

DRAFT
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The Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) thanks Chanda Emory for her December 7, 2022, briefing regarding the status of the tree and urban forest protection ordinance update (SMC 25.11).

Chanda shared that she and her colleagues reviewed and considered all recommendations from the UFC, as well as from many other stakeholders. The UFC acknowledges and appreciates the time invested in reviewing community input.

The UFC would support the changes as enumerated by Chanda during her briefing, though the commission reserves its endorsements until the full text of the revised draft is available. The UFC's summary of the proposed changes shared at the December 7 meeting are at the bottom of this letter. While the UFC believes the revisions that Chanda shared would improve the ordinance, **the City must be bolder in its efforts to protect and enhance tree canopy.**

With the results from the updated tree canopy assessment in hand, it is clear that the current regulatory, financial, and educational structures in place for urban forest governance in Seattle are not sufficient to achieve the City's stated canopy goals. Worse, they appear to have perpetuated a harmful legacy of disproportionately failing Seattle's most disadvantaged communities.

The 2021 canopy assessment shows that **Seattle's urban forest is in decline**. Between 2016 to 2021, the city saw a net loss of 255 acres of canopy. Tree loss occurred everywhere, across all land use types. But the most disadvantaged communities experienced relative canopy losses eight-fold greater than the least disadvantaged communities (-4.1% and -0.5% respectively).

Our best chance to reverse canopy loss and address tree canopy inequity is right now. The UFC repeats two specific calls to further strengthen the tree code:

- Reduce tree removal allowances outside of development
- Increase tree replacement requirements
- Require tree inventories for development projects

Reduce tree removal allowances outside of development.

The revised draft ordinance will maintain a high tree removal allowance outside of development—up to three trees per year that are not exceptional and are **significant** trees between 6 and 12”.

The City's justification for maintaining high tree removal allowances is to “maintain flexibility for people to have a garden or to increase solar access on private property.”

Commented [BP1]: The significant tree category is trees 6"-24". The limit for homeowners outside of development in the current draft is 3 trees 6"-12"; so, not all significant trees.

Given the state of our urban forest, the UFC believes this rationale is weak and the policy unwise. An allowance of two trees every three years, as the UFC has called for, would provide sufficient flexibility in many instances. If greater flexibility is required, the department could allow departures for additional removal.

Require a higher tree replacement ratio:

The revised draft ordinance will maintain a one to one tree replacement requirement, where a replacement tree must provide a canopy “roughly proportional” to the lost tree.

Given the slow growth of trees, a one to one tree replacement requirement is insufficient to replace the benefits of lost canopy at a reasonable rate. The city’s own policy is two for one replacement, and the UFC believes an inch-for-inch replacement requirement is warranted. Higher replacement ratios will help tree planting and growth keep pace with inevitable tree loss.

Require tree inventories for development projects:

The UFC thanks Chanda and her colleagues for their work to improve protections for Seattle’s largest and most valuable natural asset. The commission looks forward to continuing this conversation with SDCI, the City Council, and the Mayor’s office. The UFC requests that the updated draft of the ordinance be shared with us as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Summary of proposed changes to the draft tree and urban forest protection ordinance shared by Chanda Emory, SDCI, at Dec. 7, 2022 meeting:

The UFC was pleased to learn that the revised draft tree and urban forest protection ordinance will include the following UFC recommendations:

- Require five-year establishment period for replacement trees;
- Ensure adequate soil volume for replacement trees, especially those planted in the right-of-way;
- Legally protect replacement trees;
- Adjusted payment-in-lieu structure to include replacement tree maintenance costs over the five year establishment period.

The UFC also heard that SDCI is considering and would support: ||

- mitigation for removal of hazardous trees;
- trebled penalties when trees are removed illegally to improve views or increase development potential of a lot.
- submitting quarterly reports to the Office of Sustainability and Environment on tree removal and replacement.

Commented [H2]: SDCI may support to “submit quarterly reports to the Office of Sustainability and Environment on tree removal and replacement”