

SEATTLE URBAN FORESTRY COMMISSION

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January 13, 2021.

Jesús Aguirre, Superintendent
Seattle Parks and Recreation
100 Dexter Ave N
Seattle, WA 98109

RE: Thank you for SPR update

Dear Jesús,

The Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) would like to extend its gratitude to Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) for its work stewarding our city's parks and natural areas, and specifically to Christopher Williams, Patti Bakker, and Mike Schwindeller for their presentation updating the UFC on several initiatives and projects, including overall SPR updates, viewpoint policy, Cheasty Mountain Bike/Pedestrian Trail Pilot, Colman Vegetation Management Plan, and the Green Seattle Partnership.

Cheasty Mountain Bike/Pedestrian Trail Pilot Project (Cheasty)

The UFC appreciates the additional information provided by SPR regarding the scope of work for the trail and vegetation monitoring associated with Cheasty. The UFC believes that monitoring potential impacts from the addition of the mountain bike trail network on this large natural area is important for evaluating the success of this project and the potential impacts of future similar projects. The information is critical to determine how to balance the different needs this natural area fulfills for Seattle from resident enjoyment to wildlife habitat.

While vegetation monitoring will provide a good idea, it alone does not provide a complete picture of the impacts to wildlife habitat. As the most common daily point of contact with wildlife in urban areas, birds are of particular concern and should be monitored. With construction of the South Loop phase beginning in spring of this year, it may be too late to gather robust baseline data for post-construction comparisons at Cheasty. The UFC recommends considering avian monitoring in future scopes of work. This would align with Council [Resolution 31713](#), which articulated the City's commitment to mitigating the impacts of

the built environment on birds, stating that “...City plans and programs will increase awareness of the value of migratory birds, promote habitat enhancement, provide safe viewing opportunities for birds, improve bird safety, and recognize the benefits of urban birds in the landscape.”

In addition, the UFC noticed that although there is a monitoring plan in place, there is no information about how the monitoring data will be translated into performance metrics. This is a challenging task, and the UFC would like to participate further in SPR’s monitoring and evaluation discussions. Specifically, the UFC is interested understanding how SPR plans to interpret the monitoring data to determine whether impacts, should they occur, are acceptable or not, and whether the pilot is considered a success.

Green Seattle Partnership (GSP)

The UFC also appreciates the briefing on anticipated impacts to the GSP due to current environmental, financial, and social conditions. The restoration work in progress and planned by the GSP is critical for the future of Seattle’s urban forest.

Urgently, the UFC expresses its concern over the annual funding reduction of \$500,000 to the program, and the estimated 17 to 27-year delay to the original restoration schedule (to be completed by 2025). The GSP was established as a 20-year program; a delay of this length signifies lost financial efficiencies and further environmental degradation. Decades-long delays not only defer benefits to Seattle from the restoration but may significantly impair the City’s ability to complete the work at all.

Maintaining natural areas in restoration is an active process and missing stewardship intervention can lead to reestablishment of invasive species and planting failures, undoing previous efforts. In addition, labor, materials, and other investments tend to become more expensive over time. The UFC is concerned that budget cuts will compound existing problems, including the loss of volunteer and contractor momentum due to the pandemic and the challenging conditions, such as steep slopes, of the remaining acres.

The UFC would like to better understand the difference in restoration activities cost and tree and vegetation survival rates between volunteers and paid contractors; as well as the potential for incorporating a green jobs and youth training component into the program to create an opportunity to engage more diverse communities, especially BIPOC residents.

Despite these concerns, the UFC understands the constraints and the need to reevaluate the program. The UFC is intrigued by the notion of the *re-envisioning* of the GSP and requests to be involved in the process in the upcoming year.

The UFC looks forward to getting an update on SPR's tree policy and supplemental use guidelines for natural areas, and as always, the UFC looks forward to continuing to support SPR's work and our parks and natural areas, their trees, and vegetation.

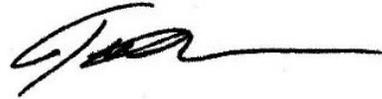
Sincerely,



Weston Brinkley, Chair



Joshua Morris



Julia Michalak

cc: Mayor Jenny A. Durkan, Council President Lorena González, CM Lisa Herbold, CM Debora Juarez, CM Andrew Lewis, CM Tammy Morales, CM Teresa Mosqueda, CM Alex Pedersen, CM Kshama Sawant, CM Dan Strauss, Jessica Finn Coven, Christopher Williams, Michelle Caulfield, Urban Forestry Management Team, Patti Bakker, Urban Forestry Core Team, **Mike Schwindeller**, Yolanda Ho, Austin Miller

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