

**MATERIAL PREPARED FOR DISCUSSION BY THE URBAN FORESTRY COMMISSION.  
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**DRAFT**

January ??, 2022

Dear Mayor Harrell,

Congratulations on your successful election campaign! Seattle's Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) welcomes you as Mayor and wishes you luck as you begin to implement your vision for the city.

Seattle's urban forest helps manage the impacts of climate change, promotes community resilience and public health, contributes to Seattle's culture and sense of place, and provides other green infrastructure services valued at the very least \$15 million annually.<sup>1</sup> The UFC notes that these urban forest services positively align with your campaign's stated goals around the climate crisis, health care, arts & culture, and infrastructure. The UFC believes that **investment in the protection and enhancement of the urban forest will help your administration advance multiple goals at once for the benefit of both current and future generations of Seattleites.**

**Such investment is urgently needed.** The urban forest is threatened on several fronts and losses are not quickly replaced. The best available data suggests canopy cover was trending downward in Seattle from 2007-2015.<sup>2</sup> This is concerning considering that our urban forest will play a significant role in how Seattle mitigates and adapts to climate change, especially extreme heat and rain events.

That is one reason why preserving tree cover has been a priority for the UFC since its establishment. **The Commission was pleased to see and agrees with the statement on [your campaign website](#) that "[one] key to reducing the impacts of both heat waves and urban flooding is to preserve open space and tree cover."**

Tree protection ordinances can be good tools for tree preservation. As you know from your service on City Council, the most recent update to Seattle's tree protection code was adopted as an "interim" policy in 2009 with the intention that it would be updated shortly thereafter following the completion of a tree canopy cover analysis. Now, well over a decade and [five urban forest studies later](#), the interim code still stands. This despite the [City's own findings](#) that **the current code is not supporting tree protection.**

**To better protect trees in Seattle, we need strong Executive support.** The UFC asks your administration to allocate the staff time and resources needed to finally complete the task of updating the tree protection code, an effort now in its 13<sup>th</sup> year.

The UFC was established in 2009 by [Ordinance 123052](#) 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. The [UFC's members](#) have decades of combined experience in tree care, environmental justice, urban planning, development, architecture, ecology, conservation, public health, and more. The UFC will be pleased to serve as a resource to and share its expertise with your office. You are invited and welcome to join any of the UFC's regular meetings or to request informational or deliberative sessions at times that are convenient for you.

In 2022, the UFC will continue serving the City and its urban forest by:

1. supporting stronger tree and urban forest protection policies;
2. advocating for appropriate funding to implement urban forestry policies and programs;
3. improving outreach and engagement with City leaders and community members; and
4. participating in the City's Comprehensive Plan update process.

Again, the UFC extends its congratulations to you and your team and wishes you the best as Seattle's new mayor.

Sincerely,

#### References

1. Ciecko, L., K. Tenneson, J. Dilley & K. Wolf. *Seattle's Forest Ecosystem Values: Analysis of the Structure, Function, and Economic Benefits*. August 2012.  
[https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/Trees/Mangement/EcoSystem/Seattles\\_Forest\\_Ecosystem\\_Values\\_Report.pdf](https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/Trees/Mangement/EcoSystem/Seattles_Forest_Ecosystem_Values_Report.pdf). Accessed 3 January 2022. [Note: Value of annual urban forest ecosystem services converted from 2012 dollars to 2021 dollars]
2. O'niel-Dunne, J. *2016 Seattle Tree Canopy Assessment*. Spring 2017.  
<https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/Trees/Mangement/Canopy/Seattle2016CCAFinalReportFINAL.pdf>. Accessed 3 January 2022.