policy get reviewed?
- Are there any areas identified as clearly to be left natural?
- What is the impact of these decisions on the canopy?
- Should the available uses discussion in the current Parks policy be updated?
- How does the invasives play into allowing uses …leveraging the restoration by allowing uses – if this is the case then monitoring should be longer or we are not able to learn.
- Should this be included in our updated Work Plan for 2015 … should we have ongoing discussion with intent to put recommendation out by say 2Q2015?
- Metrics that should come out of a pilot such as Cheasty:
    - What's the impact on canopy?
    - What's the benefit of this new constituency for the restoration effort?
    - Did this go as planned in terms of the intensity of use? Or is the impact too great? There has to be a balance – the use or intensity should not destroy.
    - If the pilot is successful, what are the impacts if it expands?

Include in the 2015 workplan – follow up item on this issue - might lead into a more refined policy or maybe a white paper?

The Commission could strengthen our recommendation that the assessment of Cheasty moves forward. Consider an alternative designation.

Suggest: UFC field trip to Cheasty both north and south AND if time allows look at street trees as well.
- **DPD Operations recommendation**

Peg will put together a draft for discussion.

New business and announcements
- UW presentation follow up- Gordon will be meeting with KK and will have informal UFC follow up. **Possible UW campus tour? Sandra to place a link on the Resources area of the UFC website to the UW tree tour.**

- **Arrange for a High Point tree tour.**

- ROW Improvement Manual – follow up on UFC involvement.

Future – get Seattle Public Schools to come in to discuss their property management practices.

Sandra to review letters sent and if we haven't heard back we want to resend.

Tree protection regulations
Considering new tree protections regulations will not move forward in the near future, members discussed opportunities to improve implementation of existing regulations such as enhanced inspector training.

Peg volunteered to draft a letter to DPD making recommendations on operational improvements to the tree protection code.

Future - get Seattle Audubon in to update us on activities and the web site action

Adjourn

Public input

From: Cass Turnbull [mailto:cassturnbull@comcast.net]
Sent: Thursday, October 02, 2014 7:11 PM
To: Pinto_de_Bader, Sandra
Subject: 4:1 tree replacement

Hi Sandra,

I thought I'd play the devil's advocate and send along something I wrote about tree replacement formulas. And also a copy of an recent email which I sent to a friend about the new 4:1 ratio. You can pass them on to the commission, or not, of you think it will be poorly received.

Dear T---(RE: the 4:1 tree replacement requirement) Unfortunate. The tree ordinances I am reading specify 1 to 1 replacement ratio based on mature tree size. Rightfully it should be even less than 1:1 because there is less open land to plant on.

Other ordinances give the replacement requirements, then they give the tree spacing rules, then they say that if there is no room on site, the dollar value goes to a City Tree Fund. That makes much better sense.

And Portland has canopy coverage goals for each zone type.

I think it really should not exceed 50% of open space, in case someone wants to grow vegetables.

We need to use the Tree Fund to buy easements, and land.
--Cass

The Two-for-Every-Removal Replacement Myth

By Cass Turnbull

In response to citizen concerns over the tree cutting and clearing of Seattle City Light's unused substations, Josh Fogt from Councilman O'Brian's office stated that

the "citywide canopy will not suffer in the long term" because Seattle City Light has a policy of planting two trees for every one cut down. I sent back the following excerpt as part of a longer response. Thought you'd like to read it.

Planting trees is both good and essential in order to keep the urban forest healthy. But I firmly believe it is insufficient, in and of itself. Policies that rely on the two-for-one tree planting mandate may ironically create a smaller and less effective urban forest in the future.

An almost universal perception is that planting two or more trees for every mature tree cut down replaces the mature tree, or perhaps even doubles it. People, companies, and institutions who cut down trees often point to their tree-replacement policies as evidence that they are doing no harm. Worse yet, many tree trunk diameter replacement formulas are institutionalized in tree ordinances, including ours.

Planting a sapling only replaces another sapling, not a mature tree. Sixty years of growth are needed to realize the environmental cost-benefits of a mature tree, now called Ecosystem Services or ES. This is an important distinction. ***The benefits of mature or large trees are greater than those of young trees,*** which is corroborated in the *Life* Science article posted recently by **Becky Ostin** and partially reprinted below with her permission*.*

Seattle is steadily losing its mature trees and not replacing them**.** In 1997 the average trunk diameter of 50% of the trees in Seattle's residential neighborhoods ***was 5" or less*** *(Urban Forest Management Plan)* and that number has remained the same for ten years. The reason for this, despite the elapsed time for growth and the planting of many new trees, is the high mortality of urban trees, paired with the steady removal of older species. A tree with the average lifespan of 150 years in a rural area will live only 37 years in residential areas, and ***only 13 years in downtown areas*** *(Skiera and Moll,1992)*. Furthermore, new trees are particularly vulnerable to premature mortality. A recent research study showed that a quarter of the trees planted through volunteer tree projects will die in the first six years *(Lu, Svendsen, Campbell, Greenfeld, Braden, King, and Falxa-Raymond, 2010)*.

Aggressive tree planting programs can increase the total canopy cover of the city, at least for a while, though the quality and diversity of that forest may be still be declining. That increase will necessarily end and possibly reverse. The reason is that the total potential tree canopy cover is **tied to the amount of land available to be planted, not the number of trees put in the ground**. As more land becomes dedicated to roads and buildings, fewer permeable surfaces are available to support trees. The common, simplified scenario is for a developer to buy a mature-treed property, cut the trees down, halve the amount of permeable land by putting up a larger building or buildings, and then plant twice as many sapling trees on the remaining open land. But one cannot keep halving the planting space and doubling the number of trees. It is a reverse Ponzi scheme. There is a tree *carrying capacity*

built into every piece of land. Two-for-one tree planting policies consistently fail to take this into consideration.

Some environmentalists regard ambitious tree planting programs as a form of *green-washing*. This is because these programs allow governments, individuals, and companies to avoid taking more meaningful steps to preserve the urban forest. Seattle, for example, has been studying, planning, and goal setting to preserve trees on private property for many years. This is shown in the city's 2007 Urban Forest Management Plan, now morphed into the 2013 Urban Forest Stewardship Plan. Both indicate the need for Seattle to adopt a tree preservation ordinance for trees on private property. Despite many attempts, this has still not been done.

Meanwhile, land continues to be sold, subdivided, built and overbuilt, and mature trees cut down without challenge.

The seductive thing about tree planting initiatives is they are so politically uncontroversial. Every ten years a mayor announces a new tree-planting initiative, or so it seems. Most people love to get a free tree, and those that don't, just decline the offer. Tree preservation, on the other hand, is much more complicated and unpopular with many groups and individuals. Tree preservation policies can decrease the profit margins of developers, they can appear to be in opposition to other city goals such as increasing housing density and transportation improvements, and they can restrict people's property rights. But the need to protect mature trees and, more importantly, preserve the required amount of permeable surface to support them and their replacements, is becoming increasingly urgent.