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January 12, 2022

Councilmember Sara Nelson  
Seattle City Hall  
600 4th Ave  
Seattle, WA 98124

RE: Welcome and UFC introduction

Dear Councilmember Nelson

Duwamish Lands (Seattle, WA) – Congratulations on your successful election campaign! Seattle’s Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) welcomes you as to your new role on Seattle City Council and wishes you luck as citywide representative.

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.

Seattle’s urban forest provides immense benefits to the city, generating economic value estimated at \$15 million or more annually.<sup>1</sup> Some of the critical services provided by urban forests include reducing the impacts of climate change, promoting community resilience and public health, contributing to Seattle’s culture and sense of place, and managing storm water flows. **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 of mature trees take decades to replace. The best available data suggests canopy cover was trending downward in Seattle from 2007-2015.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the distribution of forest cover throughout the city

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<sup>1</sup> 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]

<sup>2</sup> 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.

is highly inequitable. This is concerning because our urban forest will play a significant role in how Seattle mitigates and adapts to climate change, especially extreme heat and rain events. Lack of forest cover correlates strongly with extreme heat in the city, placing many communities at greater risk to these impacts.

That is one reason why preserving tree cover has been a priority for the UFC since its establishment, and **the Commission was pleased to see on your [campaign website](#) that you, too, are committed to updating Seattle's tree protection ordinance.**

Tree protection ordinances can be good tools for tree preservation. 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 champions on City Council.** The UFC strongly urges you to work closely with the Executive to finally complete the task of updating the tree protection code, an effort now in its 13<sup>th</sup> year.

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 is 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.** Alternatively, or in addition, please advise whether there are staff members we should reach out to for engagement on urban forest policy.

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 in City Council Position 9.

Sincerely,