



SEATTLE URBAN FORESTRY COMMISSION

Becca Neumann (Position #4 – Hydrologist), Co-chair

Joshua Morris (Position #7 – NGO), Co-Chair

Laura Keil (Position #10 – Get Engaged), Co-Chair

Julia Michalak (Position #1 – Wildlife Biologist) • **Falisha Kurji** (Position #3 – Natural Resource Agency)

Stuart Niven (Position #5 – Arborist – ISA) • **Hao Liang** (Position #6 – Landscape Architect – ISA)

David Baker (Position # 8 – Development) • **Blake Voorhees** (Position # 9 – Realtor)

Jessica Hernandez (Position #11 – Environmental Justice) • **Jessica Jones** (Position # 12 – Public Health)

Lia Hall (Position #13 – Community/Neighborhood)

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 meeting notes

February 15, 2023, 3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Via Webex call and in-person at the
Seattle Municipal Tower, Room 1872 (18th floor)
700 5th Avenue, Seattle

(206) 207-1700

Meeting number: 2497 641 1350

Meeting password: 1234

In-person meeting are not being held at this time due to the pandemic. Meeting participation is limited to access by joining the meeting through a computer or telephone conference line.

Attending

Commissioners

Laura Keil – Co-Chair

Stuart Niven

David Baker

Julia Michalak

Hao Liang

Lia Hall

Jessica Hernandez

Staff

Patti Bakker – OSE

Guests

Toby Thaler

Absent- Excused

Falisha Kurji

Blake Voorhees

Becca Neumann – Co-Chair

Jessica Jones

Joshua Morris – Co-Chair

Public

Steve Zemke

NOTE: Meeting notes are not exhaustive. For more details, listen to the digital recording of the meeting at: <https://www.seattle.gov/urbanforestrycommission/meetingdocuments>

Call to order: Patti called the meeting to order and offered a land acknowledgement.

Public comment:

Steve Zemke commented regarding the letter on the tree service provider registration ordinance, that he recommends including one week's notice in advance of work happening, and that signs be posted on site as the work is happening. He also agrees with the arborists who commented regarding the pruning allowances, that much pruning includes removal of dead limbs and that should not be counted in the percentage of canopy being pruned. He noted that tree topping should be explicitly listed as not acceptable practice and shouldn't be done. Lastly, he recommended that when tree removals are done, that data be collected including tree species, diameter, reason for removal and whether it will be replaced and if so, with what species, size and how many.

Chair, Committees, and Coordinator report:

Lia provided a recap of the meeting that she and Josh Morris attended on February 8th at the Rainier Beach Community Club. She noted that there was a lot of interest in the information they shared in the meeting, and she thinks it was a great trial run that she can see Commissioners replicating in different neighborhoods with different community groups.

Green Seattle Partnership presentation – Michael Yadrick, SPR

Patti provided the background that the last briefing from the Green Seattle Partnership (GSP) team was in late 2021. One of the team's Plant Ecologists, Michael Yadrick, will provide an update on the GSP program, as well as introduce a new potential project the team is considering, which would be a thinning project in Discovery Park.

Michael introduced himself and reviewed his experience with the program and his passion for plants, trees and restoration. He outlined the team of staff within Parks and Recreation who work on the GSP team. He provided some background on the history of Seattle's forest and the management of natural areas, including the realization that these lands need active management to make them healthy. There has been an evolution in the threats to the natural areas – from people and weeds in the beginning, to increasing climate change impacts and the need to respond to the racial reckoning and to community desires.

Michael shared some program highlights from 2022, including the total number of acres now enrolled in restoration, new acres enrolled, acres of establishment work performed, number of native plants installed, crew and volunteer hours, and the number of paid job training roles provided to community members.

Michael noted how the program has evolved since its inception in 2005 and the development of the first 20-Year Strategic Plan. The original goal was to restore 2,500 acres by 2025. With the challenges faced by the forest and by the partners in doing this work, there has been some level-setting done in recent years to acknowledge the current status and projections for the program. We have learned that it's not just a process of removing weeds and expecting the native plant community will reassemble. It takes active investment from the city that is complemented with leverage and action from the community to be successful in the effort. Factors complicating success of the program include that there are more acres now involved in the program that could see restoration (2,754), climate impacts and warming affect plant survival and establishment, and labor costs have gone up. This all means a longer timeframe, and the program has been reevaluating and considering new measures of success metrics. The revisioning process also included increasing involvement with the Indigenous community; there are places like Daybreak Star and behind the Duwamish Longhouse, where the program is working with Indigenous communities to implement restoration the way they see it, not just the way it's been done traditionally.

The revisioning also includes reimagining the Forest Steward program, to increase diversity and change what stewardship and restoration look like, and includes changing GSP governance and looking at how to engage stakeholders in different ways and hear from community how they want restoration to happen.

Michael explained the Forest Steward program, noting that they are folks that sign up as volunteers to care for forest areas in parks all over the city, in coordination with staff. There are currently 187 active Forest Stewards, with many more folks on the list to go through training to become stewards. In addition to the volunteers, there is a long list of community partner organizations involved in the program as well.

Michael covered some additional 2022 project highlights, as well as highlights for 2023. Funding that was reduced in previous years has been restored in the 2023 budget, so the performance metrics will be back up at the 2018 levels. The program will be also including intersectional work such as trail corridor and food systems work (where fruit trees overlap with natural areas.) The revisioning work will continue, with expanded contracts with community organizations.

Michael provided information on the potential thinning project the program is considering with the Friends of Discovery Park. He provided the background that Seattle's forested parks and watersheds are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, and that provides a set of principles and guidelines for GSP to follow in restoring and managing the forests. The program has also expanded their network and thinking around managing natural areas, including involvement with the national Forests in Cities program. As the program has progressed, they need to do more and more active management of trees and that includes thinning some areas. The thinning projects involve selective removal of some trees in order to create better light conditions to diversify the canopy and release the young trees that are shaded in the understory.

The program began implementing thinning projects in 2017, starting in the West Duwamish Greenbelt and focusing on selectively removing of deciduous trees. There are sections of restoration zones in Discovery Park that were planted densely and saw high survival, so they are more dense than is healthy for the conifer trees there. Goals for the thinning project include:

- Reducing the risk of wildfire by removing excess fuels
- Improving the health of the "leave" trees
- Providing habitat for wildlife (e.g. birds, pollinators)
- Improving the aesthetic appeal of the park by creating more open and interesting spaces for viewing wildlife
- Educating the public about the importance of managing forests, capture carbon, shade, and homes for flora and fauna

The team is in the process of consulting with stakeholders about the potential project, and will be considering aspects such as timing, wildlife, volume of material, consistency with Park purposes, stormwater, significant tree sizes, and cultural resources.

Questions on the briefing included:

- Is there an expected timeline for implementing the project?
- Is there a sense of the number of trees or number of acres involved?
- Regarding the recent canopy assessment news, are there any insights into the net loss that was seen in natural areas?
- Will there be areas that will be left "wild", that won't see these interventions?
- Was the area thinned in the West Duwamish part of the polluted sites there?

Presentation debrief

Jessica H. volunteered to draft a letter in response to the briefing. Components to include in the letter include the consideration to observe some forest sections and allow them to come to equilibrium on their own.

Tree Service Provider Registration Ordinance amendments

Laura provided an overview of the letter she drafted from Josh's notes on this topic from the Land Use Committee meeting. Commissioners discussed the components of the letter and the recommendations that they want to make regarding the potential amendments. They made edits to the letter, but there are remaining areas to come to consensus on recommendations for, and there was not a quorum of Commissioners present (Stuart had to leave mid-meeting), so the letter was not adopted and will be considered again at the next meeting.

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>

Public comment:

Steve Zemke noted the complications of the amendments to the TSP registration ordinance. He disagrees with increasing the number of times that tree service providers get caught not posting tree work to 6 times before a penalty is incurred. Instead, another option could be used such as doubling the penalty for each they don't report work.

Sandy Shettler agreed with Steve. With our complaint-based system, it's expecting too much of citizen activists to catch someone violating six times. The inspection process and enforcement of violations is difficult, so it would be hard for companies to get six violations in a year and that number should be reduced.

Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned at 5:05 PM.

Meeting Chat:

from Chris Gaul to everyone: 3:08 PM

No thanks.

from Matthew Hilliard to everyone: 3:22 PM

Thanks for the invite y'all, but I gotta go. Just a few more minutes in the workday. Thanks for repping GSP, Michael, and good to see you Patti!

from Lindsay Malone to everyone: 3:47 PM

At West Duwamish, there were failing (very old) Red Alder falling and knocking down the established conifers (esp. Western Redcedar).

from Hao Liang to everyone: 3:53 PM

I just found an older version of GSP Strategic Plan here, <https://greenseattle.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/GSP-Strategic-Plan-Update-01.19.18-reduced-file-size.pdf>

from Hao Liang to everyone: 3:53 PM

Are we working on a new GSP strategic plan?

from Lia Hall to everyone: 3:55 PM

Are there plans to "replace" trees outside of these sections?

from Lindsay Malone to everyone: 3:56 PM

One thing to note Michael is that the some of the sites at Discovery Park at Capehart and the South Lot is that there was higher seedling survival for those areas than was anticipated (we'd thought not all the trees would make it to this age).

from Clay to everyone: 4:02 PM

comment: a chronic need for Disco. Pk (and other City parks and greenspaces) is a strategic restoration plan that addresses prioritization and coordination of restoration activity and resources to avoid the ad hoc,

haphazard, uncoordinated, opportunistic, unfocused restoration that has happened to date. Would be best to understand how ecol. thinning fits into the restoration priorities at Disco. Pk as a whole.

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:05 PM

Discovery Park used to be a military base so this "leaving it wild" lens might just show the environmental + ecological impacts military bases + pollution leaves behind

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:05 PM

I did my Ph.D. on Discovery Park

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:06 PM

*dissertation

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:13 PM

Yes and the Duwamish river orgs. already work with Indigenous communities or were founded by Duwamish members (ex: Duwamish River Coalition)

from Hao Liang to everyone: 4:14 PM

Thank you!

from Lindsay Malone GSP forest steward, Discovery Park to everyone: 4:16 PM

Thank you Jessica, I'll follow up with Michael.

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:16 PM

I can volunteer

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:17 PM

Hao: If you want to help :)

from Clay to everyone: 4:18 PM

response to Lia: That's where a strategic restoration plan would serve well.

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:19 PM

Yes, conservationists always prescribe solutions but Indigenous peoples have knowledge since time immemorial of these places

from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 4:19 PM

I agree with Lia's approach. For example, the use of herbicide on native trees in the Duwamish Gap is somewhat disturbing. Even though this is not planned for this project, it gave me pause.

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:20 PM

I will need that statement to draft the letter @Lia as I did not capture it entirely thanks

from Rowan Braybrook to everyone: 4:20 PM

I work at NNRG and am open to answering any questions as well.

from Lia Hall to everyone: 4:21 PM

I can send you a paragraph for the letter @Jessica + @Hao if that helps

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:21 PM

Yes, that will work so that we can make sure to capture what you are saying because I am bit confused, but we are out of time. Thanks!

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:24 PM

Here are some quick comments on potential amendments to Tree Service Provider legislation.

Require a sign be placed on site when work is being done

Require minimum one week notice of work to be done on line.

Allow date of work to be changed and reason online to later date after initial notice, with one day notice

Allow work notice to be valid for one month to give scheduling flexibility for Tree Service providers

let % of tree pruned refer only to live canopy, not removal of dead limbs

Prohibit topping as an acceptable practice but define as tree removal, most departments prohibit topping but SMC 25.11 includes it in exception list.

from Clay to everyone: 4:25 PM

typically, if a building department uses third party consultants to confirm resource disclosures, impacts, etc.

those costs are passed on to the applicant

from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 4:25 PM

Agree with Steve, can you specify the length of time the notice would be online prior to the work? A week is important and addresses inequity--people who work Mon-Fri may not catch an online post that 's only up for 3 days.

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:26 PM

also - require all tree removals to include tree species and DBH and reason for removal

Ask if tree removed will be replaced by either Tree Service provider or property owner, with what species and where.

If an exceptional tree, ask how many trees will be replanted, species and where.

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:27 PM

Laura: commending you on the format of this letter, it is very clear! Like the "bolding" of statements because it makes it clear and it is hard to miss or ignore.

from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 4:28 PM

Agree with Hao--Council states the notice is for informing public only. However, there are abundant errors in removals of trees which were not declared as exceptional--these are only caught by citizens because we have a complaint-based system.

from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 4:30 PM

Yes--maybe cabling could be exempt:)

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:31 PM

Concern with pruning is that it complies with ISA standards. There are cases where excessive pruning can kill tree and also topping is basically killing tree or making it hazardous.

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:33 PM

Problem mentioned by tree service providers at Land Use Committee is that SDCI is understaffed and that the 2 arborists are not able to get out in field but are office bound. SDCI needs more arborists. Recommend adding more arborists to SDCI

from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 4:33 PM

There hasn't been an increase in staffing for tree issues.

from Chris Gaul to everyone: 4:33 PM

By random check do you suggest a visit to the tree?

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:35 PM

SDCI relies on its planners to do field checking. They are not certified arborists. Need to recommend SDCI hire more arborist or move oversight to OSE and add more arborist and urban foresters as independent evaluators of tree work separate from SDCI

from Lia Hall to everyone: 4:37 PM

To reiterate, do we have a sense of what the added administrative costs would be to these TSPs to provide these methods of notification?

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:38 PM

Notification of work is done on line and is a public record of work being done. Pruning is removing canopy, if not done right can kill trees. .

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:38 PM

Council approves budget!

from Tina Cohen to everyone: 4:40 PM

I did third party verifications, as an independent contractor, for the city of Kirkland 11 years ago. The primary problem is conflict of interest: the tree service will use a 'hired gun' to say what they want. Could be ended by requiring the evaluation be done by an unrelated company.

from Lia Hall to everyone: 4:41 PM

@Steve, understood. Can we assume that TSPs are following the recommended ISA standards for methods of pruning?

from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 4:41 PM

A distinction should be made between penalties for "failing to post" and penalty for violating the reportable work guidelines.

from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 4:41 PM

For example, a Douglas fir in Northgate was limbed up to 50 feet last week. Very little left.

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:43 PM

If it is to consult arborists, maybe they should decide the length of time they need, especially the association referenced. We can't determine that for them.

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:43 PM

Lia We have seen unfortunately excessive pruning being done. Most arborists will follow the guidelines The reason for reporting is to catch the ones that are violating guidelines

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:44 PM

Maybe reduce the fine for pruning violations as compared to illegal tree work removal.

from Chris Gaul to everyone: 4:44 PM

Once shame on you. Twice, shame on us.

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:45 PM

What was the original time frame?

from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 4:46 PM

The posting we are suggesting (online ahead of time, and on site while working) is not onerous. I don't think such a generous allowance is appropriate. Because very few are caught-it's a complaint-based system and very few people complain

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:46 PM

Maybe increase fines with each additional violation after 2. Maybe double with each additional violation. Give SDCI authority to make final judgement on violations. Teb

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:46 PM

so maybe double it?

from Tina Cohen to everyone: 4:48 PM

What do you mean by the Seattle arborist association?

from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 4:48 PM

Are there penalties for violating pruning guidelines? I don't believe so. Removing half a tree and causing its demise is different from forgetting to put up a sign.

from Tina Cohen to everyone: 4:49 PM

What are their credentials?

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:49 PM

It like saying don't worry about posting. Its only citizen complaints that will catch them and lots will be missed. It means people have to catch them 6 times!

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:49 PM

Thank you Laura for drafting this letter!

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:51 PM

Penalty should be for each violation caught or they will feel it can just be ignored.

from Chris Gaul to everyone: 4:51 PM

Is it a requirement or isn't it to be on the TSP?

from Jim Davis to everyone: 4:53 PM

There is this assumption that the TSP is raising costs to clients in a significant way. It would be good to get evidence of this and how much. Costs to clients were going up without TSP. How much does third party verification add to costs to clients?

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:54 PM

Costs should not be that much on posting work on line as they have to provide to customer what work they are doing and cost?

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:56 PM

They can provide pictures of hazard trees and SDCI can check on ones that are not clearcut.

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:56 PM

clear rather than clearcut

from Tina Cohen to everyone: 4:57 PM

Would you want random checks on electrical wiring for example? Not sure this is the best approach.

from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 4:58 PM

Likely not

from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 4:58 PM

They are supposed to vote

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:59 PM

Draft bill wil be next week Final vote 2 weeks after that

from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 4:59 PM

Thanks Steve

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:59 PM

Could we email the members not here to vote?

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 5:00 PM

Thank you Laura for drafing the letter!

from Chris Gaul to everyone: 5:01 PM

No, thanks.

from Hao Liang to everyone: 5:01 PM

I just want to say the TSP bill would be part of the tree protection effort. It is very important in terms of maintaining the city's urban forest. However, to achieve the UFC's mission and reach the city's canopy cover target, more works need to be done by policymakers, planners, designers, and engineers. In many projects, we've cut down big trees with little resistance. To avoid tragedies, we still need to integrate urban forestry into different levels of planning and implementation. It's still a long way to go.

Public input: (see next page and posted notes):