

Urban Forestry Commission

Aaron Clark (Position 1 – Wildlife Biologist) • **Jamie Shambaugh** (Position 2 – Urban Ecologist) • **Lani Chang** (Position 3 – Natural Resource Agency or University) • **Maeve Gillis** (Position 4 – Hydrologist) • **Drue Epping** (Position 5 – Arborist) • **Stephanie Smith** (Position 6 – Landscape Architect) • **Tara Camp** (Position 7 – Non-Governmental Organization/Non-Profit) • **Briana Miller** (Position 8 – Development Community or Utility) • **Samaree Wakimoto** (Position 10 – Get Engaged) • **Andrea Starbird** (Position 12 – Public Health) • **Lia Hall** (Position 13 – Community/Neighborhood)

Date: October 23, 2026

From: Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

To: Councilmember Rob Saka, Councilmember Eddie Lin, Councilmember Joy Hollingsworth, Councilmember Maritza Rivera, Councilmember Deborah Juarez, Councilmember Dan Strauss, Councilmember Robert Kettle, Councilmember Alexis Mercedes Rinck, and Councilmember Dionne Foster

CC: Mayor Katie Wilson, City Budget Director Aly Pennucci, Executive Operations Manager Sunaree Marshall

Re: Budget Recommendation to Fund Permanent Strategic Advisor for the Urban Forestry Commission

Dear Budget Committee Members,

On behalf of the Seattle Urban Forestry Commission, we recommend continued funding for a dedicated staff position to support our commission under OSE. The commission needs dedicated strategic advisor support to effectively coordinate and advance its work helping the city expand, protect, and equitably manage Seattle's urban forest canopy. We understand the current Boards and Commissions Strategic Advisor position is temporary and scheduled to conclude in 2026. We respectfully request a dedicated, permanent, funded position to support this work.

Seattle's urban forest is one of the city's most valuable assets and a defining part of its identity. As Seattle continues to grow, trees play an increasingly important role in addressing urban heat island impacts, supporting public health, improving neighborhood livability, advancing environmental equity,

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managing stormwater, and helping the city meet its climate resilience goals. Urban forest management strategies are becoming more complex and increasingly interconnected with housing, transportation, infrastructure, and public health planning. In addition, balancing ongoing comprehensive plan and zoning changes while achieving the City's goal of 30% canopy coverage by 2037 requires an informed, thoughtful urban forestry policy approach. As a result, the need for a well-supported Urban Forestry Commission has never been greater.

Adding dedicated Strategic Advisor support has fundamentally transformed the Commission's capacity. Previously, the Commission received about 20 to 25 hours of staff support per month; now, we receive roughly 20 to 25 hours per week. This order-of-magnitude increase in support has allowed the Commission to shift from reacting to issues as they arise to proactively advancing meaningful work. This increased capacity has enabled more thorough review of city initiatives, stronger coordination among commissioners, and more timely recommendations to City leaders. This level of support is also consistent with other advisory bodies that play an important role in citywide policy development, including the Seattle Planning Commission and commissions under the Office of Civil Rights (Human Rights, LGBTQ, Disability and Women's Commissions), which maintain staffing levels appropriate for their scope and function.

This expanded support has had substantial benefits. Our subcommittees can meet more regularly, advance Governance Subcommittee priorities, and develop thoughtful recommendations on City urban forestry activities. It has also accelerated recruitment and onboarding, reducing the time needed to fill commissioner vacancies and helping maintain the Commission's full range of expertise and perspectives. Without this support, volunteer commissioners would take on more administrative and coordination responsibilities, increasing barriers to participation and reducing the Commission's ability to provide timely, informed recommendations to City leadership. By providing the coordination and continuity needed between meetings, the position enables commissioners to focus their volunteer time on policy review, public engagement, and advising City leaders on urban forestry issues.

Continued funding for the Strategic Advisor position is a strategic investment in Seattle's urban forest canopy, climate resilience, and environmental equity goals. We respectfully ask the Budget Committee to establish permanent funding for this role, at this level, so the Commission can help the City advance its goals for climate resilience, healthy neighborhoods, equitable outcomes, and sustainable growth.

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Thank you for your consideration and continued support of Seattle's urban forest and the Commission's work.

Sincerely,



Aaron Clark, Co-Chair
Wildlife Biologist, Position 1
Urban Forestry Commission



Drue Epping, Co-Chair
Arborist, Position 5
Urban Forestry Commission



Andrea Starbird, Co-Chair
Public Health Representative, Position 12
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