

Washington Native Plant Society

Appreciate, Conserve, and Study Our Native Flora

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Subject: City of Seattle Tree Ordinance

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Dear Mayor Durkan and Seattle City Councilmembers,

The Washington Native Plant Society commends you for your interest in Seattle's trees and urges you to work with the Urban Forestry Commission to update Seattle's tree protection ordinance this year. Our members and leaders have tracked Seattle's progress toward effective tree protection as the urban tree canopy has continued to disappear. Further delays of an effective tree protection ordinance increase the detrimental impacts of tree loss on our state's largest city, a city many of us call home and that Washingtonians treasure. Losing our urban forest means losing the native plants that define the city.

Native trees and shrubs within Seattle's urban forest create a strong, positive sense of place reflective of the Puget Sound region's natural richness. These green oases also contribute to a healthy environment for people; they provide restorative, educational, and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Our hemlocks, firs, and cedars provide habitat for birds and other wildlife that are disappearing in alarming numbers. Exceptional and Heritage Trees, grouped and individual, are the irreplaceable foundation of the urban forest. These established trees add economic value to urban neighborhoods. These trees ensure that neighborhoods are livable.

Trees are a frontline defense against and mitigation for climate change. Over the next 50 years, even with aggressive emissions reductions, temperatures will more than double Seattle's days of extreme heat¹. The presence of trees reduces local temperatures. Trees are a cost-effective

¹ Marcia Brown. Personal communication. Anthropogenic Warming and Public Health Consequences in Seattle and Spokane. University of Washington. 6/24/2019.

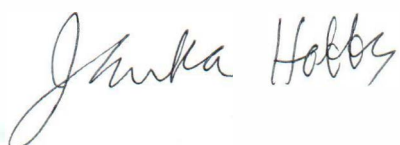
way of cleaning smoke from the air². With increased smoke from wildfires, it is imperative to preserve and protect mature trees within our state's cities. Trees also help control the stormwater resulting from the heavier rainfalls. We need to increase the urban canopy, not stand by while it dwindles to nothing.

Protecting trees within urban areas contributes to environmental justice within the city as well as to regional ecologic health. Mature trees benefit the most vulnerable – residents without access to shelter and air-conditioning, children walking to school, and elders out exercising. Protecting trees does not preclude dense development. Vancouver, to the north, has both significantly more trees and higher population density³. It would be a shame for Seattle, the Emerald City, to lose its trees. We must protect the trees that we have now, as well as planting saplings that will shade future generations.

Among Seattle residents there is strong support for a robust urban forest, and for government that protects the city's exceptional and heritage trees. Washington Native Plant Society members, many of whom volunteer in city parks and green spaces, understand that the tree canopy contributes to the public good and can't be quickly replaced. As our member Michael Marsh so aptly put it, "An exact parallel to removing a 70-year old tree and replacing it with two saplings would be replacing an experienced City Council Member with two 3-year olds." We trust that you understand. The current rate of loss is unacceptable and fails to take into account the many benefits of trees.

The Washington Native Plant Society and our Central Puget Sound chapter urge you to slow and reverse Seattle's tree loss by updating the tree protection ordinance this year.

Respectfully,



Janka Hobbs
Central Puget Sound Chapter Chair
Washington Native Plant Society



Van Bobbitt, President
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Becky Chaney, Conservation Chair,
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² McDonald, Rob, Tim Kroeger et al. Planting Healthy Air A global analysis of the role of urban trees in addressing particulate matter pollution and extreme heat. The Nature Conservancy. 2016.

³ Treepedia. World Economic Forum. <http://senseable.mit.edu/treepedia/cities/seattle> accessed 7/12/2019