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Nathan Collins (Position 9 – Financial Analyst) • **Logan Woodyard** (Position 10 – Get Engaged)
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May 8, 2024

Mayor Bruce Harrell
Seattle City Hall
600 4th Ave, Seattle, WA
Seattle, WA 98104

RE: Urban Forestry Budget Recommendations and Considerations for 2025-2026 Biennial Budget

Dear Honorable Mayor Harrell,

The Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) believes that trees are critical urban infrastructure that provide essential services to residents and visitors. The City plays a key role in ensuring delivery of those services by funding urban forest management. To that end, the UFC provides initial recommendations and observations described below for consideration in development of the 2025-2026 biennial budget.

HERITAGE TREE PROGRAM

The updates to SMC 25.11 in 2023 established tiers of regulated trees, with Tier 1 trees—formerly Heritage Trees—receiving the highest level of protection.

The Heritage Tree program was previously co-managed by a committee resourced by Plant Amnesty, a local nonprofit, and Seattle Department of Transportation. That group has since dissolved, and the state of the Heritage Tree program is unclear. The UFC would like to understand if the program is still active, and who is maintaining the Heritage Tree list and considering which new trees qualify for heritage status. **The UFC believes that support and consideration for this program is needed.**

ENFORCEMENT

The UFC acknowledges that three additional positions within SDCI were established along with the 2023 tree ordinance, to assist with the increase in workload and enforcement needs and recommends that additional support be provided. **The UFC recommends that enforcement be increased through additional SDCI staff, with at least one additional FTE site inspector with arboriculture expertise and one additional FTE building inspector with arboriculture expertise.** The City could consider SDCI inspectors who are certified arborists with necessary experience and background and who are dedicated to tree issues.

The addition of these two positions may still not be sufficient to ensure inspection sufficient to meet tree protection needs. **Therefore, the UFC also recommends exploration of more creative options such as tree bonds and monitoring tree health, to increase protection and survival of trees on sites during development above the bond options currently utilized.**

These additional subject matter experts could help ensure that protected trees on development sites receive the care and protection needed to survive the impacts of development and that mitigation requirements post-construction are appropriate.

STREET TREES

Updates to SMC 25.11 in 2023 added new requirements for street tree planting when construction occurs in Neighborhood Residential Zones. This positive update has increased the number of first-time applicants to Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) for street tree planting. The UFC acknowledges that an additional position within SDOT was established along with the 2023 tree ordinance, to assist with the increase in workload associated with this update and **recommends that additional support for SDOT processing and supporting street tree applicants should be considered if necessary.**

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Tree regulations in Seattle are complex. **The UFC recommends supporting additional education and outreach to improve code compliance and overall tree canopy and urban forest health.** This could include increasing SDCI's capacity to work with Trees for Seattle and Department of Neighborhoods to expand programming and services in more languages, and to provide additional communications support.

UNDERSTANDING TREE FINES

The UFC requests clarity in understanding where fines assessed for violations of tree protections go. Are they added to the General Fund, for example?

The UFC believes that tree activity fines should be directed back to urban forest management. If this is not already the case, the UFC recommends that the City explore how the fines can be added to the Mayor's One Seattle Tree Fund.

TRACKING URBAN FORESTRY EXPENDITURES

In 2023, the City of Seattle reported a first estimate of overall urban forestry expenditures¹. Understanding how we are investing in our urban forest is key for effective management. The report necessarily made assumptions about the breakdown of staff time and spending on urban forest management. The UFC understands that the One Seattle Tree Plan Executive Order of March 2023 calls for the Office of Sustainability and Environment to develop a report on a biennial basis of the City's urban forestry expenditures, and that the 2023 report on expenditures will provide a baseline for developing those reports. **The UFC recommends that OSE continue to explore and refine how staff time and other budget allocations can be itemized, tracked, and evaluated, as those future reports are developed.**

¹ Seattle Office of Sustainability & Environment, Seattle City Budget Office, and Seattle Urban Forestry Core Team. (2023). A Review of Seattle Urban Forestry Expenditures, 2021-2024: Response to SLI OSE-301-A-002-2023.

Sincerely,



Josh Morris, Co-Chair



Becca Neumann, Co-Chair



Hao Liang, Co-Chair

CC: Deputy Mayor Adiam Emery, Chief Operating Officer Marco Lowe, Interim CBO Director Dan Eder, Deputy Director of Policy Christa Valles

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