

**SEATTLE RENTERS' COMMISSION
MINUTES**

Monday, November 2, 2020

6:00 – 7:00 PM

WebEx Meeting

Approved December 7, 2020

Commissioners Present: ChrisTiana ObeySumner, Dinah Braccio, Jessica Westgren, Calvin Jones, Chloe Caswell, Marci Taitt-Lamar

Commissioners Absent: Daniela Lopez (E), Mac S. R. McGregor (E), Gina Owens(E)

Commission Staff: Shaquan Smith, Department of Neighborhoods

Guests: Charlie Spear, Seattle Department of Construction & Inspection
Chanda Emery, Seattle Department of Construction & Inspection

(Transcriber's Note: Seattle Renter's Commission meeting minutes are not an exact transcript and represent key points and the basis of discussion. The recording of the minutes is available upon request.)

Welcome & Housekeeping

- Commissioner Jessica Westgren made a motion to approve the October 5, 2020 meeting minutes and it was seconded. The Commission voted and the motion was approved unanimously.

Public Comment

- There were no public comments.

Tree Protection Update and Racial Equity

- Commissioner Westgren introduced Mr. Charlie Spear from SDCI to discuss the tree ordinance update, access to green space, and the current outreach efforts. Mr. Spear would like to solicit any feedback from this Commission regarding the upcoming work on tree protection and implementing the use of the Racial Equity Toolkit (RET).
- Mr. Spear noted that the City of Seattle Urban forest is fundamental to Seattle's character and quality of life.
- The City's Urban Forestry team is currently updating Seattle's Urban Forest Management Plan. Both SDCI and the Office of Sustainability and Environment have been working on tree protection.
- Mr. Spear briefly summarized the importance of urban trees.
- Mr. Spear posed questions to the Commission about how the current tree protections benefit the black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) renters and the burdens it creates.
- The current tree protections proposals include requiring permits for tree removal on private property, requiring mitigation for tree removal by planting new trees on-site or making a payment in place of

tree planting on site is not possible or desirable, setting new limits on how many significant trees can be removed, and requiring tree service providers to sign an acknowledgment that they know the City's tree protection requirements.

- Mr. Spear briefly discussed the use of the Racial Equity Toolkit process to help address the challenges of tree protection and its effect on the BIPOC communities.
- Racial equity outcomes were identified including ensuring that urban forestry benefits and responsibilities are shared fairly across communities particularly BIPOC communities, reducing the disproportionate negative impacts to BIPOC communities due to having fewer trees, and reducing the burdens of tree regulations.
- Some of the outreach efforts that could be used as leverage include the work that was done in the 2017 and 2019 Urban Forestry Management Plan update, and looking at other resources such as the 2016 Tree Canopy Assessment, Equity, and Environmental Agenda and the Duwamish Action Plan.
- Mr. Spear commented that there is a deficiency in outreach to renters.
- Mr. Spear shared some examples of what they learned including the lack of trust in government, tree planting and maintenance can be expensive, BIPOC communities would want to partner with the City to increase canopy cover in their communities, white and affluent communities tend to enjoy higher levels of canopy cover, could afford maintenance and have greater influence over City policies.
- Mr. Spear acknowledged that there are several issues to explore including the complexity of private property regulations and requiring a strong engagement effort to elicit informed input from a variety of stakeholders, the need to balance other priorities such as high rents, shortage of affordable housing, budget pressures, etc. and other factors that impact BIPOC communities such as language barriers, access to information, distrusts of government and disparities in financial resources.
- Mr. Spear outlined the next steps in the RET work by reaching out and gathering more data, drafting a RET, reviewing the draft with key stakeholders and affected communities and implementing the actions, and evaluating the work.
- The Urban Forest Management Plan is the framework for citywide policy and action on tree protection, etc. The update process started in 2018 with BIPOC and key stakeholder engagement. The draft plan will be available for public input beginning now through November 30. The draft document and summary is available at www.seattle.gov/trees/management
- Mr. Spear reiterated that the goal of this presentation is to solicit feedback, guidance, or ideas from this Commission at this time.
- The Commissioners asked about planning and zoning and any actions that are being done about gentrification in certain neighborhoods about the trees. Ms. Chanda Emery of SDCI commented about the code development within SDCI and how the current tree code emphasis is enforced. Some of the challenges and issues that they faced are feedback from the renters since they do not own the trees.
- Ms. Emery noted that they are exploring ideas to ensure that building designs include an increase in tree canopies as well as in place of payment.
- Commissioner Westgren commented about a Crosscut article about the green space tool for gentrification and asked about ways to mitigate gentrification, and Ms. Emery commented that they are very aware of the issues and they have not dealt specifically with the issue.
- Commissioner Christiana Obey Sumner commented about the RET process and implementing the feedback from the community especially with BIPOC communities and Mr. Spear noted that the RET process that they are following came from the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), and they are working closely with OCR to ensure that they are using the toolkit materials effectively and are addressing any intersectional issues.
- Commissioner Marci Taitt-Lamar asked about expanding the fee/payment in place of planting new trees and the plan to allocate this money. Ms. Emery noted that they are currently working with the Law Department on how to implement the payment. The challenge is identifying the right amount of fee that is fair that both the builder and homeowner with fixed income could afford to pay. They are also reviewing the minimum standard in the Land Use Code about the number of trees that need to be planted depending on the zone, so builders are discouraged from using them in place of payment instead of planting trees.

- Ms. Emery acknowledged that there are proposals to update or change the development standards, but the challenge was coming up with the right solution that addressed the needs of the builders, tree advocates, and stakeholders. She also added that coming up with the right balance is a challenge.
- Commissioner Chloe Caswell asked about how the replacement equivalency work and Ms. Emery noted that they are working on a proposal of having a replacement ratio based on the diameter of the tree.
- Commissioner Westgren commented that there is a type of tree that people are allowed to have and she noted that having more fruit trees would be great, but also noted about planting trees that will not hurt the environment. She asked if there are any guidelines, and Ms. Emery noted that she heard that the preference is conifer trees.
- Commissioner Dinah Braccio asked if there is any mechanism for renters to have more trees planted on their properties, and Ms. Emery mentioned that there are City departments that have existing programs with regards to planting trees including SPU and SDOT.
- Mr. Spear reminded the Commission that if they have any questions, concerns, or ideas about the tree ordinance and the RET work is to route the questions to Mr. Shaquan Smith and he can assign those feedback to him or Chanda.

Commissioner Recruitment

- Updates on Commissioner recruitment will be discussed at the December meeting.

Commissioner Opportunity to Share (47:47)

- There were no opportunities to share from the Commissioners.

Adjourn

- Mr. Shaquan Smith mentioned the SPD's budget update from Mr. Sonny Nguyen's presentation, and he will send an email to solicit any feedback.
- He also mentioned the Stay Healthy Streets Program. If there is any feedback regarding street closures, go ahead and send him an email.
- No further business being held before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned