



The Arboretum and Botanical Garden Committee

100 Dexter Avenue North, Seattle, WA 98109

July 7, 2015

The Honorable Edward B. Murray, Mayor, City of Seattle
The Honorable Sally Bagshaw, Member, Seattle City Council
Seattle City Hall
600 4th Avenue
Seattle, WA 98124

Mr. Leif Fixen, Chair, Urban Forestry Commission
City of Seattle, Office of Sustainability and Environment
PO Box 94729
Seattle, WA 98124

Dear Mayor Murray, Councilmember Bagshaw, and Chair Fixen,

The Arboretum and Botanical Garden Committee (ABGC) respects the Urban Forestry Commission's interests, perspectives, and concerns as stated in the letter dated June 3, 2015. Seattle's trees and tree canopy are vital to our City's long-term livability, and all of us on the ABGC admire and appreciate the Commission's focus on and advocacy for them. As we move forward with the Arboretum Loop Trail, it is timely to reiterate the special mission fulfilled by the Washington Park Arboretum (WPA). With this letter we seek to strengthen our understanding of each other's values and missions and our partnership for a green and sustainable city.

The Arboretum's History, Purposes, and Management

The Washington Park Arboretum, a unique destination in the City of Seattle, has a significant history. A number of documents provide background on its history and operation, starting with the 1934 agreement (attached) between the City of Seattle and the University of Washington. Other documents such as the Historic Review (<http://depts.washington.edu/uwbg/docs/arbhistory.pdf>) and 2001 Master Plan (http://depts.washington.edu/uwbg/docs/WPA_MP_Implementation_MasterPlan2004.pdf) also guide the management of the WPA. These documents chronicle the establishment of the Arboretum and the ABGC as an advisory committee to help manage the Arboretum.

The ABGC is made up of three members from the City, two of whom are mayoral appointees and one is a staff person; three members from the University of Washington; two members from the Arboretum Foundation, a support organization; and one appointee by the Governor. Since the establishment of the 2001 Master Plan, a key role for the ABGC is to provide oversight of its



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implementation. The ABGC meets monthly to fulfill this role. Also, out of the Master Plan came the establishment of the Master Plan Implementation Group (MPIG) that meets monthly to advise the ABGC on capital projects. This committee is made up of two representatives from the three previously mentioned organizations.

Education, Conservation, and Recreation are the stated goals for the WPA as affirmed in the 2001 Master Plan. The Seattle Parks and Recreation Department (SPR) and the University of Washington Botanic Gardens (UWBG) continuously strive to attain these goals. Our education programs are thriving with more than 10,000 students participating in them, including the Fiddleheads Program (outdoor pre-school), the Saplings Program (elementary and middle school), summer camps (a 10-week program), and adult education classes. The “arboretum function” conserves the UWBG’s Living Plant Collections. This is a curated function operated since the 1930s that currently contain 11,033 specimens representing more than 4,000 distinct taxa. Of those, 2,308 are of known wild origin, increasing their value to global conservation of species.

The 230-acre Washington Park Arboretum is one of the most important tree collections in North America. It is jointly managed by the UWBG (plant collections) and SPR (park functions), with support from the Arboretum Foundation. WPA is in the top five national arboreta and botanic gardens collections in maples, magnolias, the pine family, hollies, mountain ash, oaks, and viburnums. It is currently a member of the North American Plant Collections Consortium (NAPCC), managed by the United States Department of Agriculture, for maples, oaks, magnolias, and hollies. The latest additions to the collection can be seen in the Pacific Connections gardens with tree species from China, New Zealand, Chile, and Australia.

The WPA is more than just an urban forest, although it may function as such. It is a living museum of plants with native Northwest trees providing a common thread between sub-areas of the WPA and creating microclimates for the collections. There are a curator, mapping system, and database that support all the collections. Please see the attached excerpt from the book by Dr. Don Rakow, Cornell Plantations, on the definition of an arboretum. There are also two walking trail loops and a third will be available once the Arboretum Loop Trail is installed.

Access to the WPA is “ungated,” so visitation numbers are inexact. However, we conduct surveys and extrapolate to estimate annual visitation to be approximately 300,000 people. The surveys also tell us that many visitors are from other countries.

In staying true to our mission of conservation, education and recreation, we continually work to balance these sometimes competing interests. With regard to the Arboretum Loop Trail, we believe that providing access to a currently inaccessible part of the WPA by adding a multi-use trail will successfully expand recreational access while maintaining our conservation and education commitments.



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Our Response to Concerns Stated by the Urban Forestry Commission

The Urban Forestry Commission cited two concerns in its letter of June 3rd. The first was with the number of trees, particularly native species, to be removed. By definition, the Arboretum is more than native trees and tree canopy; it focuses on the plant collections from all over the world. The WPA has roughly 10,000 trees (26,000 plants in total); 168 trees, or 1.68%, will be removed for the trail project. Two new trees will be planted for every one removed. This is not necessarily sound horticulture from an arboretum collections perspective, but we thought it important to achieve City guidelines for tree replacement in more conventional park spaces. While habitat loss is always of great concern, UWBG has devoted more than 600 hours and SPR has contributed more than 700 hours analyzing ways to limit the impacts of the trail project and minimize the number of trees to be removed. Many have been moved and others have been propagated for replacement.

The second concern raised in the Commission's letter was the tenure of the Arboretum Master Plan and, to a degree, the role of the WPA in a growing city. The 2001 Master Plan is reviewed and analyzed by both the ABGC and the MPIG monthly and continues to serve as an excellent guiding document for a literally slow-growing set of projects. Each committee meets once per month and the UWBG's Curation Committee meets every two weeks. Ongoing assessment of the priorities is one of the main purposes of each of these three groups. The tree policy is constantly reviewed by the Curation Committee, the group responsible for the management of the Collections, and in consultation with the ABGC and MPIG. All trees are regularly reviewed individually as to their health and purpose in the WPA.

We would like to extend an offer to meet with the Urban Forestry Commission, perhaps in a work session, to discuss the WPA, what an arboretum is, and how we function. We would also like to offer to host one of the regular meetings of the Urban Forestry Commission in the Graham Visitors Center at the Washington Park Arboretum. And we are available to schedule a walking tour at any time. Please feel free to call me at (206) 324.2061 or email me at jfalconer Reid@comcast.net, or call the ABGC's coordinator, Rachel Acosta, at (206) 684.5066.

Thank you for your leadership and attention to Seattle's most valuable and irreplaceable assets.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Reid". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jim Reid
ABGC Chair