

Confirmation of Jessica Finn Coven for Director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment

1. What are your major goals for the Office of Sustainability and Environment (OSE) over the next year? Over the next three years? How will you know if OSE has succeeded in accomplishing these goals?

My primary goal is to continue the good work already happening with the office, but some areas where I will focus our accomplishments in the first year include:

- Creating the Equity and Environment Agenda to make sure we have clear and measurable steps to advance our work in partnership with communities of color, low-income communities, immigrants and refugees, establishing ongoing policies and practices to embed race and social Justice into our environmental programs, and developing an ongoing mechanism for environmental equity assessments to tell us where there are critical and unmet environmental justice needs in the City and how we should address those needs;
- Reviewing all existing OSE program work plans to make sure they are contributing in measurable ways to longer-term environmental objectives established by the Council and Executive and focusing on areas where communities could experience near-term environmental and quality of life benefits;
- Working with Council, the Mayor, other departments and external stakeholders to build momentum around a unified vision for the City's work on climate change and related environmental challenges. This vision will be built on the Climate Action Plan (CAP) and should be broad enough that every Seattleite feels like they are a part of the solution to this overwhelming challenge but include the specific steps to reduce emissions contained in the CAP. There must be clear roles for the business community and communities who will bear a disproportionate burden of climate change impacts to be part of Seattle's clean energy future and the vision must be one that unites and inspires many different constituencies in the collective work to limit climate change.

Over the next three years, I plan to:

- Establish and achieve an appropriate three-year reduction target for citywide greenhouse gases with a focus on reducing petroleum use in the City;
- Accomplish the near-term objectives established by the Equity and Environment Initiative to ensure all communities are seeing environmental benefits and participating in shaping our environmental programs;
- Ensure Seattle plays a key role in achieving state and federal policy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by actively engaging in discussions with our state and federal delegation as well as external stakeholders working at these levels. Often times Seattle creates models for environmental solutions that can be replicated in other cities or scaled for state or federal action. Seattle has an important role to play advancing state and federal policies by creating and promoting these replicable models.

Measurable indicators are important in all OSE programs to make sure we are delivering on our commitment to improve Seattle's environment for all our communities. Certain indicators, like pollution levels and air quality throughout the City, are technologically challenging but possible to measure. We



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will look at reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in Seattle's building stock, the increase in alternative-fuel vehicles and the number of people utilizing programs like Fresh Bucks to know if we are achieving our goals. Measuring our success at establishing a vision for Seattle's environmental work that is shared by all our diverse communities is somewhat harder, but will be assessed through periodic discussions with a wide variety of stakeholders to analyze changes in stakeholder support and engagement with OSE's work over time.

2. What do you see as the primary challenges facing OSE?

A key challenge that motivates me and all the staff at OSE is the fact that environmental benefits have been experienced unequally in Seattle and that lower income communities and communities of color disproportionately face environmental burdens. Addressing this trend is the primary role of OSE's Equity and Environment Initiative and has to be at the forefront of all OSE program areas and policy recommendations.

Another challenge facing OSE and all of Seattle is ensuring our City grows and changes in a sustainable way. How Seattle addresses housing affordability and transportation needs will determine if we are on track to be a livable and sustainable city for all of our diverse communities for generations to come.

A challenge often experienced in environmental work is that many of the environmental issues faced by the City - climate change, access to healthy food, and environmental justice in particular - can feel so overwhelming for people that it's often hard to articulate a clear and actionable path toward solutions. This has often led to struggles in making this work relevant, urgent, and connected with current community conditions and experiences. OSE needs to play a leading role working with Council, the Mayor and other City departments to develop solutions to these issues that meet the scale of the problem while also feeling actionable and achievable to the average Seattle resident.

Finally, like many offices OSE is resource-constrained. We are a small office with a relatively small budget, but the environmental challenges faced by the City are large, spanning multiple departments and sectors. The office must balance responding to urgent issues as they come up with the need to meet our long-term environmental goals.

3. OSE covers a wide range of activities. What parts of OSE's work will be the newest to you, and how do you anticipate getting up-to-speed on those areas?

I've spent my career to date focused on climate change, which has given me exposure to a wide range of environmental and social issues since almost everything will be impacted by climate change. That said, several of OSE's issue areas will be new for me to deeply engage with. I'm especially excited for the opportunity to work more on urban forestry and access to healthy food, two issues I care deeply about but haven't had the chance to work on closely before.

I'm lucky that OSE has a very knowledgeable staff in both of these areas who have already been helpful in briefing me on these programs. OSE has a strong management team that I meet with weekly and I have additional briefings on each of our programs scheduled in my first month to bring me up to speed on the Office's work plans and current trends in these important issue areas. I feel confident that between the highly capable staff at OSE and my connection to Washington's environmental community I will be able to become familiar with the issues I have not focused on in the past.

4. How will you foster partnerships with other City Departments and Offices? Where do you see opportunities for collaboration?

The key to successfully addressing environmental challenges is collaboration; OSE has a very small staff and budget and therefore plays a critical role as “connector and convener” amongst the various departments and offices also working on these issues. The first step to deepening any partnership is to build relationships based on trust and shared objectives with the Directors and staff of other departments. My career has focused on building meaningful relationships with a range of traditional and non-traditional allies and I feel well positioned to build on that framework with OSE.

Environmental issues are multi-faceted and impact so many areas of the City that there are almost limitless opportunities for collaboration. I truly believe that working amongst departments is critical in just about all areas of sustainability. Certainly when looking at the Climate Action Plan, there is deep collaboration with Seattle City Light, Seattle Public Utilities, Department of Planning and Development, Department of Transportation and many others and of course, the Office of Economic Development is a key ally in driving Seattle’s clean energy future. In addition, the Equity and Environment Initiative offers the opportunity to increase our collaboration with Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, the Office of Civil Rights, Department of Neighborhoods, and Parks and Recreation, among others.

5. How do you define the roles of the Executive and Council with respect to OSE? How will you communicate with the Council and Legislative Department Staff?

OSE’s most important role is to work with the Council and the Mayor to advance solutions to the City’s environmental challenges. The key to doing this is open, consistent communication and strong working relationships between all parties. I know OSE has had a strong relationship with the Council in the past and I intend to continue that, working closely with the PLUS committee as well as other Council members to understand their environmental priorities. As a direct report to the Mayor, I will work closely with him to understand his priorities, identify areas of overlap with the Council and ensure Council is consistently engaged as we advance OSE’s work. With regular and transparent dialogue I have no doubt we will be able to create a joint plan to deliver sound environmental victories for the people of Seattle and advance the important environmental goals of both the Council and the Mayor.

6. How will you foster partnerships with other governments (e.g., local, state, federal) to develop good public policy?

While Seattle is the largest city in Washington, we can’t accomplish all of our environmental objectives by taking action only within the City’s borders. We must work with Seattle’s state and federal delegation to establish shared objectives and have clear action plans to achieve them, with roles for all levels of government. We must also build strong working relationships with King County and other municipal governments to learn from each other and create replicable models for other cities throughout the country.

Often working together on shared projects is the best way to build lasting partnerships and OSE has participated in a number of local and national networks designed to connect municipal leaders with other levels of government to learn from each other’s successes and challenges and create economies of

scale where possible. These range from the King County Cities Climate Collaborative to the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the international C40 network. Thankfully, my work in the advocacy community here in Washington and in Washington DC has given me pre-existing relationships to build on at all levels of government, including with some of these larger networks, and the OSE staff also has long-established working relationships with other governments that I will rely upon to accomplish city, regional, state and federal policy objectives.

7. As Director, how would you set priorities among competing needs to address sustainability in Seattle? Can you describe what you see as some competing needs?

In a resource-constrained world, prioritizing is necessary. The first step in doing this is to get a comprehensive assessment of the environmental needs of all communities in Seattle, what is currently being done to address them and where we are falling short. The equity assessment will yield important information to this end. In my first three months we will also identify those important citywide environmental goals where OSE is uniquely positioned to facilitate action across sectors and departments.

In addition to these steps, I intend to have many conversations with the Council, the Mayor's office, other departments, leaders in the environmental community and other key stakeholders over the next three months, which will give me a sense of where OSE needs to focus our work. When I have more clarity around priority needs and where other City departments or external stakeholder groups are already focusing their efforts, I will be able to better prioritize OSE's work and look for synergies that will make us more efficient and cost effective. OSE will also seek to utilize cost-benefit tools and other data-driven ways to evaluate real-world impacts of our work so that we have objective data whenever possible to make the best policy and programmatic decisions.

When I look at competing needs in Seattle, I don't see issues that are in direct conflict with one another, but rather the need to prioritize certain issues in the short-term. This is largely determined by the needs of our communities, what other departments and offices are already doing and what issues OSE is uniquely qualified to lead on. To date, OSE has focused on building energy issues, climate preparedness, environmental equity, urban forestry, electric vehicle readiness, green stormwater and food access. One obvious question is whether or not the office should engage more on transportation issues due to the transportation sector's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution in our region. SDOT has been a leader on green transportation solutions and I intend to work with the OSE and SDOT staffs to determine if there is a role for OSE to bolster their efforts.

8. The recently-established Equity and Environment Initiative comes in response to a longstanding challenge faced by the City in engaging under-represented communities, primarily communities of color and low-income communities, in Seattle's sustainability and environment work. How do you intend to reach out to constituencies that have not historically participated in discussions of sustainability? How do you see EEI relating to your goals for OSE?

The EEI is an exciting opportunity for OSE to significantly rethink how we partner with and support communities of color, low-income communities and immigrants and refugees to participate in environment and sustainability programs. Most of these communities are having discussions about sustainability - many of them are carrying a disproportionate burden of environmental inequities - but



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we as a City haven't often connected in a way that engages these communities.

The Initiative has already established a Community Partner Steering Committee who will be providing recommendations for community engagement to create a City Equity and Environment Agenda and to ensure that we are engaging all communities in discussions of sustainability. The Steering Committee and the Agenda will serve as key resources for us to get to know how best to reach communities and for us to develop actions that are based in community needs. I'll use this process to listen and partner with communities and will continue to be present in these communities to develop additional relationships. Too often, City processes and programs don't do enough to ask communities what they need and how they are already approaching the work. By creating long-term partnerships and working through trusted advocates and networks to create a broader community engagement approach we have an opportunity to substantially transform who is at the table of decision-making on issues of environment and community health.

I will work to make sure we are applying the lessons-learned from the initiative as well as from the work of other departments to deepen our strategic partnerships with communities across OSE program areas. The EEI provides a foundational opportunity to build inter-departmental partnerships and external coalitions, have conversations with many stakeholders and broaden the base of who is benefiting from Seattle's environmental movement. The Agenda will also create the roadmap for new environmental policies and programs that address the intersection of race, social justice and environment while advancing community capacity building, OSE's understanding of community engagement, increased participation from Seattle residents in our programs, and an understanding of how well our existing programs deliver equitable outcomes.

9. OSE oversees and staffs the Urban Forestry Commission. What is your vision for this Commission? How can the Urban Forestry Commission work more effectively with programs such as Green Seattle Partnership, ReLeaf, and Friends of Trees to promote your vision?

Seattle is fortunate to have a very engaged urban forestry advocate community that supports City programs and also pushes the City to do more to protect Seattle's urban trees. I believe the Urban Forestry Commission is an important partner in the implementation of the Urban Forest Stewardship Plan and the accomplishment of the plan's goals.

My vision is for the Commission to remain a strong advocate for a thriving urban forest while exploring innovative approaches to increasing Seattle's tree canopy and encouraging City efforts along the same lines. Seattle is one of the fastest-growing cities in the US. Trees deliver numerous environmental, social, and economic benefits and make Seattle livable.

As OSE Director, I will ensure the Office's continued support of the Commission's work by coordinating interaction with City Departments and other organizations that impact Seattle's trees. The Commission provides an external point of view that helps the City take stock of the sometimes conflicting policies, programs, and projects that impact the City's ability to accomplish our urban forestry goals. The Commission also helps connect issues across departments to benefit our urban forestry goals. The monthly Urban Forestry Commission meetings provide an important venue for tree advocates, friends of parks, technical experts, and residents to provide input on City programs and projects, ensuring that

department staff get real time information on what's happening out there, on the ground, as we go about our urban forestry work.

The Commission has been very involved with the great work done by the Green Seattle Partnership and Seattle reLeaf receiving frequent briefings on progress. In 2013, the Commission issued a [letter recommending increased funding levels](#) for both programs. And it was thanks, at least in part, to this recommendation that City Council increased funding for GSP and reLeaf. However, with an issue as broad and complex as trees, there is always room for improvement. One way to foster a stronger relationship between the Commission and the GSP, reLeaf and Friends of Trees would be to:

- Create some sort of peer exchange learning opportunity.
- Create more opportunities for presentations and briefings both to the Commission and BY Commission members at other meetings.
- Create opportunities for the different urban forestry groups and programs to celebrate their successes together – perhaps during the annual Urban Forestry Commission/Interdepartmental Team meeting, where the different groups would get a chance to report out on their accomplishments and open themselves to feedback on their work plan in the coming year.