

**Urban Forest Update
Regional Development and Sustainability Committee
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Presenters

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Background

In August of 2009, City Council passed Resolution 31138 which directs departments to follow up on a range of action items related to protecting and enhancing Seattle's tree canopy. Discussions with Council have resulted in new timelines for some items, notably those related to the Tree Protection and Street Tree regulatory updates, work on which is underway. This paper summarizes our response to the remaining key action items.

Action Item Updates

Sections 1 & 2: Requesting Department of Planning & Development (DPD) update Tree Protection Regulations

The Department of Planning and Development is currently in the process of developing a proposal for updating Seattle's Tree Regulations. We anticipate releasing this proposal in July and will work with the Urban Forestry Commission and the general public to gather broad input. Using feedback generated through this process, we will draft legislation which will again be reviewed by the Urban Forestry Commission and the public. We anticipate this legislation will be submitted to Council by the end of the 2nd quarter of 2011. This timeline varies from Council's request in order to allow for substantial consideration by the Urban Forestry Commission and the public at both the proposal and ordinance stages.

Section 3: Requesting Department of Planning and Development (DPD) update documents related to the protection of Exceptional Trees

The "Designation of Exceptional Trees" Director's Rule regulates all designated heritage trees as well as trees of all species. The current Director's Rule explicitly states the diameter thresholds for the 74 most common species in the city and refers to Trees of Seattle for other species. DPD will review the most common species list again when the Director's Rule is reevaluated as part of the comprehensive tree protection update.

A layer containing all designated heritage trees is available on the Geographic Information System maintained by the City.

Section 5: Requesting the Office of Sustainability & Environment (OSE) present estimates and a plan for a sampling-based tree inventory

The Green Cities Research Alliance, a partnership between the US Forest Service, University of Washington, King County, and the Cascade Land Conservancy, is implementing a multi-phase research project referred to as the Integrated Urban Forest Assessment (IUFA), funded by the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA). As part of this research project, Cascade Land Conservancy will lead an effort to conduct a sampling-based inventory of Seattle's trees using the nationally recognized i-TreeEco Assessment model.

Sampling will occur this summer and will include roughly 230 plots that are 0.10 acre in size (radius of 37.2 ft), which are distributed throughout the city on public and private property. Data analysis will begin in the fall with the final report to the City expected in Summer 2011. This sampling-based inventory approach is similar to the forest inventory process undertaken in Portland. The City is making a modest investment from existing urban forest funding to support outreach to private property owners, but the vast majority of this work is supported through the ARRA grant.

Section 6: Requesting that Seattle City Light (SCL) report on efforts to improve coordination between the Vegetation Management and Capital Improvement and Planning divisions
Projects developed by the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) with vegetation elements are now reviewed by both SCL Vegetation Management and Engineering divisions. Additionally, SDOT and SCL management meet monthly to discuss issues related to tree planting, pruning and removal. This review and the agreed planting list will ensure that future plantings are consistent with utility needs.

Section 7: Requesting SCL and SDOT report on updates to the tree planting list at or near overhead power lines

SCL and SDOT have approved a tree planting list for use near overhead power lines. Alternate selections for a particular site can be considered by both departments on a site by site basis where conditions are appropriate. The process for interdepartmental approval will be included in an SCL/SDOT MOA which is in process. In February of this year, SDOT and SCL began monthly meetings starting last to discuss related issues and to seek solutions and avoid conflicts.

Section 8: Requesting SDOT report on efforts to improve coordination between Street Maintenance and Urban Forestry divisions

SDOT Street Use and Urban Forestry and Street Maintenance Divisions executed an MOA in December 2009 to guide decisions on tree planting and removals as well as Urban Forestry support to the sidewalk repair program. The MOA identifies Urban Forestry's decision-making responsibility related to tree retention and root pruning activities. It references, by appendix, tree selection & planting guidelines that specifies minimum tree pit sizes for different species of trees as a means of minimizing future sidewalk damage. It also references expectations about the level and timing of support Urban Forestry will provide the sidewalk repair program, and describes a process for resolving conflicts between the divisions.

Section 9: Requesting OSE identify education & incentives to encourage tree retention, maintenance and planting including potential use of utility rates and ROW permits fees

Seattle Public Utilities is collaborating with OSE this summer to more than triple the impact of last year's Trees for Neighborhoods program. Based on the storm water mitigation value of trees, SPU is funding the planting of at least 400 medium and large trees in single family neighborhoods in southeast Seattle. The program is designed with a strong, on-going education element to help ensure that the trees survive and thrive into maturity and maximize their storm water mitigation value.

Section 11: Requesting SDOT submit legislation or a Director's Rule clarifying requirements to use the public right of way to move a structure

Chapter 15.28 of the Seattle Municipal Code addresses building and equipment moving with specific provisions related to: the permit application; removal of trees or shrubbery; relocation of wires and cables; and reimbursement of the expenses associated with the move that may be incurred by Parks, SDOT and SPD. The Street Use Division typically receives no more than one permit application annually to move a structure. The Division staff meets with the applicant individually to review the specific coordination and permit requirements associated with the move.