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) • **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
June 7, 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: 2487 677 3998
Meeting password: 1234

Attending

Commissioners
Josh Morris – Co-Chair
Becca Neumann – Co-Chair
Laura Keil – Co-Chair
Stuart Niven
Hao Liang
Jessica Hernandez
Jessica Jones
Lia Hall

Staff
Patti Bakker – OSE
David Bayard – Seattle City Light

Guests
Toby Thaler

Absent- Excused
Julia Michalak
Falisha Kurji
David Baker

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

Public comment:
Steve Zemke noted that the Seattle Parks and Open Space Plan, which is updated every six years, has a June 30 deadline for response; the UFC has time to weigh in on that. Regarding the ordinance, the UFC didn't get everything they wanted in it, but Councilmember Strauss expressed interest in continuing to working on it, so there should be ability for the UFC to continue to influence it. Some examples for amendments include: have definitions of the tree tiers include the descriptors exceptional, significant and heritage; adjust the in-lieu payment amount, urging the $4,000 amount; clarifying that tree grove should include street trees; requiring a tree inventory plan and maximizing retention of existing trees. He also wondered about an update to the appointment process for the two vacant UFC positions.

Chair, Committees, and Coordinator report:
Patti noted that the regularly scheduled first meeting in July is right after the July 4 holiday and many Commissioners have noted they will be out that week. Commissioners discussed rescheduling that meeting and confirmed that more folks could make a July 12 meeting. Patti will send an updated appointment for that meeting to reflect the schedule change from July 5 to July 12.

Patti also provided an update on the IRA grant application submitted by the City. The city submitted a project proposal for the IRA grant funding available through the US Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry program. The combined project involves OSE, SPR and SPU and includes three project components: 1) stewarding a connected, resilient forest, by managing natural areas holistically across boundary lines, 2) elevating community urban forestry leadership by equipping and empowering communities to participate in urban forest planning and 3) training youth for future careers in urban forestry by expanding the Youth Green Corps program.

Regarding recruitments, Patti noted that the candidate confirmations for Positions 1 and 2 may be scheduled for June 26. One application was received for Position 9 and an interview with that candidate is being set up. Get Engaged program staff are recruiting for the next cohort of GE members to start their one-year terms in October. Three applicants applied to serve on the UFC and interviews with those candidates are being scheduled now.

Patti provided an update on the effort to respond to the latest Statement of Legislative Intent regarding urban forestry. This SLI requested that the Office of Sustainability & Environment collaborate with the City Budget Office and the Urban Forestry ID Team to develop a report on the City's funding and expenditures for tree planting, stewardship, and other related activities. OSE and CBO are working together to gather this information from the departments and will be compiling a response to submit to Council by the September 30 deadline.

Josh thanked all of the Commissioners for the hard work reviewing and commenting on the tree protection ordinance update, and noted that it was voted on by full Council in May. The ordinance includes many things the UFC has been advocating for for many years, but there are things to continue to work on and improve. Some Council members have committed to working to improve it, and the UFC should follow up on that, through the various avenues available (code change, budget process, etc.)

Commissioners discussed whether it is known what the timeline and process is for working on updates to the ordinance. Josh noted that Councilmembers Strauss, Mosqueda, Morales and Herbold all expressed interest in continuing to work on the ordinance, so first step could be to contact those members.

Stuart suggested that one thing that might be helpful is to prepare a compare and contrast table between what was allowed in the old ordinance and what's allowed in the new ordinance, including some real-world examples of what's happening. It will take time to see what really will result from the ordinance. Becca suggested that Commissioners interested in working with Stuart on this let him know via email.

Josh provided an update on his efforts to coordinate with the Seattle Planning Commission, since their mission is to steward the Comprehensive Plan and the Environmental Impact Statement for the 2024 Comprehensive Plan update is due to be released this summer.

Right of way canopy data additional findings – Hao Liang
Hao shared some of his additional findings on right of way canopy and street tree data, in preparation for Commission review and potential adoption of the SDOT briefing follow up letter. He looked at various references, SDOT's Urban Forestry program and their rules around equity.

The 2021 Tree Canopy study shows that the tree canopy in the right of way constitutes 27% of the city's land area and contributes 23% of the canopy in the city. Hao looked at the canopy data for each neighborhood from the lens of equity, as a basis to review the canopy topics. He prepared a maps showing the canopy cover percent in each neighborhood and canopy in the right of way in each neighborhood. The right of way data shows more details related to history, urban planning and socio-economics.

Disadvantaged neighborhoods already have lower canopy cover, as illustrated by comparison of East Queen Anne and Rainier Beach neighborhoods. The canopy cover in the two neighborhoods is relatively similar to each other, but the canopy in the right of way in East Queen Anne is almost twice that of Rainier Beach. That difference impacts the walkability, connectivity, social interaction, public health and safety of the two neighborhoods. Hao shared a chart showing that the amount of canopy in a neighborhood's right of way is not proportional to the amount of right of way in the neighborhood, for many of the city's neighborhoods.

Street tree species can also be an indicator of a neighborhood's history and socio-economic status. The data shows that more affluent neighborhoods have more showy spring blooms. The majority of maintenance responsibilities for street trees falls on the adjacent landowner, and that may affect which species exist in neighborhoods since the showier species often require more maintenance. Views may be another factor influencing tree species.

Preservation of existing street trees is fundamental to achieving the city's canopy cover goals. Many of our current street trees were planted decades ago, and the city may face a serious challenge when those older trees decline due to age and the challenges they face. SDOT estimates a life span of 50 years for street trees. There may be a surge of replantings needed, and those will come with maintenance and establishment needs and costs.

Questions and comments on the presentation included:
- How many trees are projected to be needed for SDOT to plant in the next few years?
- Do we know the ratio of trees planted by SDOT versus private property owners?
- In the scatter plot shared that showed canopy cover in relation to amount of right of way, some of the neighborhoods that fall below the line are industrial or downtown areas, but that also highlights that the nearby neighborhoods that are also low on the line are important to focus on given the industrial impacts.

Seattle Department of Transportation briefing follow-up
Hao reviewed the letter he drafted to follow up on the SDOT briefing in March, which included several recommendations for SDOT to consider. Commissioners discussed and edited the letter.

> **Action: a motion to adopt the SDOT briefing follow-up letter as amended was made, seconded and approved.**

Seattle City Light Vegetation Management program updates
Dave Bayard shared the mission and vision of Seattle City Light (SCL), which have been updated recently, and provided a high-level overview of SCL, its vegetation management and the four programs that are within his unit.

SCL is a public power generator, transmitter and distributer, which is rare for utilities. It is the 10th largest power generator in the country, and includes infrastructure and facilities all cross the state. SCL owns about 75 properties in and around the city, which require management. The Vegetation Management group is in the same unit as T&D Operations, whose mission is to "keep the lights on".

Utility vegetation management is very complicated. Distribution line clearance is the most well-known piece of it, but there is also many others such as wildfire prevention and control and wildlife habitat creation and management. They are a tree care organization and there is a lot of credentialing that goes through ISA and other organizations specifically related to utility work.

They maintain and monitor over 300,000 trees with grow/fall potential, which means they are actively keeping eyes on them. They have a $6M annual budget to do the work (mostly contracted labor), on a 4.5-year cycle. They have more tree crews at work in the city than any other city department.

The 4.5-year maintenance cycle is based on "feeders" which is how wires move from one pole to another. Most utilities require contractors to have an ISA arborist in charge on their crews. SCL requires them to have an ISA certified arborist on each crew as well as power line clearance-qualified arborists. Seattle has been certified as a Tree Line USA city for nine years. All crews follow ANSI A300 and Z133 standards.

They trim trees for certain systems – primary, secondary, etc. – which have different voltages at different heights, so that means different types and levels of vegetation maintenance. They prune to ensure access to their equipment (so, no pruning for street lights.)

Transmission ROW maintenance program – manage these assets on a 2-year cycle. There are 657 miles of transmission ROW through King, Snohomish, Skagit, Whatcom and Pend Oreille counties. There are three primary drivers behind it: safe/reliable power transmission, NERC compliance, and integrated UVM. Integrated UVM is an attempt to manage the landscape to encourage compatible vegetation. The ROW maintenance group gets into very varied work: tree pruning and removal, invasive species management, ROW infrastructure maintenance/repair, storm response, wildfire prevention and mitigation.

New to the TROW maintenance program: heavily and increasingly invested in technology:
- GIS-based work management software
- UAVs integrated UVM
- Satellite remote-sensing for tree health and hazard ID
- LiDAR for clearances

Landscapes maintenance program – their primary role is substation maintenance (16 of them). Need to keep the interiors weed-free; many of the exteriors are historic landscapes. They maintain the landscapes at the 75+ properties they manage – mow, weed, plant, irrigate, integrated pest management. Other roles include snow response team, repair/mitigate landscape damage, special projects. Dave shared examples of major substation landscape projects. These exposed, hot environments include drought-tolerant and pollinator-friendly plant species.

Urban and Community Forestry program – this is a new program Dave developed. It's the only such program he's aware of that is within a public utility. He had a strong drive to develop it because of very strong resources behind it. Staffing includes a program lead, an arborist, and transmission sustainability forester. The intent is to be more intentional in who they engage and how they engage. The program will include the urban tree replacement program, the Tree Line USA certification, a pilot for private land tree pruning, Green Line community ROW stewardship project, TROW Stewardship Accreditation, community pollinator planting, citywide urban forestry/equity engagement.

Why is this kind of program important for an electric utility? Urban and community forestry work is equity work and that is incredibly important. They touch more trees than every other department combined, and utility ROWs are public green spaces. And, it is baked into electric utilities' value statements – Dave provided examples of quotes from the mission and vision statements from SCL, PG&E and Exelon Energy.

Questions and comments from Commissioners included:

- How much coordination is there between SCL's new Urban and Community Forestry program and the other city UF departments?
- Which community groups do they work with in the stewardship program?
- What vegetation is allowed under the lines like along the Chief Sealth Trail?
- What is the budget for the new Urban and Community Forestry program? There is no line-item budget for the program beyond the staffing.
- Is the technology referenced for doing tree health and hazard identification available for use citywide? The technology uses another sensor on the plane flying LiDAR that detects chlorophyll, and can tell levels as higher or lower, indicating tree health. Yes, it can be used in the city; more effective for broadleaf plants than conifers.
- On SCL easements where property owners live, is it the property owner's responsibility to manage vegetation, or SCL's?
- Are there situations where private property owners can hire their own arborists to prune street trees around wires? It's against the law for non-qualified personnel to come within 10 feet of a power line in doing tree work.

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 that the Land Use Committee will deal at tomorrow's meeting with updates in the Industrial zone. One of the provisions relates to some updates to the Comprehensive Plan that can be done on a yearly basis, and they don't include trees and vegetation. He encouraged folks to review the meeting materials and make comments as appropriate.

Hao made a clarification about the ROW data.

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

Meeting chat:
from Francisca to everyone: 3:06 PM
No comment thank you
from Bridget Moehring, FAIA to everyone: 3:07 PM
no comment, thank you.
from Steve Zemke to everyone: 3:13 PM
What about hiring Urban Forester approved in budget? Is there a timeline?
from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 3:13 PM
Can folks on their phones mute themselves?
from Jessica Hernandez to everyone: 3:14 PM
didnt raise my hand, so no. thank you.
from Becca Neumann to everyone: 3:15 PM
thanks!
from Toby Thaler to everyone: 3:23 PM
For the record: Our office believes the 85/100% impervious surface guarantee in LR and higher density zones will likely result in increase loss of trees/canopy percent.
from Toby Thaler to everyone: 3:24 PM
You may

from Steve Zemke to everyone: 3:35 PM
David Moerhing has done a lot of this alternative design review of projects over the years
from Francisca to everyone: 3:36 PM
Appreciate Stuart's insight re: real world scenarios. I am not at Stuart's level i.e. large scale development. I am however struggling and trying to stay positive currently. Thank you Stuart.
from Stuart Niven to everyone: 3:37 PM
Thank you Toby; your office sees this as it is. This level of hardscaping and coverage will impact adjacent properties also, which has not been considered on any level that I know of.
from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 3:46 PM
View Ridge also has views--the east side has very few trees overlooking Lake Washington.
from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 3:48 PM
This is incredibly valuable--thank you Hao.
from Chris Gaul to everyone: 3:49 PM
Thanks, Hao!
from Steve Zemke to everyone: 3:50 PM
Thanks for your work Hao!
from Steve Zemke to everyone: 3:51 PM
What is ratio trees planted by SDOT versus private property owners? estimate?
from Stuart Niven to everyone: 3:52 PM
Great presentation Hao
from Stuart Niven to everyone: 3:52 PM
Very informative
from Steve Zemke to everyone: 3:52 PM
Was 600trees total planted or just those by SDOT?
from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 3:55 PM
Municipal governments throughout the US plant/maintain street trees. There are economies of scale for pruning etc
from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:00 PM
Comp plan says for industrial areas - "Recognize the unique working character of industrial areas by keeping landscaping and street standards to a minimum to allow flexibility for industrial
activities, except along selected arterials where installing street trees and
providing screening and landscaping can offset impacts of new industrial
development in highly visible locations." It does not emphasize planting more trees. Land Use Committee meeting tomororrow does not propose changing this language,
from Hao Liang to everyone: 4:07 PM
@Steve, those trees include SDOT planted trees and private, contractor, and others platned trees
from Steve Zemke to everyone: 4:09 PM
Thanks Hao
from Lia Hall to everyone: 4:42 PM
Curious about which community groups you work with in the stewardship program.
Apart from that, I'm wondering what vegetation if any is allowed under the lines along Chief Sealth Trail for instance.
from Chris Gaul to everyone: 4:42 PM
Can a private tree service provider clear trees from power lines and telecom lines? Kudos on the substation landscaping!
from Francisca to everyone: 4:42 PM
Wow! I am so appreciative hearing this presentation! If a private homeowner sees a City tree being damaged, trucks parking under critical root zone consistently, dumping around the root collar, would this be your departments investigation?
from Lia Hall to everyone: 4:49 PM
Thank you, Dave. Chief Sealth Trail in the south end seems like it has many areas for opportunity to plant native shrubs and plants, decreasing the need to mow and providing benefits to wildlife and other residents.
from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 4:53 PM

Dave, can you speak to situations where private property owners prefer to hire their own arborists to prune street trees around wires? I am aware of one person who has made an agreement with SCL to coordinate this and wondered if is widespread.
from Chris Gaul to everyone: 4:58 PM
Great presentation!
from Joshua Morris to everyone: 4:58 PM
Thanks, Dave!
from Toby Thaler to everyone: 4:58 PM
Do any utilities uou're aware of shift money to utility to do that arborial service
from Steve Zemke to everyone: 5:02 PM
Issue of notifying of work. Seems to go to person on property, including renters but not to landlord.
from Chris Gaul to everyone: 5:03 PM
No, thanks.
from Sandy Shettler to everyone: 5:04 PM
This is such a good point, thank you Steve.
from Dave Bayard SCL to everyone: 5:04 PM
Hi Steve. You're right, it's beena bit of a sicky wickett for us. My folks don't have access to an up-to-date prop. owner dataset that they could work with on a house-by-house basis as they're notifying. The exception is for tree removals - we try harder to ensure the person signing off on a tree removal is the propery owner, not a renter.

Public input (additional comments received):