

## SEATTLE URBAN FORESTRY COMMISSION

John Floberg, Chair • John Small, Vice-Chair  
Gordon Bradley • Tom Early • Leif Fixen • Matt Mega • Jeff Reibman • Erik Rundell • Peg Staeheli

*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*

**August 14, 2013**

### Meeting Notes

Seattle Municipal Tower Room 2750  
700 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Seattle  
3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

#### Attending

##### Commissioners

John Floberg (JF) - chair  
John Small (JS) – vice-chair  
Tom Early (TE)  
Leif Fixen (LF)  
Erik Rundell (ER)  
Peg Staeheli (PS)

##### Staff

Sandra Pinto de Bader (SPdB) - OSE  
Phyllis Shulman (PSh) – CM Conlin’s Office  
Brennon Staley (BS) - DPD

##### Public

Steve Zemke

#### Absent- Excused

Gordon Bradley (GB)  
Matt Mega (MM)  
Jeff Reibman (JR)

**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>**

#### Call to Order

##### Chair report

JF – we are moving forward with the adoption of the Urban Forest Stewardship Plan. The Commission participated in the update of the plan starting in 2011 when the Commission wrote a letter to Council calling for the adoption of the plan.

There was a briefing to Council this morning and Tom represented the Commission.

TE – CMs were very appreciative of the effort and I expect them to move it to full council for vote.

PSh – we were late in the agenda but we were able to get through the whole thing even though the meeting was running late. Council proposed a revision to the Resolution and focus on several specific agenda items from the plan. CM Burgess proposed an amendment to Section 1 of the Resolution to say: “It is anticipated that action on individual plan recommendations will be considered by the Seattle City Council after a more complete analysis of each recommendation’s costs and benefits to the public and private sectors as part of future policy and budget decisions.”

CM Burgess is very supportive. Framework plans usually get the same treatment in terms of amendments to the resolution. The more clearly we can convey specifics in terms of implementation of the action agenda the easier it will be for Council to make decisions about urban forestry issues.

JS – how do I bring up comments to Council.

PSh – if it's as an individual, email me your comments.

JF – City Fruit wrote a letter of thanks for the Commission's support. They will be developing a business plan with revenue sources and needs to share with the City. I wanted to share also the Seattle Times article in the Sunday paper (tree love) – Pacific NW magazine.

### **Urban Forest Stewardship Plan funding conversation – Phyllis**

JF – how would you want to have this conversation?

PSh – The UFSP will be voted on mid-September. Before this budget cycle, Richard is interested to see if there is anything he could either protect or add to the budget this year. We'll hear from the Mayor in mid-September. We will analyze the proposal and see if there are any cuts related to UF and what are some of our priorities for the next biennium.

The resolution is calling for departments to tell us more about the actions that are being undertaken. What things have you thought about that you think would be helpful, based on the priorities in the UFSP that we should be implemented in this next budget cycle.

Council members have a variety of interests and you don't always get all that you want. We don't add money to the budget but we might be able to re-arrange.

JF – I'd like to hear from commissioners in terms of ideas or how to frame this funding discussion.

JS – there are some specific rate-based programs that derive the most benefit from trees: storm water, keeping transmission lines clear. The bulk of the money is spent in clearing lines and the bulk benefit is in the storm water piece. Understanding and communicating to rate-based programs whether the way they are spending funds in UF is the most efficient or not. I think SCL should remove large trees under power lines instead of continue to prune them. We have talked about the need of having an urban forester or a technical person that could work out if what we are spending money on makes sense across departments.

JF – the discussion we had on pruning cycles last week, could also benefit from some sort of analysis to get at the economic benefit over the long-term view, because we have a sense that there is a missed opportunity there.

TE – the monitoring aspect of the plan – by monitoring you can gain efficiencies by understanding how money is being spent on the UF. It's a pretty complex problem. A shorter answer, reLeaf is a great place to put additional funding. It's highly underfunded.

PSh – does it need additional position or other funding?

TE – both.

Peg – or a different way to look at it. As an evolution, the program might not have the best model for growth.

PSh – one of the core strategies of the plan is outreach and engagement. reLeaf is one of the places where we can do this. WE have SDOT that engages people when street permits are issued (that's when they provide education). There is a variety of engagement efforts in different departments. Part of the plan is to strengthen our outreach and education. If we set up the reLeaf with the intention that it be that single point of contact what does the program need to be able to do that.

JS – it makes sense to use them as a tool funded in part by SCL , SDOT and get the message of the right tree in the right place. I can see reLeaf going to the homeowner and giving them trees and teaching them to care for them so that they grow, thrive and grow in the appropriate location. A huge percentage of our trees are maxing out of their spaces.

JF – we've been talking about outreach and engagement. When I went to the reLeaf site there is also a regulation button. People experience city government through regulation.

Peg – I'm trying to think about that urban forester and tying that to re-Leaf. I'm a bit confused in the mix. That's a re-brand of re-leaf. We never got there.

JS – reLeaf as the exiting function of the City that gets the closest to having more trees on the ground. We are going to reach our canopy cover goal by planting.

Peg – I don't agree. I don't think that statement in our urban streets and urban neighborhoods, we are not going to get there by planting. We need to have a mechanism to get the trees that are already there get bigger. Re-branding is needed, strategic plan.

LF -being in SPU is a step in the right direction.

PSh – the intent is to have reLeaf be that but it doesn't have the capacity or the mandate. Overall I'm hearing that we need a strategic plan for outreach and education that has to do with all our trees, not just SDOT or SCL. There should be a cohesive approach with a common thread. To fulfill the mandate of the UFSP we need to know how to take the next step for outreach and education. We don't have the capacity to do this in-house... we might need consultant money to augment the IDT effort. Would it make sense to maybe in year two increase budget for re-Leaf.

Peg – if you are going to have an approach... I would ask that the first year has a staffing increase as well. Can then flip to maintenance? That's the opposite side of planting and that is growing the trees that we already have. I just came back from Tokyo and I can tell there is money being spent on increasing canopy. Columnar trees are not canopy, they are meant to grow next to tall buildings. We need a new crew (of a pruning contract).

JS – my experience with SCL contractors hasn't been good.

LF – that goes back to the manager that is running the crew. I'd like to go to a zone pruning which is dictated by the budget you have.

PS – we could come up with numbers and then decide whether to do it in-house or through a contract.

PSh – can we get additional pruning now (we are not going to catch up with the pruning cycle). Anything we can do to increase it would be great. Maybe what we do is ask for a SLI to explore different efficiency models for pruning and come back with a plan that could show how we could get more efficient (without adding money). Another SLI that would say what it would take to catch up.

JS – I would expand maintenance to ask each department to see how they can protect trees first, then planting and then removals that are unavoidable. Maintenance is the greatest piece. Ask departments to look at that range of options. Also maybe, reLeaf becoming this mitigation strategy.

PSh – for budget process we need to be very focused in order to get support from councilmembers and departments. It doesn't help if we get too broad.

TE – in terms of tree protection – additional funding for our inspectors to have them go out with the staff arborist to look at tree sites to look at ways for tree protection to go better for development sites.

Peg – R7 strikes me as needing more funding.

Brennon – if it's in-house training it doesn't require additional funding.

### **Regulation vs. Voluntary Action – conversation**

Peg – I think this was meant to be brainstorming.

Erik – land use regulations based on what happens on a property affects the community (even if trees are on private property). Small incremental actions have large impacts. It makes sense to regulate private property. Voluntary action is difficult to mandate. There would be more political push back from regulations.

Leif – I lean more towards regulation. The big thing is you tie it to ecosystems services. Don't stop people from removing the tree in their backyard but if they do remove it then they need to replace the function lost. Trees are not just decoration. I don't think you can do that with voluntary action.

JS – I think that regulation without outreach or an attempt to sway public opinion is not going to amount to much. Ideally, the city as a whole is proud of the urban forest and want to see it thrive. I don't get a great sense of the city that they are selling the public of the benefits. There are conflicting uses (solar power, gardens, etc.) you have to provide reasons why trees are good. Understanding that trees are a shared asset even if they are on private property is important. That's part of the message that is missing right now. There is a need for outreach.

Tom – I believe that regulations work when they allow for people to manage their land as they see fit within certain boundaries. Most people see that there are diminishing values if the regulation require additional amounts of mitigation. I do believe trees need to be protected city-wide. Your contribution is to keep it, replace it, or manage it. Regulation is important because otherwise it can be eroded depending on many of situations.

JF – I think the voluntary aspect, we have not yet scratched the surface. Regulation is not communicated well, we have poor data on the benefits of trees, we need a huge research component to start sharing the message of all of these wonderful benefits trees provide. Still have the backup of the regulation once outreach has been done.

Peg – I think we forgot that funding, if we fund good research of Seattle, that would go a long way, our conditions in the Puget Sound are quite. Ecosystems values are not supported enough for urban conditions. It would be easier to have incentive action with additional research to better understand the benefits. We fine people for speeding, we ticket people for parking in the wrong places, we are not a non-enforcement society. What I'm hearing everybody say is that we want a balance. But when it comes to the big trees, we won't save them with incentives because you can't replace a large tree with incentives. We don't respect and value the big trees. Maybe there is a way to manage this by neighborhood. You have to compensate people that have the big trees.

JF – I went to Portland and saw plaques in trees that gave me a better understanding of the importance of those trees.

PS – I thought it would be great to talk about this so we know where the bar is before we look at the ordinance that is coming down from DPD. It's hard to see that a tree that I worked on saving is coming out because we regulated retention but not maintenance to keep the tree healthy.

TE – I do on-call arborist work in Medina. They have a very strict code and everybody hates it. But after they go through it and they finish their development everyone stands and defends it because it maintains their community. It institutes the value of a community, they might not agree with it but they respect it. They enjoy the community, that's why they bought a house there.

Brennon – I have a couple of thoughts. Incentives that work are those that with small cost leverage a big benefit. The small things like the trees giveaways, plaques for heritage trees, coupons, have big benefits. On the regulations side they only work when 90% of people agree that's the right thing to do and it helps the 10% of people act accordingly. My experience is that when people go through it they are still angry about it. It's not whether regulation is good or bad but what can you actually achieve with it. When you are regulating trees, there is only so much you can achieve. If someone doesn't want a tree the tree will die (cut it, not water it, not plant it), but can push people to do things that they think are the right thing to do. Enforcement side – what's challenging for us, people will have the idea that if you try hard enough then people will do the right thing. There is no way for us to know when trees are going out. People have to think something is important enough when they see something wrong going on.

JS – bit trees are not taken out by homeowners by themselves, they are taken out by industry. If we don't regulate the industry, we are not going to preserve big trees.

Brennon – regulation of the industry doesn't help all that much.

PSh – People continue to speed even though speeding tickets are large. People keep on speeding. That's why it's important to move people to do the right thing.

### **Keio University Q&A session**

UW is doing an exchange program with Japan. Cultural and environmental studies program type of exchange. It's a group of 35 in groups of 6. This is the Urban Forestry group. Just shared with them the UFMP and annual reports as well as the GSP 20 year strategic plan.

Q&A with the Commission.

### **Public Comment**

Steve – covered a lot of issues and had a good discussion. Dismay at the cynical position of Brennon's when he talked about regulation. I have the sense that he is going to come back with little regulation.

Arborists are the ones that are going to cut down big trees for home owners. If you have permits you have notification, you have posting. Lake Forest Parks assesses triple damages. We already have the system in place with SDOT's permits. DPD currently doesn't have a process for people to take down a tree that is over 30 inches.

Plant Amnesty helps people and has an arborist helping people. Maybe there can be a day a year where arborists donate their time and help residents.

Carbon Storage and Sequestration is mostly taking place in parks. SCL pays out for carbon credits, maybe \$100K to fund the parks stuff as a way to getting carbon credits for SCL.

The one thing that I'd like to see more mention of in the UFSP is the habitat value related to insects, birds, other life forms that are depending on a functioning urban forest. The plan doesn't mention how many birds are in the city, what's the insect population for pollination. Survival of smaller animals is something that needs to be worked into the plan in the future.

**Next month's agenda items. Good of the order.**

**Adjourn**

**Community input**