



**SEATTLE URBAN FORESTRY COMMISSION**

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

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

**Hao Liang** (Position 6 – Landscape Architect – ISA), Co-Chair

**Alicia Kellogg** (Position 2 – Urban Ecologist) • **David Baker** (Position 8 – Development)

**Nathan Collins** (Position 9 – Financial Analyst) • **Logan Woodyard** (Position 10 – Get Engaged)

**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 14, 2024, 3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

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

(206) 207-1700

Meeting number: 2480 460 5900

Meeting password: 1234

**Attending**

Commissioners

Josh Morris – Co-Chair

Becca Neumann – Co-Chair

Alicia Kellogg

David Baker

Nathan Collins

Logan Woodyard

Jessica Jones

Lia Hall

Absent- Excused

Hao Liang, Co-Chair

Staff

Patti Bakker – OSE

Guests

Public

Steve Zemke

Michael Oxman

June BlueSpruce

**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 he's been doing research on canopy cover and our ability to reach 30% canopy. Portland is approaching it by taking into account that trees are different sizes, heights and growth rates. They consider when planting trees that small trees have a 300 sq ft canopy, medium trees have 500 sq ft, and large trees have 1,000 sq ft. In using that definition, to go from 28.1 to 30% canopy by 2037 would require 44,000 large trees, 87,000 trees if medium. Also need to account for tree loss; if we continue to see the rate of loss we had in the last five years for the next 15 years, we would need an additional 33,000 large or 66,000 medium trees. Portland also calculates a "canopy factor" – incorporating height, spread, and growth rate – and a "growth rate factor". Canopy volume in addition to canopy spread. Reaching 30% canopy incorporates many factors.

**Chair, Committees, and Coordinator report:**

Patti noted that Jessica Hernandez has indicated the need to step down from her position on the UFC. OSE is currently planning for working with new Council staff and the Mayor's office to fill the vacant UFC positions.

Patti also noted the timing of and planning for major upcoming issues/plans:

- The draft Comp Plan and draft EIS are due to be released in early March, so the UFC should be prepared to be briefed on it and work to review and understand the draft plan/EIS. We will hold time on the March 13 agenda for this item and the UFC may consider a special meeting(s) to work on reviewing and developing feedback on the Plan.
- The draft Move Seattle Levy is also planned to be released soon, and there likewise here might be a need for special meeting(s) for review and consideration of that.

Josh noted that he talked with CM Strauss and CM Moore's office, and some Commissioners met with CM Morales's staff. He shared information about some things that happened with trees during the ice storm in January in Portland that caused some backlash around trees and Portland's ordinance and administration of their policies and permitting.

**Adoption of January 3 meeting notes**

**Action: a motion to adopt the January 3 meeting notes as written was made, seconded and approved.**

**Wildland-Urban interface regulations – briefing and discussion**

Josh provided an overview of the draft Seattle Wildland-Urban Interface code that is set to take effect in March 2024. The code sets a process to define and determine areas that fall within the wildland-urban interface (WUI) areas, taking into account both density of structures and levels of vegetation. He shared graphics illustrating the various areas of wildlands, intermix, interface and urban areas. He shared an example in Seattle of Seward Park, the peninsula of which is mostly wildland, with an intermix area that connects to the mainland. He shared the Seattle WUI map and noted that there are no interface areas within Seattle, but there are intermix areas; 4.9% of Seattle (4 sq mi) is considered intermix, and there are 2,200 structures within those intermix areas.

The defensible space requirements are the most pertinent to the UFC. They include:

- 30 foot minimum space all directions from structure, or to lot line:
  - Within this space, trees are allowed, provided there is a 10-foot horizontal distance between crowns of trees and between crowns of trees to structures.
- No trees/flammable vegetation within five feet of structures.
- When defensible space requirements result in tree or vegetation removal that is not permitted by other codes, such as ECA or the TPO, consult with SDCl staff to determine compliance path.

Josh created an example scenario using a sample screenshot within Seattle, noting building footprints and 5' buffers around them and locations of trees. He identified which of the trees would need to be removed or pruned for the homeowner to be in compliance with the new code. Within this scenario/screenshot:

- Around 49 trees total in the WUI
- 7 trees (14%) are out of compliance with defensible space requirements, so compliance would mean removal
- 7 trees (14%) are close enough to the 5-foot buffer that it is unclear whether removal or pruning would result in compliance
- 16 trees (33%) would likely need to be pruned to be in compliance

The new code will only apply to new construction projects, so removal of existing trees won't be required, but could have an impact on Seattle trees long-term.

The Washington State Building Council has been considering adopting portions of the International Wildland Urban Interface Code. The state legislature asked them to adopt only a few portions of the code, but they wanted to include the WUI also, which concerns some conservation organizations, who are thinking that specific requirements established at the statewide level might not be the most appropriate way to establish the requirements and that more discretion for local jurisdictions might make more sense.

Questions and discussion included:

- Drier conditions can lead to the assumption that trees are a danger. But that is not always true since tree groves stay cooler and retain moisture.
- The WUI map is a guiding tool; it's up to the applicant to determine if they are in an intermix area.
- What are other jurisdictions doing? There is a Senate Bill being considered that advises on this. Some are waiting to see what happens with that.

### **Subgroup reports**

#### **- Tree Protection Ordinance**

Lia provided an overview of the meeting with Councilmember (CM) Morales's staff. They indicated they are amenable to relying on the UFC for appointment recommendations. The group discussed ways to strengthen the relationship between the CM and the UFC. The CM's staff also noted that this is the largest turnover in Council in Seattle history. There is both good opportunity and a need to educate the new members.

The subgroup also had a conversation with Lauren Urgenson, which included noting that the UFC should be aligned on key points to convey to Council members. Lauren noted other ways to be involved in advancement of the city's urban forestry goals outside of the TPO, including the Comp Plan and Move Seattle Levy.

#### **- Climate**

Becca shared slides she put together on tree safety margins related to climate impacts.

Questions and discussion included:

- o [Lia comment] Native species needs; need for diversity
- o This information can help identify which of our existing tree species need more care/monitoring/support.
- o Should also consider that native wildlife species rely on food sources – look at characteristics of the robust/non-robust species and what they can provide in terms of wildlife habitat.

- The SDOT tree selector doesn't have climate considerations in it; consider how to recommend adding that.
  - We try to make up for ways in which we've impacted the environment, but we really don't know what the effects will be. We can only do our best to consider conservation and all the vegetation we have – is there a future in which we are happy to have Himalayan blackberry? We don't know what the impacts will be long-term. There are many ripple effects in considering preferred tree species – e.g., if we choose smaller trees to fit under utility lines, they don't sequester as much carbon.
- **Budget**  
Nathan and Josh have been looking at the SLI report and are preparing a presentation on it for a future meeting. They are also setting up a meeting with the City Budget Office to discuss the budget process and ways of understanding the city budget and making recommendations.
  - **Diversity and Equity**  
Alicia and Josh started an inventory of everything the UFC does so that all of the UFC activities can be evaluated from a diversity and equity lens. There are 16 items on the list; this provides an opportunity to evaluate even things that don't seem like they would have much impact (e.g., meetings are 2 hours, should we incorporate a break?) Discussion areas include:
    - Accessibility – ways to improve accessibility for Commissioners and the public. How can we make it easier for people to attend meetings? How can we make it easier for people to be Commissioners?
    - Identifying neighborhoods that don't currently get a lot of attention around urban forestry issues – South Park, Georgetown? Potentially have Commissioners go to their meetings to share what the UFC does and give them someone to share their input with.
    - How can the UFC leverage social media opportunities for having a presence in the public sphere, and reaching people who aren't already connected to UF work/happenings?

The subgroup's meetings are on Wednesdays, and they are open to more Commissioner participation. They will develop a list of potential changes to UFC protocols based on this analysis.

Questions and discussion areas included noting that it would be great for the UFC to not be an echo-chamber, but instead have the UFC hear from more folks in the community.

#### **Bylaws update to amend meeting schedule**

Patti reviewed the discussions around amending the UFC schedule to avoid conflict with the new schedule of the City Council's Land Use Committee. The amendment changes the UFC meeting schedule from the first Wednesday of the month to the second Wednesday.

**Action: A motion to adopt the amendment to the Bylaws was made, seconded and approved.**

#### **2023 Annual Report**

Patti shared the draft 2023 Annual Report and reviewed the process of developing it to date. Since the last meeting where the initial draft content was reviewed and edited, Josh and Hao both provided suggested input. Josh reviewed the changes that he made in the content and Commissioners discussed the content and status of the report.

**Action: A motion to adopt the 2023 Annual Report as prepared 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:**

Michael Oxman expressed the opinion that the annual report avoided any controversy, and there was controversy that happened last year.

June BlueSpruce noted that there will be a public hearing tomorrow on TreePAC's petition to the Growth Management Hearings Board regarding the tree protection ordinance. She also noted that some advocates have been talking with Councilmembers, some of whom are familiar with tree issues, so there is optimism that they may take positive action

Steve Zemke noted regarding the hearing, that they are trying to push the city to get to achieving the 30% canopy goal. Regarding the budget, he noted that the One Seattle Tree Fund is not in place yet and urged the UFC to ask the Mayor about the status of that. He also recommended looking at overlapping tree responsibilities to reduce costs, such as not having three departments prune street trees. He noted that OSE will be giving a report to City Council on Friday; Jessyn Farrell will be speaking on the things that the Office of Sustainability and Environment does. He asked if there can be a report on the status of the tree tracking at the next meeting – who is tracking tree replacement and trees planted by private property owners.

**Adjourn:** The meeting was adjourned at 4:43 PM.

**Meeting chat:**

from Lia Hall to everyone: 3:13 PM

<https://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/2024/01/editorial-portland-should-put-punitive-tree-permit-requirement-on-ice.html>

from Joshua Morris to everyone: 3:13 PM

Thank you, Lia!

from Lia Hall to everyone: 3:33 PM

<https://climatecheck.com/>

from 24804605900 to everyone: 3:38 PM

Can Lia speak up? For some reason she's hard to hear.

from 24804605900 to everyone: 3:42 PM

Would this be a good time to resurrect the UFC's 2019 draft as a comparison document? Many of its points and suggested provisions were not addressed last spring.

from Joshua Morris to everyone: 3:43 PM

^ That is a good idea

from steve zemke to everyone: 3:52 PM

Native trees very important to native birds

from 24804605900 to everyone: 3:52 PM

The resilience of groves could be emphasized--connected communities expand the ranges of heat and drought tolerance.

from steve zemke to everyone: 3:53 PM

Evergreens important to reduce stormwater runoff in rainy season

from Lia Hall to everyone: 3:56 PM

I've noticed a lot of sequoias dying back from the top

from Joshua Morris to everyone: 3:57 PM

<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/city.of.seattle.transportation/viz/SDOTTreeSelector/Dashboard>

from 24804605900 to everyone: 3:57 PM

Agree with Josh re Doug Tallamy--can we help highlight his take-homes? And thank you Lia for the insightful analysis, and everyone for your amazing hard work and persevering through so many challenges. I have to drop off at 4 so will watch the recording when it's up. Take care!

from Becca Neumann to everyone: 4:03 PM

Here is the link to the manuscript: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-022-01465-8>

from steve zemke to everyone: 4:03 PM

What is status of One Seattle Tree Fund of Mayor Harrell - collection of in lieu fees so far?

from Michael Oxman to everyone: 4:09 PM

Are citizens allowed to attend subgroup meetings?

from Michael Oxman to everyone: 4:11 PM

Has any citizen ever attended a subgroup meeting?

from steve zemke to everyone: 4:11 PM

Budget - look at pluses and minuses of creating a Climate and Environment Dept with an Urban Forestry Division

from Joshua Morris to everyone: 4:11 PM

Micheal: Yes

from Joshua Morris to everyone: 4:11 PM

\*Michael

from June BlueSpruce to everyone: 4:13 PM

I came late to the meeting. Did anyone announce the hearing with the Growth Management Hearing Board on the petition submitted by TreePAC, the Trees and People Coalition, and the Duwamish Valley Neighborhood Preservation Coalition? It's tomorrow, 9 am-1 pm. Log in information:

from Michael Oxman to everyone: 4:13 PM

Seattle Department of Natural Resources was proposed in this video in 2014.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xgOykI9jzk>

from June BlueSpruce to everyone: 4:14 PM

Log in for hearing: Meeting ID: 786 327 0263

Passcode: 101623

or call (253) 215-8782

from Joshua Morris to everyone: 4:14 PM

Thanks, June! We hadn't shared that info. Would you like to share more at the ending public comment?

from June BlueSpruce to everyone: 4:15 PM

Sure. What time would that be?

from Joshua Morris to everyone: 4:15 PM

Reviewing the annual report is our last agenda item, so would be following this discussion. I can also share if you need to log off.

from Michael Oxman to everyone: 4:19 PM

Additional Highlights section of Annual Report should include press reports of commission membership irregularities.

from Michael Oxman to everyone: 4:24 PM

Rosy picture devoid of any controversy.

from Joshua Morris to everyone: 4:35 PM

Have heard that no developers have yet opted for fee-in lieu...

**Public input (additional comments received):**