



Memo

Date: December 6, 2021

To: Councilmember Dan Strauss, Chair, Land Use and Neighborhoods Committee

From: Nathan Torgelson, SDCI Director and Michelle Caulfield, OSE Acting Director

Subject: Tree Protections Update – 4Q 2021 Report

The City Council adopted [Resolution 31902](#) on September 16, 2019, directing SDCI and OSE to explore strategies to protect existing trees, increase Seattle's tree canopy cover, and balance City goals to support future growth and density as provided in the City's Comprehensive Plan. The resolution also directs SDCI and OSE staff to provide quarterly reports to the Chair of the Land Use and Neighborhoods (LUN) Committee on progress made. In 2020, SDCI and OSE delivered reports on February 12, July 22, and November 25. This year staff delivered reports on March 23, July 14, and September 24, 2021, which summarized work accomplished over the past few months, including work underway and anticipated next steps. This is the 4Q report of 2021.

Progress on the 2020 Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP)

The UFMP sets the goals and framework to guide Seattle's urban forestry policies and programs. Since the adoption of the 2020 UFMP in September, the City's interdepartmental urban forestry team has begun to develop an annual implementation plan for 2022. Core team members are meeting this month to sequence the actions included in the action agenda and identify key 2022 activities to advance this five-year plan. We look forward to sharing the 2022 implementation plan with Council, once developed.

Progress Made/Work Underway on Tree Protection Updates

SDCI and OSE have continued to work to improve tree protections. This includes work completed this quarter to finish the public engagement phase, summarize and post the results of both public outreach methodologies.

Public Outreach – Results Posted

At the beginning of November, SDCI and OSE completed the public outreach phase of this work. Feedback received helped identify and understand community and stakeholder interests and priorities. This information helped to shape and inform our draft recommendations. A summary report and meeting notes are available on the [Changes to Code - Tree Protection website](#).

Code Compliance Update

We continue to focus on our enforcement efforts and have recently received four penalties for illegal tree cutting in the amounts of \$23,495, \$28,572, \$28,983 and \$17,016. As of November 30, 2021, penalties received to date equal \$166,306. The total number of penalties received in 2021 exceeds the previous year.

Council Requested – Tracking Tree Removal & Replacement

SDCI's team of GIS analysts continue to track tree removal, protection, and required planting on private property. An additional analyst was hired part-time this quarter to fill in a gap when the lead staff found that the target milestone could not be achieved when a member of the team reported reduced hours. The new hire was brought on board without any interruption to this work which has allowed for the team to

meet its quarterly target. We are finding that this new, improved data set is becoming more robust and will help SDCI and OSE determine tree canopy coverage on properties that have undergone development, which will further assist our efforts to monitor canopy coverage over time and inform the potential policy and code development recommendations.

Additional Staff

This year, SDCI funded four new staff positions to further assist existing staff to increase tree protections through all phases of development. New staff include: two professional engineers with extensive stormwater management experience; one plan reviewer with additional technical code experience to further protect exceptional trees, including tree groves, and to assist in the enforcement of tree protection measures and mitigation for tree removal when it is allowed; and one new accountant to support current staff with implementation of the existing tree regulations.

Urban Forestry Commission Briefings

SDCI has engaged and briefed the Urban Forestry Commission about tree protection needs and potential strategies several times this year. Most recently, on December 1, 2021, SDCI briefed the Urban Forestry Commission on the strategies being explored, how the Urban Forestry Commission’s recommendations are being incorporated, and how all stakeholders are also informing the recommendations. As a reminder, SDCI and OSE have been exploring five categories of potential strategies related to Resolution 31902:

1. Allowing for tracking and monitoring of tree-related work through a new tree service provider registration and enhanced tracking when trees are removed outside of development;
2. Expanding the definition of an exceptional tree to include all trees above 24” as measured by diameter at standard height (DSH) and tree groves and heritage trees;
3. Defining “significant tree” as any tree that has a DSH of six inches or greater and is not defined as an exceptional tree and exploring potential for adding some replacement requirements;
4. Allow for a payment option (voluntary payment-in-lieu) when tree replacement is required; and
5. Simplify processes and update enforcement provisions for tree regulations.

Additional Stakeholder Input

SDCI and OSE continue to explore the strategies outlined in the resolution for additional stakeholder input to existing policies, regulations, and business practices. This work is proposed to continue according to the schedule below.

Schedule and Budget

The schedule outlined below includes the goal of issuance of an environmental (SEPA) review of a proposal by end of 2021.

Task	Milestone
– Post results of public outreach;	November 2021 (completed)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct any necessary technical analysis; - Prepare plans for technology and business practice updates; - Assess resource needs to administer and enforce; and - Develop draft recommendations and make draft proposal available with environmental (SEPA) review for public comment; 	December 2021
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work with stakeholders, including UFC, on any potential updates to the proposal - Final recommendations for legislation 	Q1 2022

*Assumes no appeal of SEPA decision.

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