

Urban Forestry Commission

Aaron Clark (Position 1 – Wildlife Biologist) • **Alicia Kellogg** (Position 2 – Urban Ecologist)
• **Lani Chang** (Position 3 - Natural Resource Agency or University) • **Drue Epping** (Position 5 –
Arborist) • **Maeve Gillis** (Position 10 – Get Engaged) • **Melanie Ocasio** (Position 11 –
Environmental Justice) • **Andrea Starbird** (Position 12 Public Health) • **Lia Hall** (Position 13 –
Community/Neighborhood)

Date: June 1st, 2026

From: Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

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

CC: Mayor Katie Wilson; Lish Whitson, Council Central Staff Director; Sunaree Marshall, Mayor's Office Executive Operations Manager, OSE Central Staff Analyst, Jasmine Marwaha

Re: Phase 2 Comprehensive Plan and Tree Policies

To Seattle City Council Select Committee on the Comprehensive Plan,

The Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) was established by [ordinance](#) in 2009 as an advisory body to the Mayor and Council on policies and programs that affect Seattle's urban forest. Our mission is to ensure our urban forest is protected, well-managed, and thriving. UFC members bring an intersectional lens to urban forestry policy through our various backgrounds and expertise. The Urban Forestry Commission stands ready to partner with the Council, Mayor's Office, and City departments to ensure Seattle's growth advances housing affordability while protecting and expanding the urban forest essential to public health, climate resilience, and environmental justice. We are pleased to provide our insights for the Comprehensive Plan Phase 2 Centers and Corridors legislation.

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Background

In 2021, Washington State experienced a heat dome in which 171 people lost their lives and our State ranked the [4th highest in the nation](#) for heat-related deaths, per the CDC. Trees are a critical tool to mitigate heat impacts on communities as they live, work, commute and recreate in their neighborhoods. A new research article from The Nature Conservancy this week determined that [urban tree cover mitigates almost 50% of urban heat island effects](#) compared to no tree canopy.

Seattle faces significant heat impacts in this changing climate, just like many other communities. The [King County Heat and Health Data Explorer](#) shows that Seattle neighborhoods can be more than 10 degrees warmer than neighboring areas. To illustrate how these temperature patterns align with planned growth and equity considerations in the city, we created a [map](#) with 2 key data layers. Both can be found at the end of this letter.

- **Map layers #1:** Median afternoon temperatures ([King County](#)) overlaid with the Comprehensive Plan Phase 2 Centers and Corridors ([City of Seattle](#)).
- **Map layers #2:** City of Seattle's Racial and Social Equity Index ([City of Seattle](#)) with the Comprehensive Plan Phase 2 Centers and Corridors ([City of Seattle](#)).

Shade patterns and localized hot spots can shift throughout the day, so this map should be viewed as a general indicator rather than a precise snapshot. Even so, it helps illustrate how heat island and equity impacts can be unevenly distributed across the city. This equity and heat data highlights the opportunities we have to work together to drive forward thoughtful urban forestry planning alongside the Comprehensive Plan implementation.

Please consider the following recommendations, to help ensure all Seattle residents experience equitable access to urban forest and greenspace and the many benefits they provide:

1. Take a Comprehensive, data-driven approach to tree policy

The [One Seattle Plan's](#) urban forest and tree canopy policies direct the City to use its regularly updated tree canopy analysis to shape urban forestry management plans, decisions, and actions (Urban Forest and Tree Canopy, Policy No. CE 12.5). As the Comprehensive Plan Phase

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As legislation moves towards implementation, we want to draw your attention to two upcoming products that will be critical to informing a data-driven approach to tree policy and management.

- The City's first *Tree Equity Plan* (aka Canopy Equity and Resilience Plan) will identify key strategies for closing our most urgent canopy equity gaps based on community priorities and best available data.
- The 2026 Tree Canopy Assessment will provide updated information on the amount and distribution of tree canopy throughout the City, including within newly rezoned areas.

Updated community and canopy data is critical to effectively identifying priorities and guiding urban forestry policy-making across land types to address extreme heat and equity considerations. As the One Seattle Plan is put into practice, our urban forest can grow effectively alongside housing. We welcome the opportunity to work directly with elected leaders and City staff on implementation once these reports become available.

2. Pair nature-based cooling infrastructure with density and mobility to build healthy, resilient communities

The UFC supports rezones to provide housing capacity and diversity along frequent transit corridors but is concerned about community exposure to high heat, noise, and air pollution along high traffic arterials and truck routes. We would like to see careful consideration of these potential health impacts paired with innovative solutions to concentrate trees and greenspace in areas with increased density of multi-family housing.

We encourage Council to take a look at exciting “Cool Corridors” initiatives happening with [Oregon Metro](#) and [City of Phoenix](#), which are glowing examples of how cross-department, large-scale investments can significantly improve liveability along major transportation corridors. The work with [Phoenix](#) identifies cool corridors for priority planting that are walkways or trails adjacent to an arterial street and selected using four key criteria: neighborhood heat vulnerability, transit dependency, pedestrian use, and shade coverage and temperature. This initiative offers an example for how Seattle could integrate nature-based cooling with increased density to advance climate resilience and equitable mobility.

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The UFC looks forward to engaging with City Council and providing data-informed input on these issues throughout One Seattle Plan implementation. In the meantime, we encourage Councilmembers to [explore the map](#) we created and think about heat and equity in their districts. Thank you for your consideration and for your continued stewardship on behalf of Seattle's communities and future generations.

Sincerely,



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



[Drue Epping \(05/29/2026 17:28:39 PDT\)](#)

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

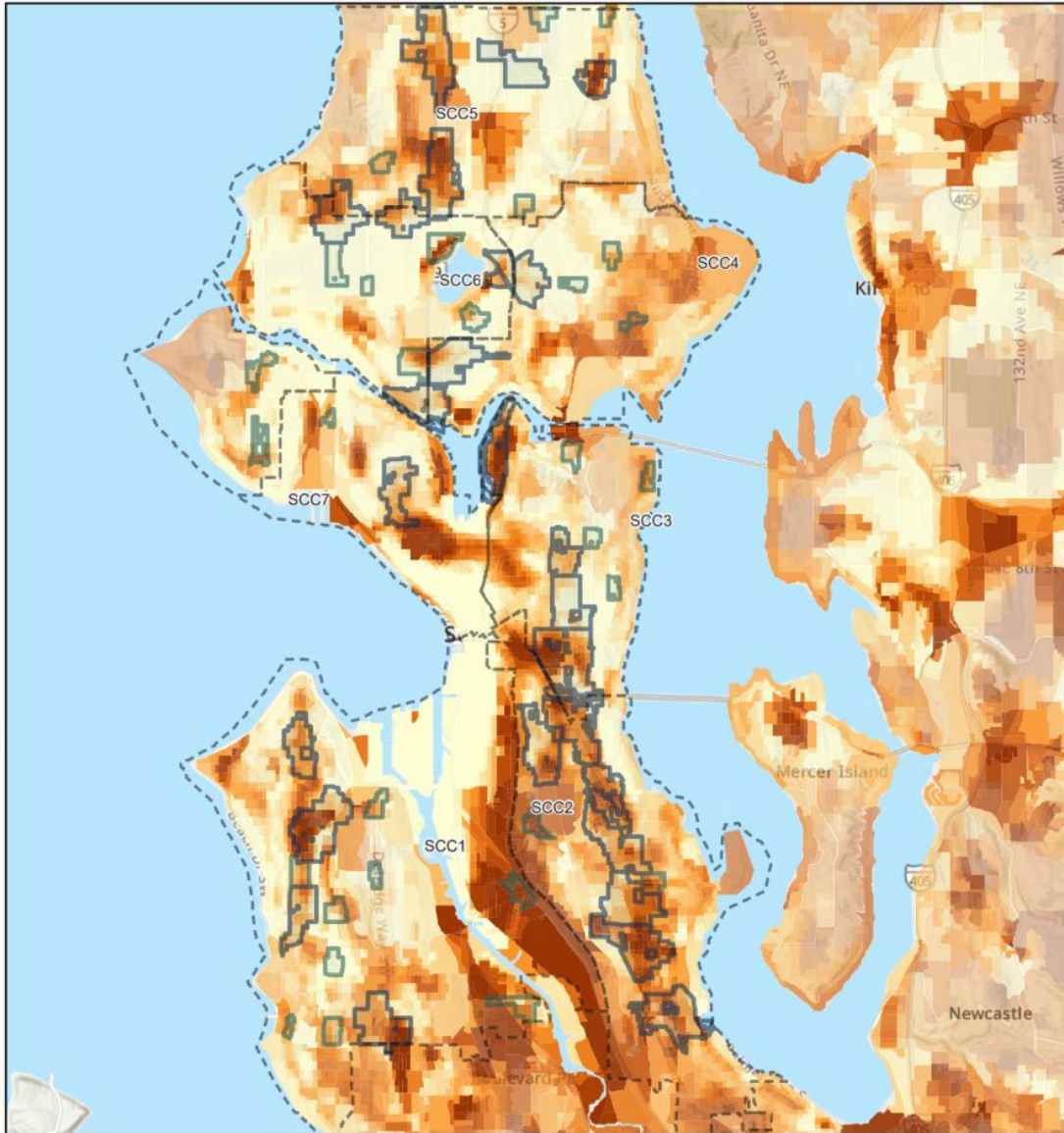


Andrea Starbird, Co-Chair
Public Health Representative, Position 12
Urban Forestry Commission

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Map Layers #1

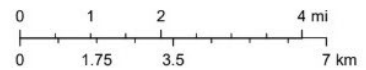
UFC - Heat and Comp Plan



5/15/2026

- SCCDST AREA 2237 - Seattle City Council Districts
- Urban Center
 - SCC1
 - SCC2
 - SCC3
 - SCC4
 - SCC5
 - SCC6
 - SCC7
 - Future Land Use 2044
 - Neighborhood Center
- Median Afternoon Temperature
- 94.120468
 - 83.137222
 - 52.4247 - 58.4
 - 58.4 - 63.5
 - 63.5 - 67.8746
- World_Hillshade

1:192,296

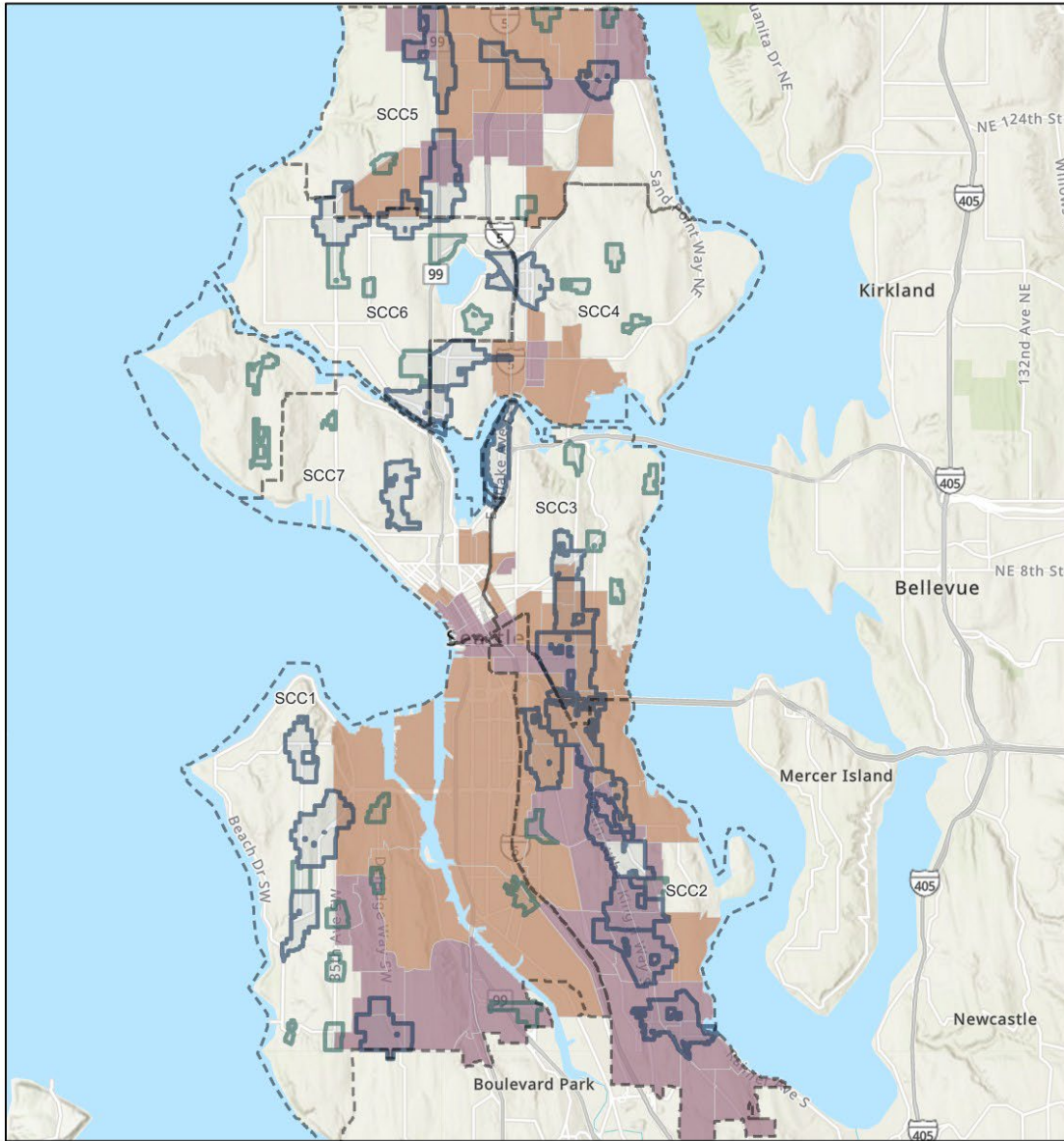


City of Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS

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Map Layers #2

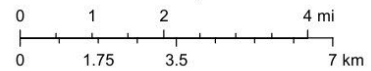
UFC - Equity and Comp Plan



5/16/2026

1:192,296

- SCCDST AREA 2237 - Seattle City Council Districts
- SCC1
 - SCC2
 - SCC3
 - SCC4
 - SCC5
 - SCC6
 - SCC7
- Future Land Use 2044
- Neighborhood Center
 - Urban Center
- Race and Social Equity Composite Index
- Second Highest
 - Highest Equity Priority
- World_Hillshade



City of Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development. Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS

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Source: *UFC Heat_Comp Plan* ([map](#)), created by Lani Chang, UFC Commissioner, 2026.

These maps were created and provided by the UFC and have not been reviewed by City of Seattle Staff. Map data from the following sources were layered over each other within ArcGIS to generate a single map detailing median afternoon temperatures in King County, City of Seattle Racial and Social Equity Index with the Comprehensive Plan Phase 2 Centers and Corridors. This map does NOT include additional rezoned corridor areas due to data access limitations.

Data Sources:

- [Heat and Health Data Explorer Tool](#)
- [City of Seattle Racial and Social Equity Index](#)
- [Zoning Map | One Seattle Plan Zoning Update](#)