



Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

2023 Annual Report

Introduction

2023 was a busy year for urban forestry in Seattle. We saw changes to the City's tree protection regulations, The Mayor's One Seattle Tree Plan, new staff positions in OSE for urban forestry, and major new funding for urban forestry projects through the Biden Administration's Inflation Reduction Act. The UFC continued its mandate to advise the Mayor and City Council on policies and regulations governing the protection, management, and planting of trees and vegetation in the Seattle. Updating the City's tree protection ordinance remained at the forefront of the UFC's work, as that 14-year effort finally resulted in new tree ordinance legislation. The UFC also issued recommendations on a range of topics to support the City's ongoing decision-making to continue to protect and grow Seattle's urban forest, which is a critical piece of the city's infrastructure.

In 2023 the UFC's primary objectives were to:

- 1) Support improvement of the City's Tree-related regulations and policies
- 2) Provide input to the process to update the city's Comprehensive Plan
- 3) Review and advise on City funding for urban forestry as part the budget process
- 4) Increase outreach and engagement with the public and City staff, and
- 5) Incorporate race and social justice principles into UFC work

2023 Activities, Outputs and Impact

Summary

The UFC is one of the most active commissions serving Seattle. In 2023, it held 24 public meetings, issued eight letters of recommendation on a range of topics, and provided feedback letters on program updates from Seattle Department of Transportation, Seattle Public Utilities, and the Green Seattle Partnership.

UFC members participated in four Seattle City Council Land Use Committee meetings, provided verbal public comment in front of the full City

Council and met with several councilmembers and City staff individually to discuss urban forest management.

In addition, the UFC strived to improve its connection and relevance to community and to learn from other City advisory bodies. Commissioners presented to the Rainier Beach Community Club, hosted conversations with the Seattle Arborist Association, and received hundreds of public comments at meetings and via email. The UFC collaborated with the Green New Deal Oversight Board to issue a joint recommendation to review tree protections through a climate equity lens. It also connected with the Seattle Planning Commission to learn more about the Comprehensive Plan update process.

Tree Regulation Ordinance Update

The first half of 2023 was dominated by the tree protection ordinance update, which was released for review in early March, then amended and approved by City Council in May. In response, the UFC issued four letters of recommendation, participated in four conversations with the Seattle City Council Land Use Committee, and provided public comment at full City Council.

There were several changes in the tree code that the UFC believes are improvements over the previous code, including reducing threshold designation for exceptional tree status, increased tree replacement requirements, and reducing the number and size of trees allowed to be removed by homeowners outside of development.

However, the UFC is concerned that the updated tree protection ordinance may not help the City reach its canopy and equity goals. For example, it is now easier for protected trees to be removed during development due to hardscape guarantees in higher density zones and inflexibility with tree protection areas. These zones tend to be





lower-canopy and have a higher percentage of people with lower incomes and/or people of color. And while the new code directs off-site replanting to be prioritized on public property in environmental justice priority areas, those gains may not compensate for loss of mature trees on private property. Given this, the UFC warns that the tree code as written may exacerbate existing canopy inequities.

The UFC encouraged Seattle residents to provide input throughout the tree protection ordinance update process through its electronic bulletin; subscribership rose by nearly 25% from 2022 to more than 2,200 subscribers. In 2023, the UFC received more than 700 comments from Seattle residents. These comments included continued encouragement for updating and enhancing urban forest protection regulations, as well as concern for particular trees and tree groves potentially at risk. All of these communications can be found in the UFC meeting notes for the meeting period in which they were received.



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UFC Recommendations

The UFC issued the following letters of recommendation and feedback related to city work as well as work of external partners:

- Tree protection ordinance update:
 - * January recommendations on [tree service provider registration ordinance amendments](#)
 - * [January](#) and [April](#) recommendations on draft tree protection ordinance
 - * May recommendations on [potential amendments to the tree protection ordinance](#)
 - * May recommendations on the [process for advancing the tree protection ordinance](#)
 - * July [recommendations on Director's Rules](#) on Tier 2-Exceptional Trees and Payment in lieu
 - * October [recommendations on Culturally Modified Trees amendment](#)
- [Cambridge Urban Forest Master Plan](#)
- Philly Tree Plan
- [ANSI/ISA Standards](#)

The UFC supported City initiatives and City

departments' work with the following letters:

- City's 2024 budget:
 - * July [initial recommendations](#)
 - * October [supporting recommendations](#)
- [Green Seattle Partnership program update and Discovery Park proposed thinning project](#)
- [Seattle Public Utilities program updates](#)
- [Seattle Department of Transportation program update](#)

Additional Highlights

The UFC recruited several new members this year and is pleased to continue increasing the diversity of voices on the Commission and maintaining a roster of excellent Commissioners bringing broad knowledge of and passion for the city's urban forest.

One of the main recommendations the UFC has emphasized regarding updating and improving urban forest protections was the establishment of a tree service provider registration, an ordinance for which was passed by City Council in 2022. City Council continued work



on that ordinance in 2023, with amendments aimed to improve the ordinance and the registration processes. The UFC worked with Council and the Seattle Arborist Association on these amendments and adopted recommendations regarding them.

The UFC provided recommendations to the city budget process regarding investments in urban forestry, during the budget development and the budget deliberations phases. Successful urban forest-related budget adds to the 2024 budget include additional funding for development of the Canopy Equity and Resilience Plan, a Statement of Legislative Intent regarding evaluation and monitoring of tree ordinance implementation, funding to increase the Trees for Neighborhoods program, continued industrial greening efforts, and additional resources for planting trees in developed parks and natural areas.

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In 2022, city staff and the Executive were asked by City Council in Statement

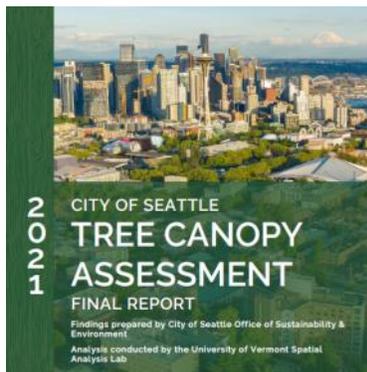




of Legislative Intent OSE-301-A-002-2023 to develop a report on the city’s urban forestry investments. Office of Sustainability and Environment (OSE) staff worked with urban forestry departments to collect information on these investments from the nine urban forestry departments for the years 2021-2024. OSE submitted the resulting report to Council in early October 2023, and will use this baseline report to continue refining the process of collecting this information from departments and producing the biennial urban forestry investments report called for in Mayor Harrell’s One Seattle Tree Plan Executive Order. The UFC incorporated the findings from this report into their budget recommendations.



In early 2023, the city produced a report on the canopy cover assessment work that was initiated in 2022. Key findings from this report include that the city’s canopy cover declined during the period of the study (2016-2021), and that the distribution of tree canopy and the rate of canopy loss are not equitably distributed. Staff briefed the UFC at various points during the assessment work, and the UFC incorporated the results into their work. For example, using the canopy cover assessment data and other available data, the UFC examined the status of tree canopy in the right of way, considering the equity implications of the extent and distribution of ROW canopy across the city.



The UFC has advocated for a new citywide UF position. That position was approved for the 2023 budget and was filled in OSE in the fall of 2023.

Urban Forestry Commission/Urban Forest Inter-departmental Team Annual Meeting

The 2023 joint meeting between the UFC and the city’s Urban Forest Interdepartmental Team again incorporated a hybrid approach, with many members of both groups meeting in person at the Seattle Municipal Tower and many members joining remotely.

The goals for these meetings include strengthening the partnership between the UFC and the IDT to accomplish the goals of the Urban Forest Management Plan, deepening our understanding of the relationship between racial equity and urban forestry, and continuing to practice the application of a racial equity lens to urban forestry work. In this meeting, the teams focused on hearing from staff on various aspects of the state of the urban forest, and then engaging in working discussions around planting and maintenance opportunities, and around climate resilience.

Commission Membership

The Commission successfully recruited four new members in 2023:

- Alicia Kellogg** – Position 2 – Urban Ecologist
- David Baker** – Position 8 – Development
- Nathan Collins** – Position 9 – Financial Analyst
- Logan Woodyard** – Position 10 – Get Engaged

Joshua Morris, Becca Neumann and Laura Keil were elected as Co-Chairs for 2023.

The UFC thanks the following outgoing Commissioners for their contribution to the Commission’s work: Julia Michalak (Position 1 – Wildlife Biologist), Falisha Kurji (Position 3 – Natural Resource Agency Representative), Stuart Niven (Position 5 – Arborist), David Moehring (Position 8 – Development), Blake Voorhees (Position 9 – Real Estate) and Laura Keil (Position 10 – Get Engaged).





Reflections – Highlights from 2023 and looking ahead to 2024

The UFC was busy in 2023, advancing policy and partnerships for Seattle’s urban forest, continuing to implement the standard for the volume of recommendations, presentations and meetings held. This year Seattle finally passed an updated tree protection ordinance, but work remains to fully understand, and to evaluate and monitor, implementation of the new ordinance. And as Commissioners we represent a City still embedded with institutional racism. In 2024 the UFC will continue efforts on both of these fronts.

In 2023, the UFC made changes to its meeting schedule and work structure. The frequency of full UFC meetings was reduced to once per month, and several subgroups were established to enable advancement of UFC priority work areas: climate change, community engagement, tree protection ordinance, diversity and equity, and budget. These subgroups will conduct their work between UFC meetings and report out on their work at the full meetings.

Focus areas for 2024 will include the following:

- Tree protection ordinance – ensure the new ordinance is understood by the UFC and the community, by continuing to work with SDCI as well as with the Mayor’s Office and City Council.
- Continued involvement in the Comprehensive Plan update process
- Continue to understand and advise on the city’s urban forestry investments
- Work with city staff and partners on development of the Canopy Equity and Resilience Plan
- Community engagement – continue to develop plans and implement next steps for engaging with the community around the UFC’s work. Continue to increase ways for the UFC to hear and learn from community, and from other cities and urban forestry colleagues.

Contact

Additional information about the Urban Forestry Commission can be found on the Commission’s [website](#), or by contacting:

2023 Urban Forestry Commission

Becca Neumann, Co-Chair

Position 4 – Hydrologist

Joshua Morris – Co-Chair

Position 7 – NGO Representative

Julia Michalak, Co-Chair

Position 1 – Wildlife Biologist

Laura Keil, Co-Chair

Position 10 – Get Engaged

Alicia Kellogg

Position 2 – Urban Ecologist

Falisha Kurji

Position 3 – NR Agency Representative

Stuart Niven

Position 5 – Arborist

Hao Liang

Position 6 – Landscape Architect

David Moehring

Position 8 – Development Community

David Baker

Position 8 – Development Community

Blake Voorhees

Position 9 – Real Estate Broker

Nathan Collins

Position 9 – Financial Analyst

Logan Woodyard

Position 10 – Get Engaged

Jessica Hernandez

Position 11 – Environmental Justice

Jessica Jones

Position 12 – Public Health

Lia Hall

Position 13 – Community/Neighborhood

Patti Bakker
Urban Forestry Commission Coordinator
Seattle Office of Sustainability & Environment
P.O. Box 94729
Seattle, WA 98124-4649
patricia.bakker@seattle.gov

