



City of Seattle
Urban Forestry Commission

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

March 1, 2023, 3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Via Webex call

(206) 207-1700

Meeting number: 2481 895 4234

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

Becca Neumann – Co-Chair

Joshua Morris – Co-Chair

Falisha Kurji

Julia Michalak

Hao Liang

Stuart Niven

Lia Hall

Jessica Hernandez

Staff

Patti Bakker – OSE

Guests

Toby Thaler

Absent- Excused

David Baker

Blake Voorhees

Jessica Jones

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

Public comment:

Steve Zemke suggested regarding UFC procedure, that potentially the bylaws could be changed so that recommendations can be adopted short of a quorum. Also, regarding Council's Land Use Committee meetings, it was a missed opportunity that there was not UFC representation at the last meeting when the Tree Service Provider registration ordinance amendments were being considered. Also, the Tree Canopy Assessment report was released and he urges the UFC to take a closer look at it.

Lia Hall passed on an update related to a comment made at the July 20, 2022 meeting regarding the Indigenous Creatives Collective. The comment at the time noted that the group was trying to acquire land that was under threat of development, subdivision and clearing of trees. The update is that they were able to acquire the land. Lia shared a link in the chat to their website, which outlines the plans for the property.

Chair, Committees, and Coordinator report:

Patti noted that the canopy cover assessment report was released yesterday. The report contains all the information provided in the briefings to the UFC previously, plus some additional details such as the development analysis, and it also includes an expanded listing of recommendations for urban forest investments, as informed by the assessment. The report is posted on the Trees for Seattle website. There has been some media interest in the report received by OSE, and at least one Commissioner has been contacted by media so far. Since it just came out, there has not been a stance on the report adopted by the Commission, and that is not agendaized for today and there hasn't been time for Commissioners perhaps to have fully reviewed the report, but Commissioners can share their experiences in media contacts and the process for responding to them.

Jessica Hernandez shared the media request she'd received, and Commissioners talked through the process for replying to such requests without an official stance being adopted by the Commission, including sharing other UFC recommendations that are pertinent and resonate with Commissioners and sharing Commissioners' own expertise and experience.

Patti further noted that there is still additional data and analyses the city is working on related to the canopy assessment. The report released includes a snapshot of the data and analyses at this point, but there will be these additional data and analyses to work on. The city is working to get the final data and GIS layers available publicly.

Josh shared that he had a couple of briefings with Councilmember Strauss and with the Mayor's Office on the updated tree protection ordinance. A release of the ordinance will come in the next week or so.

SDOT Urban Forestry briefing – Joe Markovich and Katey Bean, SDOT

Joe introduced the members of the SDOT in attendance to help provide information and answer questions. He shared the department's mission, values and goals, and reviewed the 2022 accomplishments as reported out as Levy deliverables, as well as 2023 accomplishments to date and 2016-2022 Levy accomplishments.

2022 Accomplishments

371 trees planted
181 trees removed
4085 trees pruned
487 traffic sign or signal obstructions cleared
1449 landscape maintenance events

2023 Year to Date

160 trees planted

19 trees removed
781 trees pruned
126 traffic sign or signal obstructions cleared
173 landscape maintenance events

2016 – 2022 Totals – Move Seattle Levy

2,663 trees planted
1,272 trees removed
33,442 trees pruned
3,189 traffic sign or signal obstructions cleared
10,402 landscape maintenance events

Joe described what it means to clear obstructions for safety, discussed why there were 1200 trees removed since 2016, and explained landscape maintenance events.

Trees and sidewalks – SDOT is working to make Seattle walkable and passable and in that effort, sidewalks get built, rebuilt and repaired. Tree roots can make sidewalks not ADA compliant, so there is a challenge reconciling that. Katy noted that this problem stems from large canopy trees being planted in undersized root wells in the 60s and 70s. As those trees grew, their roots increased in diameter and impacted sidewalks. The department has the obligation to fix these problems. There is a Trees and Sidewalks Operations Plan that is used as a guide and includes strategies for how to resolve the tree root issues.

Katy shared information on the case study of the Aurora Avenue sidewalk repairs. She discussed some of the particular trees and the solutions that were found, including aluminum sidewalk plates. This was a pilot project and SDOT hopes to use this option in other areas of the city.

Questions about this topic included:

- Will the tree roots under these solutions continue to push up and cause problems?
- How much did input from the community influence the decision to explore these innovations?
- When the trees are identified as "sick" is there any remediation strategies used to try to heal the tree?

Soil volume and trees – Katey noted that SDOT is considering what the city can do better moving forward to avoid those situations where there are conflicts with sidewalks and roots. This is complicated by the number of things that have to share the space below ground with tree roots and the amount of space each of those things need. There is a correlation between canopy spread and the soil volume needed for a tree.

Soil cells are being more widely used as cities look to expand soil volume for trees under crowded urban conditions. They are very strong and are traffic-rated (can hold cars in parking lots.) The soil cells can work with utilities, but utilities are so far skeptical on that. They are 4' depth. Katey described the city's soil volume standards, including 1,200 CF for each tree planted in urban areas downtown, but that is very difficult or impossible to achieve. Research has shown that you can reduce soil volume requirements by allowing trees to share soil volume (e.g. if two tree can share area connected below the sidewalk through soil cells or if they're planted in a continuous planter, you can reduce the soil volume required by up to 30% per tree.

SDOT has standard plans that are updated every three years and will be published at the end of the month for 2023 and the next update will be 2026. They are looking to do some trial updates on plans and specifications in some of their capital projects, and they welcome input from the UFC on them.

Questions and comments included:

- Regarding the street tree list – an interactive tree selection guidance tool has replaced the old pdf of the street tree list.
- Does soil volume impact decision-making when it comes to maintenance?
- Soil quality – some parts of the city are built up on non-native soil, so how is soil quality factored in in tree planting?
- Re: soil cells, what are the concerns that utilities might have in using them?
- Given what happened with the Aurora trees, what kind of monitoring procedures does SDOT have in place so that when trees are planted they won't require this kind of mitigation later?
- Some right of way trees are privately maintained, some are public – is the monitoring and maintenance only done on the SDOT responsibility trees?

Presentation debrief

Commissioners discussed thoughts to capture in a follow up letter:

- Thank SDOT for their leadership in solving conflicts and for engaging with community in finding solutions. Appreciate how they value trees and make them a priority.
- For those calling in for sidewalks, does SDOT collect demographics? Would be interested in seeing that data if available, especially given that some communities have more accessibility to do these calls. Any translation offered for this calls?

Hao volunteered to draft the letter.

Tree Service Provider Registration Ordinance amendments

Josh noted that Council has already voted on the amendments to this ordinance, but that it is still worthwhile to get UFC comments adopted and submitted on it. Patti provided a recap of the discussion from the last meeting and the edits made to the draft letter in that discussion. Laura walked through elements of the letter and the places that still need work to finalize UFC feedback. Commissioners further discussed and edited the content of the letter. Commissioners decided that there is more work to be done to finalize input on this topic, so the letter was not adopted at this meeting and this discussion will continue at a later date.

2022 Annual Report final design and transmission letter

Patti reviewed the draft transmittal letter for the Annual Report, and Commissioners discussed and edited the letter.

Action: a motion to approve the 2022 Annual Report and transmittal letter as amended was made, seconded and approved.

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 urged folks to pay attention to state legislature and the bills they are working on regarding increased housing and the impacts that would have. From the canopy report, it's noted that in Neighborhood Residential areas, developed parcels saw 33.6% relative percent loss and in MF there was a 49.5% reduction of canopy. This data should be reviewed in relation to the ordinance and how development can impact tree canopy.

Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned at 4:58 PM.

Meeting Chat:

from Stephanie Helms to everyone: 3:01 PM

Getting all my webex settings together! Thanks for having me!

from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 3:03 PM

Having trouble with audio, will try to fix or call in

from Lia Hall to everyone: 3:06 PM

I have a comment to share.

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 3:06 PM

Caller User 3 is creating echo

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 3:06 PM

can they go silent?

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 3:07 PM

Reminder: Can everyone not speaking mute themselves? Thanks.

from Lia Hall to everyone: 3:15 PM

<https://yehawshow.com/land>

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 3:15 PM

What was your initial reaction to the 2021 assessment?

(https://seattle.gov/documents/Departments/OSE/Urban%20Forestry/2021%20Tree%20Canopy%20Assessmant%20Report_FINAL_230227.pdf)

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 3:16 PM

What does the assessment tell us about how the city is doing with regard to reaching its goals for our collective canopy, as well as prioritizing environmental justice?

from sage miller to everyone: 3:18 PM

clicked on link. site not available

from sage miller to everyone: 3:19 PM

sorry- "page not available"

from Laura Keil she/her to everyone: 3:19 PM

Sage - I had success copying and pasting the link into my browser

from sage miller to everyone: 3:20 PM

thanks

from Sharon Ricci to everyone: 3:20 PM

Link worked for me as well

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 3:20 PM

This message was more for commisioners. Sorry, made it available for everyone. These are the media questions.

from Bakker, Patricia to everyone: 3:27 PM

The report itself:

https://seattle.gov/documents/Departments/OSE/Urban%20Forestry/2021%20Tree%20Canopy%20Assessmant%20Report_FINAL_230227.pdf

from Bakker, Patricia to everyone: 3:27 PM

Trees for Seattle's canopy cover page: <https://www.seattle.gov/trees/management/canopy-cover>

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 3:32 PM

when you share

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 3:32 PM

click on share sound

from Lia Hall to everyone: 3:32 PM

can someom drop a link to the video in the chat?

from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 3:32 PM

The community was so excited about this project!! Thanks Katey and Director Spotts.

from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 3:33 PM

Shout out to Tina Cohen who helped get the word out about "tree coffins" and why soil volume is needed

from Lia Hall to everyone: 3:33 PM

Think I found it:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6nUi_XYcJYE&embeds_euri=https%3A%2F%2Fsdotblog.seattle.gov%2F&feature=emb_logo

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 3:37 PM

Is there a plan to plant more trees along Aurora sometime soon?

from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 3:38 PM

I think street trees have a median expected life of much less than their normal life spans. So anytime we can save them even for a few decades it's a gift to the community

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 3:39 PM

Question: In the report it mentions the highest losses were parks natural areas & neighborhood residentials. Are the geographic regions available? Wondering to see if this also relates to an equity issue. Example: Are communities with majority low-income families experiencing these canopy losses.

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 3:40 PM

Sorry, confused it since the link was shared during this presentation. I thought it was a report for SDOT.

from Bakker, Patricia to everyone: 3:41 PM

Sorry, Jessica, I was just providing links to the canopy report and web page since I'd mentioned doing that.

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 3:41 PM

Question: When the trees are identified as "sick" is there any remediation strategies used to try to heal the tree? Or does SDOT not work on that so it waits until it dies to remove?

from Stuart Niven to everyone: 3:48 PM

Unfortunately I have to step out for time but will switch to being mobile so I do not miss much, if any, of this meeting. Thank you SDOT crew for this interesting presentation so far!

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 3:53 PM

Does Becca have a question? Hand is raised.

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 3:57 PM

This is close to where I live lol :D

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 3:58 PM

No wonder the road was closed for weeks!

from Cindy Kozak to everyone: 3:59 PM

and in a standard planting strip the standard watermeter doesn't fit so they rotate it 90degree with 2 bends on each side taking 5' clear + 3' bend + 5

from Cindy Kozak to everyone: 3:59 PM

15

from Cindy Kozak to everyone: 3:59 PM

to 20' long

from Dinushi to everyone: 4:06 PM

It's great how early planting involves digging down to make room for tree roots.

from Rundquist, Nolan to everyone: 4:07 PM

<https://www.seattle.gov/transportation/projects-and-programs/programs/trees-and-landscaping-program/tree-selection-guidance-tool>

from Rundquist, Nolan to everyone: 4:09 PM

We also consider the mature diameter and root flare, so we wouldn't consider, for example, oaks on 100' foot centers in a 4' foot wide strip.

from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 4:19 PM

Slightly off topic, but can the SDOT team speak to the budget/resources for watering newly planted trees? Seeing this as an issue in many neighborhoods.

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:20 PM

For those calling in for sidewalks, does SDOT collect demographics? Would be interested in seeing that data if available, especially given that some communities have more accessibility to do these calls. Any translation offered for this calls?

from sage miller to everyone: 4:22 PM

Is SDOT working with Sound Transit regarding tree removal, replacement for upcoming ballard/west seattle construction plans?

from Rundquist, Nolan to everyone: 4:26 PM

RE: Tree Watering - we are currently watering SDOT planted trees for 4 years of establishment. If you see trees that seem to need watering, email us at seattle.trees@seattle.gov and we'll check to see if they're our responsibility. If not, we can reach out to the responsible party.

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:26 PM

That \$ value threw me off a bit due to cultural values, but it is interesting to see how natural capital is working in these systems.

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:28 PM

#2 the pushback we received

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:29 PM

Public wanted stricter guidelines

from Toby Thaler to everyone: 4:30 PM

Letter is still timely in that "big tree ordinance" will be at Council "soon" and can probably accommodate further TSP amendments.

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:31 PM

Still concerned about not imposing penalties until 6 violations. Problem is public is still watchdog. SDCI does not have resources to watchdog at present. Look at financial penalties that double or triple with each violation.

from karenbarrettdesign to everyone: 4:31 PM

Is there a suggestion for asking about ECA of the tree location? And how can a private owner determine *correctly* if it is in a ECA area, since the King County Property info does not post this on parcel viewer (even though there is an Environment section). And who is checking the accuracy of the self-filed information?

from Taylor Duke to everyone: 4:32 PM

Thanks im having issues with my sound

from Lia Hall to everyone: 4:32 PM

Is Stewart still here? I'd be curious what he thinkgs

from Lia Hall to everyone: 4:32 PM

thinks^

from Attendee to everyone: 4:32 PM

The consequence for not posting, is only issued if a member of the public puts in a complaint regarding the lack of posted notice. It needs to be recognized that most residents will not even know to put in a complaint, so it's very unlikely a single TSP would even be "caught" 3 times.

from Taylor Duke to everyone: 4:32 PM

currently the code is written such that 2 strikes and you're out.

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:32 PM

We had people who referred to themselves as "tree activists" who pushed back on us for this

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:32 PM

Arborists concerned with violations putting them out of work but easy to ignore regulations to post.

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:33 PM

We didn't have many arborists in the last meeting

from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 4:33 PM

Andrea's comment speaks to the enforcement issue and is a great point.

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:36 PM

Maybe need to clarify as major and minor violations. Second violation for example removing more than 3 significant trees or illegally removing an exceptional tree

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:39 PM

I see, it is just even looking at the meeting notes, I think Steve also took part in that conversation. I just recall it due to the verbal pushback we received.

from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 4:40 PM

Yes, there is no tension between well-run arborist companies and tree activists. The difficulty is building a system that protects trees from illegal removals and pruning that is well outside ISA guidelines.

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:42 PM

I need to re-read the notes from last meeting because there was a lot mentioned during public comment that was pushing back on #2

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:42 PM

Recent example in neighborhood Tree Service Provider topped a probably 60-70 foot cedar tree for solar access. Not everyone doing Tree work is doing ISA recommended work. Most arborists are doing good work but not all. .

from Rundquist, Nolan to everyone: 4:43 PM

From SDOT's perspective - I'm only considering a violation such as a citation that has been verified, as being a "strike" I'm planning on detailing that info in my update of the Street Tree Manual, along with an appeal process.

from Tina Cohen to everyone: 4:44 PM

I agree with Sandy's comment, and I'm a Certified Arborist (retired)

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:46 PM

@Nolan from SDOT's point of view, what does three strikes entail? how does this differentiate from 6?

from Hao Liang to everyone: 4:46 PM

I know some arborists who take pruning work as the art in their practices and they are very proud of it :)

from Laura Keil she/her to everyone: 4:47 PM

Good idea Jessica! The Design Commission does this sometimes

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:50 PM

It was before the TSP ordinance went into effect. They came back to cut another cedar tree down about 3 weeks ago, no posted sign and would not say who they were. I filed a complaint with the city. Got their CA license number. This was about 3 weeks ago and have not heard any resolution yet regarding this company doing the work.

from Rundquist, Nolan to everyone: 4:50 PM

@Jessica - SDOT doesn't have a posting requirement for pruning, so it's apples and oranges

from Rundquist, Nolan to everyone: 4:53 PM

@Jessica (again) we would consider unauthorized removals a strike - unpermitted 'good' pruning would likely be a warning rather than a strike - unpermitted awful pruning, as strike, etc.

from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 4:53 PM

Thank you Patti!

from Hao Liang to everyone: 4:53 PM

I felt mixing pruning and tree removal together kind of devalues the the purpose of the notice