

Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

Leif Fixen, Chair • Tom Early, Vice-Chair

Gordon Bradley • Donna Kostka • Richard Martin • Joanna Nelson de Flores • Jeff Reibman • Erik Rundell • Steve Zemke

June 3, 2015.

Mayor Ed Murray and Councilmember Sally Bagshaw
Seattle City Hall
600 4th Avenue
Seattle, WA 98124

RE: Arboretum Mixed-Use Trail

Dear Mayor Murray and Councilmember Bagshaw,

Seattle Parks and Recreation staff briefed the Commission on the Arboretum Multi Use Trail project and has been very helpful in answering the Commission's questions.

The Commission is aware that this project is part of the 2001 Washington Park Arboretum Master Plan where the City agreed to work with our University of Washington and Arboretum Foundation partners to provide a space for the Arboretum collection to be located, and that Seattle Parks and the Arboretum have done extensive public engagement around this project. Still, the Commission has a couple of concerns about this project:

1. The sheer number of trees to be removed to accommodate this 14 ft. wide trail based on ASHTO standards. Of the 168 trees to be removed, 65 are native species. 50 are 18" or greater in caliper. The eight largest trees to be removed are natives between 36" and 50" in caliper. These removals will result in a significant amount of tree canopy and wildlife habitat loss.
2. Considering Seattle's increasing density, the changing demands for open space, and the fact that the Arboretum Master Plan is a 14 years old document that may no longer represent City priorities in terms of canopy cover and open space goals, the Commission recommends re-assessing the needs of Seattle residents in order to update the master plan on a more regular basis. The Commission would like to encourage the Parks Department, in partnership with the University of Washington and the Arboretum Foundation, to review the tree policy within the Arboretum, especially the removal of native trees. Reviewers should consider the City's canopy cover goals and assess the impacts on native birds and other wildlife.

Lastly, the Commission commends the Parks Department for the intensive effort to move some of the trees, propagate those that can't be moved, and applying the City's Two-for-One Tree Replacement Policy to the project in a manner that is consistent with City policy. The two-for-one tree replacement is crucial for mitigation of the significant canopy loss and correlating loss of environmental services that this project will incur with its current design.

Preserving mature trees, especially native species, in Seattle's dense urban environment is challenging. There are few locations where our large conifers can thrive without growing onto overhead power lines, or causing damage to underground utilities and sidewalks, or causing sightline issues in our rights-of-way. In order to accomplish the Urban Forest Stewardship Plan's goal of 30 percent canopy cover the City should focus tree conservation efforts on locations that provide sufficient soil and don't present infrastructure conflicts such as Parks land and the Arboretum.

Sincerely,



Leif Fixen, Chair

cc: Council President Burgess, Councilmember Godden, Councilmember Harrell, Councilmember Licata, Councilmember Okamoto, Councilmember Rasmussen, Councilmember O'Brien, Councilmember Sawant, Jessica Finn Coven, Paige Miller (Arboretum Foundation), Fred Hoyt (University of Washington), Christopher Williams, Garrett Farrell, Andy Sheffer, Doug Critchfield, Deborah Brown, Eric McConaghy.

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