

Urban Forestry Commission (UFC)

June 8, 2011

Meeting Notes

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

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

Attending the tour

Commissioners

Matt Mega (MM) – chair
Nancy Bird (NB)
Gordon Bradley (GB)
John Hushagen (JH)
Jeff Reibman (JR)
Peg Staeheli (PS)

Staff

Sandra Pinto de Bader (SPdB) - OSE
Roy Francis (RF) - SDOT
Darren Morgan (DM) - SDOT

Absent- Excused

John Floberg (JF)
John Small (JS) – vice-chair

Public

Michael Oxman (MO)
Steve Zemke (SZ)

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SDOT-led tour of the Torchlight Parade route

SDOT led a tour of the Torchlight Parade starting at Fourth Avenue and Wall Street all the way to Fourth Avenue and Olive Way. SDOT staff answered commissioner questions and explained issues related to pruning and tying back trees.

DM explained that Seafair has requested that SDOT prune or tie back trees on Fourth Avenue starting at Wall. North from Wall they will be tipping balloons. They are asking for a 24 foot wide clearance that is 70 feet high. Seafair introduced balloons to the parade without consulting with SDOT. Years ago when trees were smaller, small pruning cuts were done. Now pruning would have impacts on long-term canopy.

RF – Balloons were introduced some 12 years ago.

JH – when did it become apparent that there was a problem?

DM – approximately five years ago.

JH – does the City have a policy to accommodate private businesses?

RF – They get requests to prune trees back if they are blocking their business signs. It's not unusual for the City to decline such requests.

JR – notices that some trees at Wall and North have larger planting pits

DM – there was a significant preservation effort when the City re-paved.

JR – are there plans to widen tree pits along the whole corridor?

RF – it is possible

DM – there are different funding mechanisms for maintenance, for sidewalk repair, and Bridging the Gap levy.

JH – why prune a tree for a business sign just because it's on a balloon?

DM – Sometimes SDOT does prune if they are able to keep the health and form of the tree. Seattle Municipal Code 15 states that business signage can't interfere with trees. The situation will not get easier. This year SDOT will pull canopy but can't have both tree canopy and balloons for ever.

JR – what street would work better?

DM – I'm an arborist and can't answer that question. I can answer questions about the trees.

PS – Second has columnar trees.

DM – the parade ends at Qwest field (Jefferson and James).

JH – how much will this cost the City?

DM – The estimate for this year is \$6,000. One and half or two days of work. They coming back to remove the hardware. They will also have to pay for traffic control.

RF – SDOT sent a letter to Seafair asking to pay for the work.

MM – what trees, needing maintenance pruning, are not getting pruned because of needing to address this request? This is the busiest time of the year for SDOT, right?

RF – they have a 14 year maintenance pruning cycle for the 40,000 trees in the right-of-way. As the City plants more trees that cycle might get worse. The industry standard is 7 years.

DM – for new trees, they prune three times in 10 years.

GB – it sounds like future pruning will not be feasible to accommodate the parade

DM – It's important to raise the issue. Trees are extremely valuable in the downtown core. It's a rare opportunity to grow large trees like these.

RF – This is detrimental to the UFMP goal. Is not sustainable to do it every year. The decision will have to be made at a higher level.

PS – the UFC could make a stronger statement about canopy and these trees.

NB – it's important to manage expectations. This policy is not going to work in the future

PS – Discussion about Seafair needs to happen in Oct-Nov for next year's parade.

Parade Route and tree conflicts:

Wall to Battery – not significant issues

Battery to Bell – Significant trees on that block.

Bell to Blanchard – also has conflicts with trees

DM – the City has made a significant investment to get trees to this size

Blanchard to Lenora – doesn't have significant issues

Lenora to Virginia – has significant conflicts with trees

Virginia to Stewart – Also has issues

Review of UFC Seafair recommendation – possible vote

MM – the intention is to finish this letter, take a vote and send it off.

Commissioners read the draft letter.

JR – suggested that the graph at the end of the letter be removed.

PS – we might to add something specific from our look at the trees. Paragraph 3 we can change the third sentence. The UFC believes it is not sound policy to spend tax payer dollars, or allow practices... (Substitute the current 'and' for 'or') ... because is the staff or private people working on it. We could insert a sentence after on the fourth paragraph, and add a third sentence after sidewalk and say in our walk down Fourth Ave to look at the conditions, there are several trees that will have significant tie backs and/or pruning this year. As the trees mature... they are probably border line. Tying those back... there is only so much tieback you can do. You place a lot of torque on both the branch your are tying back and tying to. You are not going to be able to that every year.

MM – two thoughts there. One is that excessive pressure will be put on the trees to do the work this year and long-term it's not going to work anyway.

JR – I have an edit that I think addresses that. In the third paragraph where we just were, that paragraph could end at the point where it says negative long term effects for short term purposes, end of paragraph. New paragraph, regardless of accommodations for this year, it's clear that this is not a feasible long term solution. The UFC believes, in the long-term the parade could be re-routed to a different street.

MM – I agree with that. Drawing attention to the future...

JR – why this is not a long-term solution

MM – would like to add in the short-term impacts that the trees that need the most pruning are the healthiest trees right now. There is a lot of compromised trees but the healthiest trees are the ones on the way. I'm concerned that we are not going to be able to finish this up and send it out today.

JR – there is no need to send it out today. There will not be a change in action.

NB – I would also say that this letter as is now is good. And if changes were made and I didn't see it again I would be fine with that.

PS – I agree. Even if we couldn't make a single change.

GB – Are we going to put in there re-route. Maybe say explore options.

MM – Jeff got to that saying that in the future there is the need to re-route.

JR – we can say from our knowledge that there are other streets that are not significant in terms of canopy right now.

NB – right now...

PS – I rode down First with this in mind.

MM – where we are going is that we softened the paragraph. There needs to be a bigger discussion about the future.

JR – maybe we can say that as part of a long-term solution Seafair needs to look at its logistics and routing.

MM – we wrote this letter thinking that we will going to get something out quickly to stop the pruning. Now we are taking a step back. I think Sandra and I can finish this up. I think where Gordon is going is that we don't need to focus on re-routing. I think there needs to be a broader discussion about multiple potential solutions.

SPdB – the last time the UFC talked about this letter the UFC mentioned the need for the City to look at a festival street to accommodate balloons.

MM – maybe other people will want to use balloons.

GB – maybe when the new water front...

MM – a few cleanups. We need to strike the cost to plant a tree because I don't think we'll have that information.

SPdB – Because now we have the dollar amount that SDOT will spend pruning and tying back we might mention that but put in perspective?

MM _ we should add in the last paragraph

NB – A complete estimate ... \$6K is an underestimate

MM – maybe we can add that it is an underestimate and that it doesn't include the cost of not pruning other trees that need pruning, and other ecological services of lost canopy.

NB – the \$186 every year makes it look small but the overall is huge

MM – second to last paragraph we can strike. Last sentence... needs to be removed in subsequent years. We might put a year on it. I put in 10. We can't hold Seafair accountable...

SPdB – I doubt that SDOT is going to be excessive pruning...

MM – what if they snap a branch while tying?

JR – I would say that if they are going to do a mitigation fund, we should say that any trees that are damaged as a direct result of this work.

MM - the City needs a strategic plan to deal with maintenance. It's a budget issue. Any other suggestions.

GB – It may be sufficient that the UFC is concerned about irreparable damage to trees. A lot of people don't appreciate that we are 'stressing' the trees and inflicting wounds. I don't think people fully appreciate how significant it is to prune like this. They trivialize the issue. Just talk about significant impacts and leave it at that. From the loss of canopy sentence and the trees might need significant pruning.

PS – I wouldn't mind making it shorter

SPdB – it's also diminishing the value of a public asset

PS – people still don't understand the term asset as applied to trees.

MM – can we insert the goal? The goal is 12%, there is only 6% now (*NOTE: existing canopy number for downtown is actually 4.7%*) and we can't afford any further reduction.

JR – it's helpful to point out the use to public money.

SPdB – I will put together a final draft for review?

PS – I'm okay with you guys finishing it.

MM – we need a motion

**ACTION: A motion was made to approve the Seafair recommendation as amended.
The motion was seconded and carried.**

Seattle Audubon work on neighborhood canopy inventories

MM – we have a half an hour for John and I to bore you guys. This last phase is to talk about tree canopy data. The City did a 2007 analysis that compares it to 2002. I had a UW class look and compare canopy analysis methods. The UW remote sensing live (SPRING software). They came up with 88% accuracy in Columbia City. Seattle Audubon will get the data. They tested his data using Multispeck was 74% accurate. The City's data was over 90% accurate for Columbia City. There was no ground-truthing. They took 50 random points and then they went to see if that was a tree or not using GIS. They probably should have done 100 points. Canopy came up at 23%-26%. They did a planting opportunity map for Columbia City. They did size thresholds. They did a model that Matt can now run. The City's data was from 2007, we did 2009. There was about a 2-3% loss of canopy for Columbia City.

PS – if you look at Ballard. They went from residential to multifamily.

MM – they did all satellite. They compared four methods, the grid method (the least accurate according to them), SPRING, Multispeck, and iTree that the City is already doing.

PS – it's good to use the same technology consistency of approach.

MM - The debate on iTree is the number of plots.

SPdB – my understanding is that iTree focuses on ecological services

MM – yes, it can't put a spatial on it. It's very exciting to have two students that will continue working on this. The City used "feature analyst" that uses infra-red to find trees. That costs a lot of money, and SPRING is free. The work I will do is neighborhood by neighborhood and SPRING won't let me do the whole city at once.

JR – based on what you've discovered so far do you have a sense of how sample area affects accuracy?

NB – that's a statistical questions. Your sample size has to meet a size to make it statistically valid.

MM – SPRING does the whole thing. It's not a sample. Because of that they couldn't determine the margin of error... I'm just learning. I'll report back.

JR – I assume you can make adjustments.

MM – showed a map with a comparison from City of Seattle and Seattle Audubon data. Shadows are an issue and require ground truthing... I need to read the report. Wants to go from parcel level to block. For SPU is going to be hard to give single homeowner enough credits to make a difference. Do blocks assessments of trees by arborists. Tie canopy to other things they want to do such as gardens.

PS – Be careful while talking to neighborhoods about their lines. Recommended contacting Amalia in her office. Advise on policy that tree ordinance would look at tax credits, drainage rate, etc. Look at small scale parcels.

NB – Integrated habitat and other things such as affordable housing that are interrelated.

JR – maybe add a block score and use neighbor pressure.

JS – to know the difference in canopy view shed from Puget Sound. That’s why SW lost trees due to views.

HR – view sheds percentage and what’s happening. How are we going to control for development patterns.

MM – the City has to come up with maintenance funds.

Adjourn