

Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

2013 Annual Report

The Urban Forestry Commission continued to fulfill its mandate to advise the Mayor and City Council on policies and regulations governing the protection, management, and conservation of trees and vegetation in the City of Seattle. The Commission continues to make recommendations to encourage City decision-making to recognize the urban forest as a critical piece of our urban infrastructure.

2013 was a very productive year with the highlight that Seattle now has an updated Urban Forest Stewardship Plan that has been adopted by City Council.

The Commission's primary objectives are:

- To support implementation of the Urban Forest Stewardship Plan's goals:
 1. Create an ethic of stewardship for the urban forest among City staff, community organizations, businesses, and residents.
 2. Strive to replace and enhance specific urban forest functions and benefits when trees are lost, and achieve a net increase in the urban forest functions and related environmental, economic, and social benefits.
 3. Expand canopy cover to 30 percent by 2027.
 4. Increase health and longevity of the urban forest by removing invasive species and improving species and age diversity.
- To provide feedback and recommendations to City Council and the Mayor on specific policy actions that will ensure the long-term health and viability of Seattle's urban forest; and
- To provide a forum for public dialogue to assist the Commission in its advisory role.

2013 Accomplishments

Urban Forest Stewardship Plan

The Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) was created in 2007 to recommend tangible measures to preserve and expand Seattle's urban forest. The UFMP's overarching goal is to increase city tree canopy from 23 to 30 percent by 2037. The Urban Forest Inter-departmental team (IDT) working on the Plan update continued to work closely with the Commission and with City Council to get feedback throughout the update process. The Commission reviewed the new Urban Forest Stewardship Plan and issued a recommendation to add a new Action Agenda item regarding public tree maintenance. The Commission also issued a letter of support for the Plan's adoption.

DPD Proposed Tree Regulations

The Commission had originally programmed a good part of its 2013 work plan to continue working with DPD on its proposal for new tree regulations. Unfortunately, due to staffing issues, DPD halted work in 2013. The Commission hopes that 2014 will be the year in which DPD will finally update its tree protection ordinance for trees on private property.

Tree Preservation on Private Property

Tree Preservation Protocols for Small Development Projects

The Commission heard concerns from several members of the public regarding the loss of trees in small development projects. Specifically the concern was regarding trees that are shown in permitted plans to be retained, yet once the project is under construction, trees are either outright removed or effectively removed by damage. The Commission issued a recommendation proposing changes to DPD's plan review process, fines for damage or removal of trees, mitigation alternatives, and staff training.

Small lot development in Single-Family Zones

DPD staff sent a letter to Councilmember Conlin regarding small lot development in single family zones. After reviewing the letter, the Commission concluded that the preliminary recommendations contained in it will allow appropriate opportunities for tree planting and canopy coverage consistent with the overall goals of the UFSP. The Commission added a recommendation related to DPD's Tree Point System. The Commission recommended that the tree point system be amended to require one point for every 200 SF after the first 2,000 SF of lot area, expect that a minimum of two tree points shall be required regardless of lot size to ensure that all single family lots contribute to the City canopy coverage goals.

Tree Preservation on Public Property

Position Paper on Trees and Views

Considering Seattle's topography and the attractiveness of private views available, the desire to prune public trees for views is understandable. However, the private benefits of views can be at odds with public benefits of trees. The Commission believes that tree/view conflicts have the potential to increase. Because of this, pruning of public trees to maintain private views is a topic that deserves a clear and concise policy. The Commission produced a position paper with specific criteria that need to be met before public trees are pruned for private views.

City Fruit

Non-profit organization City Fruit has effectively partnered with several City departments, including Parks, Neighborhoods, Human Services, Public Utilities, Transportation, and the Office of Sustainability. These partnerships have provided 45,000 pounds of fruit for human consumption, planting 200 fruit trees, and train more than 600 Seattle residents in fruit tree maintenance. City Fruit has also leveraged more than 1,400 volunteer hours from the community to maintain and map fruit trees in nine City parks and 1,000 private properties. The Commission recommended City Fruit's leadership to develop a business plan in support of their intent to obtain a more sustainable, large-scale model. The Commission issued a letter of recommendation for City Departments to consider formalizing a partnership with City Fruit.

Urban Forestry Funding

As part of the budget process, the Commission issued a letter of recommendation to City Council urging them to fund key elements of the UFSP. Funding recommendations included:

- Increasing the Green Seattle Partnership's budget to a total of \$3.5M per year;
- Adding \$1M to the annual budget for street tree and Parks tree maintenance;

- Increasing Seattle reLeaf's budget by \$160,000 in support of the Tree Ambassador program (\$60,000) and the Trees for Neighborhoods program (\$100,000);
- Increasing DPD's budget to provide \$200,000 for site inspectors; and
- Allocating \$50,000 to City partnerships with non-profit City Fruit.

Urban Forestry Commission/Urban Forest Inter-departmental Team joint meeting

The Commission and the Urban Forest Inter-departmental Team had their 2013 extended work session at Camp Long. The meeting goal this year was to use a creative exercise to continue building rapport between the Commission and IDT members. This work session was a good opportunity for the groups to work on proposing creative funding mechanisms to support Seattle's urban forest efforts.

Commission Membership

Two Commissioners terms came to an end: John Floberg (Position 1) and John Small (Position 2). The Commission is currently recruiting for these positions. Peg Staeheli was elected 2014 Chair with Tom Early serving as 2014 vice-chair. The Commission voted to re-appoint Erik Rundell to Position #9.

Conclusion (To be provided by John Floberg)

2012 Commission Members:

John Floberg, Chair: Wildlife Biologist—Position #1
 John Small, Vice-chair: Urban Ecologist —Position #2
 Gordon Bradley: University Representative (UW)—Position #3
 Peg Staeheli: Hydrologist —Position #4
 Leif Fixen: Arborist —Position #5
 Tom Early: Landscape Architect—Position #6
 Matt Mega, Chair: NGO Representative—Position #7
 Jeff Reibman: Development Community Representative —Position #8
 Erik Rundell: Planner—Position #9

Contact:

Additional information about the Urban Forestry Commission can be found at ww.seattle.gov/trees, or by contacting:

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