



3 August 2023

Urban Forestry Commission  
City of Seattle  
700 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1868  
P. O. Box 94729  
Seattle, WA 98124-4729

Dear Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to present the work we do at SDOT Urban Forestry at your March 2023 meeting. We appreciated your careful consideration and the insightful questions you sent regarding our operations in your follow up letter dated 7 June 2023. These questions are repeated below along with our responses.

**1. *What is the resource allocation for maintaining existing trees, and how are the resources distributed among different neighborhoods?***

SDOT has divided the city into 27 Urban Forestry Management Units to track spending and guide maintenance activities. These units are shown in the Urban Forestry Story Map located at [Trees for Seattle | Street Trees \(arcgis.com\)](#).<sup>1</sup>

As part of the Move Seattle Levy, SDOT Urban Forestry focused on three management units per year for tree installation. By rotating the set of three management units each year, our goal is to ensure all 27 units receive focused attention for the nine-year implementation cycle tied to levy funding. This focused investment represents 40% of the Urban Forestry budget.

The remaining 60% of the Urban Forestry budget goes to city-wide work, including clearance pruning, hazard tree removal, and watering of SDOT-owned street trees for the first 3-5 years of establishment.

Street trees that are privately owned are maintained by adjacent property owners. For large capital projects by other city departments or transit authorities, SDOT crews will water trees for the first 3-5 years of establishment when funding is provided by the project.

**2. *Does SDOT collect demographic information on people who call the department, and are translation services available for these calls?***

We do not currently collect demographic information from our customers. The closest we have is location data for the services requested (which is not always the same as the customer's home location).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://seattlecitygis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=a7072ffa326c4ef39a0f031961ebace6>

We do offer translation services if needed through a vendor called LanguageLine. If a customer indicates they need an interpreter, we will bring a LanguageLine interpreter on the line for a three-way call and live interpretation.

**3. *What is the current pruning cycle for SDOT trees, and how does this impact tree health, public safety, or other social and environmental subjects?***

We perform maintenance pruning on street trees for three Urban Forestry Management Units each year. This schedule results in a minimum nine-year pruning cycle for every tree. Some trees need more frequent pruning based on species and location. We also do safety pruning and risk-mitigation pruning as needed.

**4. *As the 2021 Tree Canopy Assessment has identified the Right of Way as a distinct management unit, does SDOT plan to develop a strategy to increase tree canopy coverage on its streets in alignment with the city's canopy goals?***

Yes. We are working with other city Urban Forestry groups on a comprehensive strategy to increase tree canopy across all management units with a focus on ROW for SDOT Urban Forestry.

**5. *What is the plan or mechanism for updating the Trees for Seattle map and other publicly available data?***

The following data on the Trees for Seattle map is live and matches our latest internal records:

- Street tree data on the Explore Seattle's Trees tab
- Permit data and work order data on the Street Tree Management tab
- Species diversity and resilience data on the Urban Forest Resilience tab

In addition, SDOT updates the Street Tree Benefits data for three management units each year. These updates include field verification of tree inventory data and post-processing of the data with iTree.

The following data on the Trees for Seattle map is maintained by other city departments:

- The Office of Sustainability and Environment updates data for the Urban Tree Canopy tab every five years. They are currently processing the 2021 Tree Canopy lidar layers. When that processing is complete, they will load the new Canopy Cover percentages to the Trees for Seattle web site.
- OPCD updates the RSE Index data on the Environmental Justice tab.
- SPU's Trees for Neighborhoods program updates data on the Stewardship tab.

**6. *What is the budget and resources allocated for establishing and watering newly planted trees for five years?***

Budget for tree watering and landscape establishment comes from a variety of funding sources including SDOT Capital Projects, Move Seattle Levy, reimbursements from utility partners, and General Fund. With the new tree ordinance, funding for trees planted to offset removals on private parcels will be covered by the One Seattle Tree Fund (funded through payments from developers).

**7. How does SDOT engage communities in caring for newly planted street trees, and whether you notice adjacent neighbors with the necessary information for the purposes of awareness, education, or engagement?**

We install door hangers and notices when we install trees in neighborhoods. We also work with the Department of Neighborhoods and Trees for Seattle on outreach.

For Capital Projects, the project teams do extensive public outreach, including public meetings, press releases, project website, and emails to interested parties.

**8. What is the difference between privately owned and SDOT-owned right-of-way trees, in terms of watering/pruning responsibilities, as well as permits for pruning/removal?**

Privately owned trees include trees installed by private property owners or by developers to meet land use code requirements as a condition of development. Property owners are responsible for watering, pruning, and maintaining privately owned trees on their street frontage. If property owners want to remove a tree or do extensive pruning, they should request an Urban Forestry permit issued by the City Arborist's office. Under the municipal code, trees must be posted for 14 calendar days prior to removal unless an immediate hazard exists.


SDOT-owned trees are trees that SDOT installs through a capital improvement project, levy funding, or other public funding source. Maintenance of SDOT-owned trees is SDOT's responsibility. Under the municipal code, trees must be posted for 14 days prior to removal unless an immediate hazard exists.

**9. Is SDOT working with Sound Transit regarding tree removal and replacement for upcoming Ballard/West Seattle construction projects?**

The West Seattle and Ballard Link Extension project is still in the environmental analysis phase. We are having higher level discussions with Sound Transit to explain municipal codes, city policies, and design standards that relate to street tree preservation, replacement, and mitigation for any development or right-of-way improvement project in the city of Seattle. The Federal Transit Authority has not issued the Record of Decision on the alternative to be built, so not a lot is known about the quantities of street trees that may be impacted or locations where future street trees may be planted in the future.

We appreciate your interest in and support of our work. If you have any further questions or would like to schedule another meeting with us, let us know. We look forward to continuing our dialogue.

Best wishes,

  
Joe Markovich (Aug 4, 2023 10:47 PDT)

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