

STREET TREE PLANNING STUDY

South Park | Census Tract 112.00

City Council District 1

Submitted 5/30/25



Seattle
Department of
Transportation



Study background

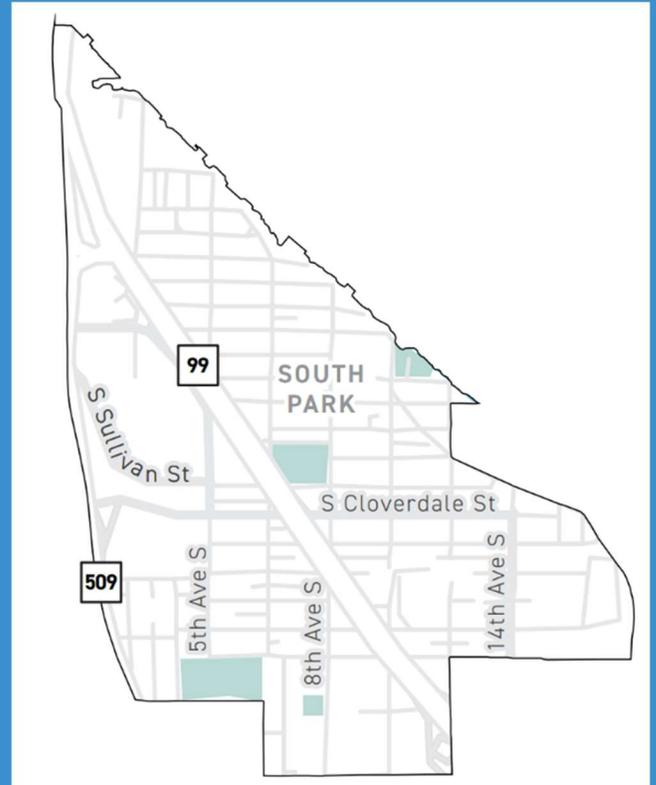
The City of Seattle is committed to ensuring all communities have access to healthy trees and the benefits they provide—especially in the face of a changing climate. In early 2025, the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) launched the Street Tree Planning Study as a pilot project to identify street tree planting opportunities, assess community support, and understand local concerns in four census tracts that represent conditions across the city. Funds for the study were provided by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources Urban and Community Forestry Program. This memo summarizes findings from the South Park census tract. It includes results from an arborist assessment and from community engagement.

What are street trees?



Street trees grow in the public right-of-way—usually in planting strips between sidewalks and curbs—and are managed by SDOT. Street trees provide environmental, health, and social benefits, such as cooling neighborhoods and reducing air pollution.

Seattle aims to achieve 30% tree canopy coverage by 2037, across all public and private spaces. A 2021 study showed street trees comprise nearly one-quarter of Seattle's existing tree canopy. The study also showed an overall loss of tree canopy,



prompting SDOT to analyze opportunities and barriers to planting street trees.

South Park overview

Census tract 112.00 is located in Seattle's South Park neighborhood. This 613-acre area is bordered to the north by the SR 99 - First Avenue South Bridge and to the south by S Barton St and S Director St. It includes areas both east and west of Highway 99 (W Marginal Way) and includes parks such as Marra-Desimone Park and South Park Playfields. This census tract is primarily home to residential, commercial, and manufacturing uses. The neighborhood has 14.5% tree canopy coverage.

As of 2023, the tract is home to 3,736 people. About 46% speak a language other than English. Most residents are 20 to 39 years of age. Approximately 37% of residents are white, 15.8% are Asian, and 14.7% identify as two or more races. South Park is also an important Hispanic center in Seattle.

Equity and health snapshot

The city uses a [Racial and Social Equity Index](#) tool to plan and prioritize investments throughout the city. South Park is considered a part of the Highest Equity Priority based on race, language, socioeconomic, and health indicators. Similarly, the

2025 [Washington Environmental Health Disparities Map](#) shows health measures divided into four themes: environmental exposures, environmental effects, sensitive populations, and socioeconomic. South Park ranks high overall, particularly for traffic related pollution, Particulate Matter (PM) 2.5, and toxic releases. PM 2.5 is small particle air pollution that enters the lungs and can cause serious health problems. It ranks low only for ozone concentration.

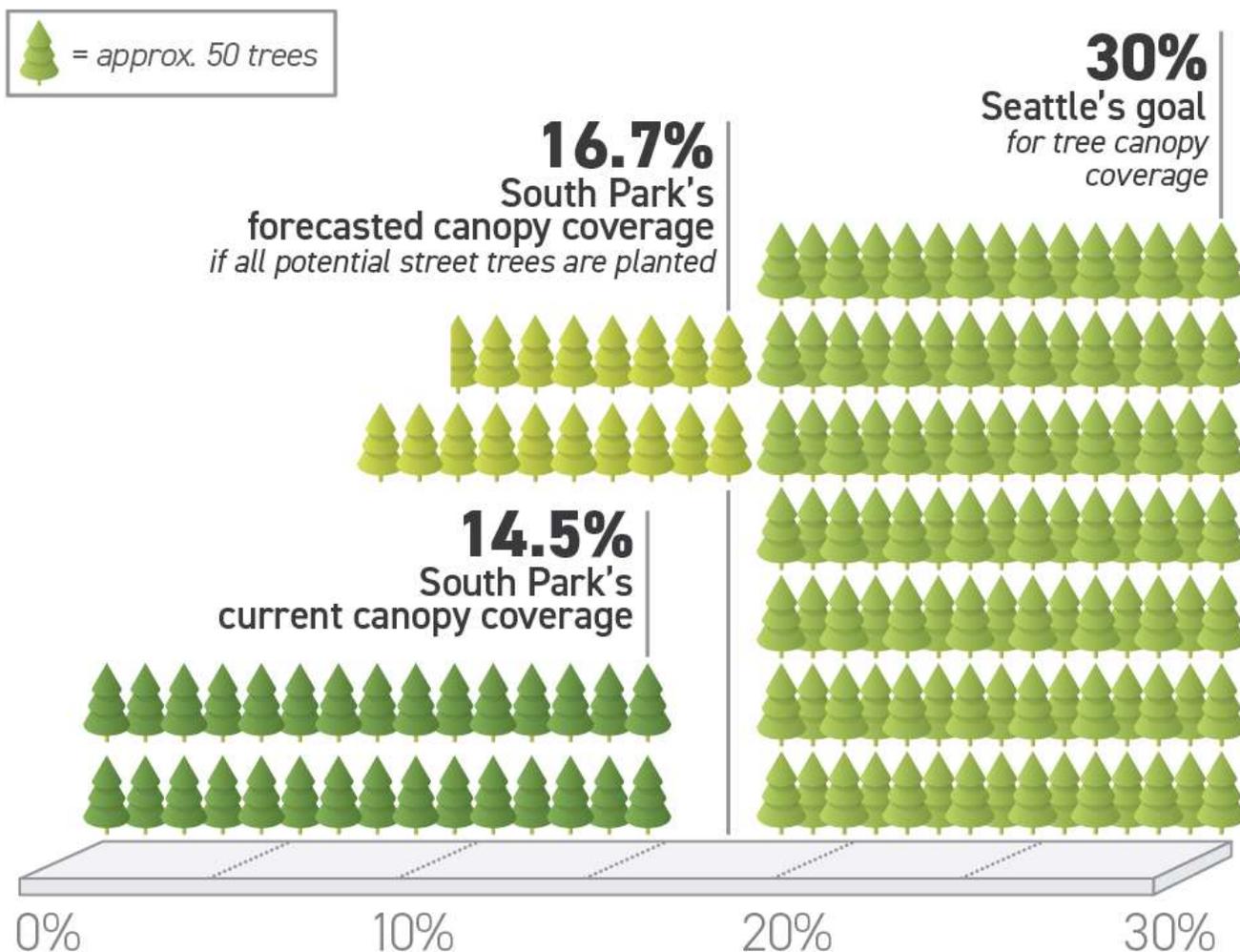
Trees absorb, bind, intercept, and sequester pollutants, including PM 2.5 emissions. Trees also reduce air temperatures, which lowers ozone levels.

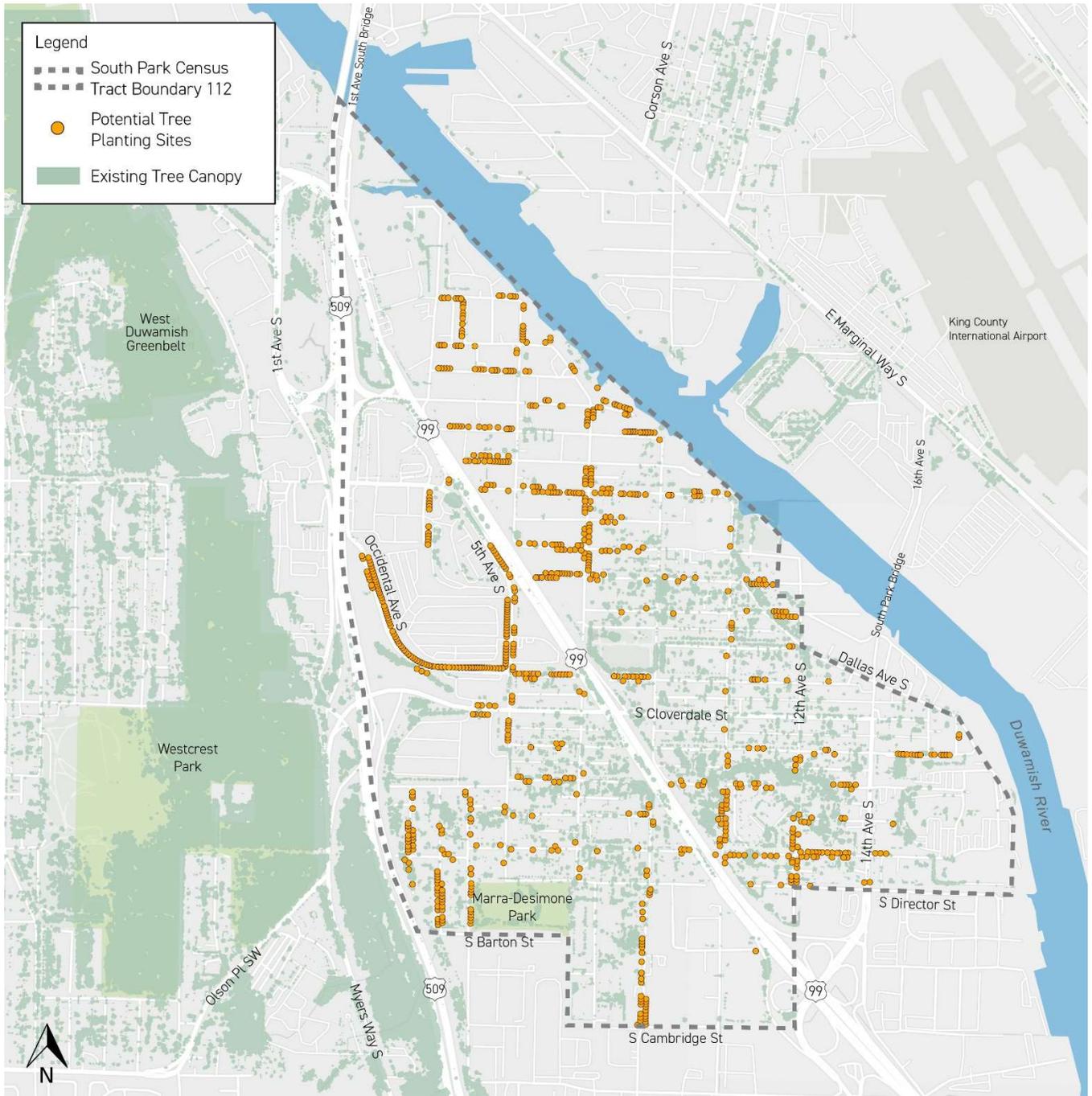
South Park faces seasonal flooding, high air pollution, and urban heat. Expanding the tree canopy can help absorb stormwater, filter pollutants, and cool the area.

Where can we put street trees in this census tract?

South Park has 14.5% tree canopy, which is lower than the city's goal of 30% tree canopy coverage. This gap is due in part to the lack of street tree planting space. Every new street tree requires planning and coordination. The city has identified potential street tree planting locations using mapping analysis and on-site inspections. In addition to 1,505 existing street trees and 881 potential street tree planting locations, this census tract requires 5,239 more trees to reach the city's goal of 30%.

While 881 potential street trees represent only part of what's needed, each tree is progress toward our overall goal.





Census Tract 112.00 – Existing Tree Canopy and Potential Street Tree Planting Locations

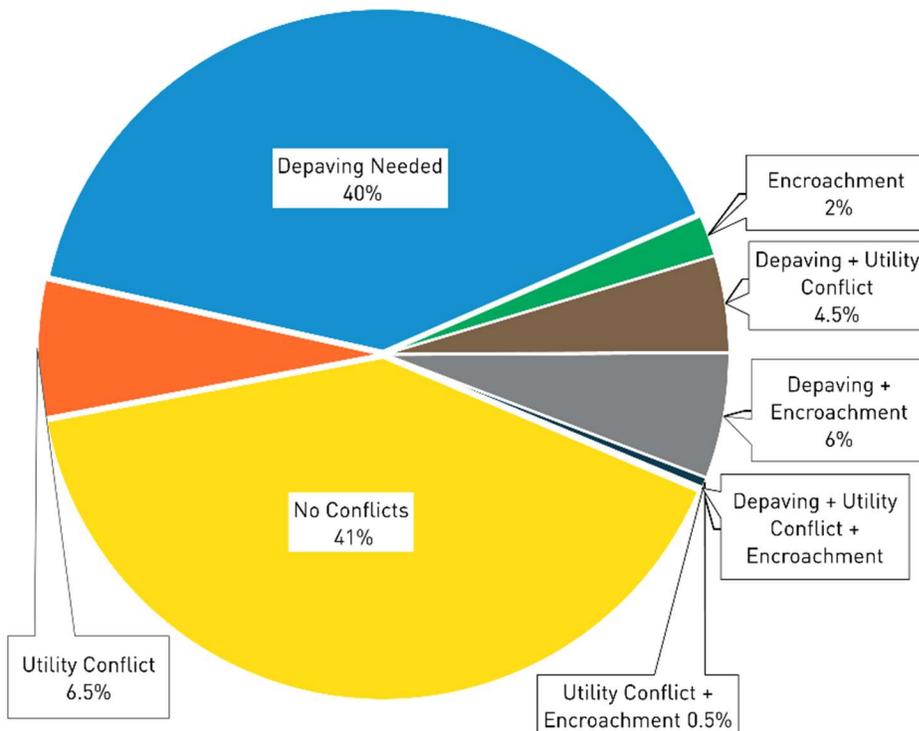
What are our existing challenges with street trees?

Space in South Park is limited and often already occupied by infrastructure, e.g. buildings, sidewalks, roads, utility systems. Of the 881 potential planting sites identified, only 41% could be planted today. Another 40% would be possible if pavement and/or compacted gravel in the planting strip were restored with planting soil.

To increase the street tree canopy in this census tract, the city would need to address the following key challenges:

- Limited space: Many streets in South Park do not have planting strips wide enough for street trees.
- Utility conflicts: A high volume of underground pipes, overhead wires, and other utility infrastructure can limit where street trees can be planted. For example, an underground electrical vault in a planting strip would prevent planting street trees nearby.
- Pavement removal: In many locations, paved surfaces would be removed to create space for street trees.

Challenges to planting street trees in South Park



To overcome these barriers, the city is exploring solutions such as developing planting strips and removing unnecessary pavement. All efforts would comply with SDOT standards, which include:

- A minimum 5-foot-wide planting strip
- At least 25 feet between street trees
- Setbacks from driveways, poles, hydrants, and other public infrastructure

These standards are designed to support healthy tree growth, reduce long-term maintenance issues, and help prevent damage to sidewalks and utilities. They also help ensure that public spaces remain safe, accessible, and functional for all users.



Image of narrow planting strip and sidewalk

In May 2025, SDOT asked people who live, work, or visit the South Park area to share their thoughts about street trees. The city gathered input from over 35 people through a pop-up table in the neighborhood, meetings with local groups, and an online survey.

What we heard

Strong support for street trees

Trees can help with urban cooling and shade, address air pollution, soak up stormwater and reduce run off that potentially ends up in the Duwamish River, and create healthier habitat for animals and humans.

Tree preferences

Community members supported mature, low-allergen, and native trees; fruit-bearing species; trees with flowers for pollinators; and species that are low-maintenance, that can increase biodiversity.

Infrastructure first

- Sidewalks and road improvements were a high priority
- Added trees were welcomed, but only after essential infrastructure is addressed.

Parking and traffic

- Mixed opinions: some community members wanted to preserve parking; others supported narrowing streets to slow traffic.

Maintenance and responsibility

- Uncertainty about who is responsible for tree care.
- Support for involving local businesses in care.
- Desire for better tree health and risk assessments.

Cultural and environmental relevance

- Interest in tree species that reflect the neighborhood's immigrant communities.
- Support for trees that improve air quality due to pollution from industrial areas.

Community engagement

- Work alongside local indigenous tribes for land restoration.
- Need more education on tree benefits.
- Suggested outreach: events, flyers, social media, podcasts, and radio.

Development and design challenges

- Concerns about sidewalk damage and utility conflicts.
- Frustration with development delays due to tree preservation rules.

What the survey showed

- 85% of respondents strongly supported planting more street trees, 3.6% strongly opposed.
- Over 53% of respondents cited concerns about maintenance costs, 46% raised safety concerns (e.g., root damage, falling branches), 38% had concerns about blocking views or sunlight, and 23% noted allergy concerns.
- Many were willing to volunteer for planting if provided access to watering and irrigation but would like to see support from businesses and the city since the community is low-income and underserved.
- Respondents wanted to see larger and better funded city tree programs and improved outreach and communication from the city about opportunities to get involved.

Most supported new planting strategies

Survey participants ranked potential solutions for creating more planting space:

1. Install sidewalks with planting strips – 96%
2. Remove pavement or compacted gravel – 73%
3. Remove on-street parking – 46%

WHAT WE HEARD

“South Park deals with several environmental issues that street trees help with. We often are much hotter in the summer due to being in the valley and surrounded by so much concrete, trees can help cool the air.”

- *South Park Community Member*



What future recommendations and outreach should we consider?

Based on community feedback, the following ideas reflect what community members hope the city will consider as it plans for a greener, more livable South Park:

Priority planting areas

- Add street trees in industrial zones like the Duwamish River Trail, 8th Ave SW, 14th Ave S, Dallas Ave S, S Cloverdale St, and 4th Ave S.
- Focus planting away from intersections and driveways to maintain freight visibility.
- Remove pavement where possible but preserve street parking to support local access and the economy.
- Avoid pollen-heavy species to reduce allergy impacts.

Community collaboration

- Partner with local indigenous tribes for land restoration.
- Collaborate with groups like Dirt Corps and Duwamish Valley Youth Corps.
- Involve residents in tree planning, planting, and stewardship.

Education and outreach

- Share accessible info on tree benefits and care via tags, flyers, mailers, and local media.
- Offer free webinars, tree identification guides, and watering tips.
- Provide free or low-cost watering tools and tree kits with care instructions.

Policy and program development

- Create a simple mail-in permit process for tree planting and green stormwater projects.
- Involve developers to preserve trees or fund new plantings within ¼ mile of new construction.
- Partner with businesses to plant and maintain trees on their properties.
- Develop paid youth programs and job training in tree care and green infrastructure.
- Offer incentives for volunteers and community-led greening efforts.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

SDOT is committed to growing our city's tree canopy and creating greener, healthier neighborhoods.

Explore the study: Learn about other neighborhoods included in SDOT's [Street Tree Planning Study](#).

Plant a tree: Visit [Trees for Neighborhoods](#) for free trees and planting resources in your community.

Learn about street trees: Visit the [Trees for Neighborhoods Street Trees](#) page for more information.

Connect with SDOT

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