



# Memo

**Date:** September 20, 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 – 3Q 2021 Report

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The City Council adopted [Resolution 31902](#) on September 16, 2019, directing SDCI and OSE staff 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 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 to share progress made, next steps, and actions accomplished to date, including the status of the 2020 Urban Forestry Management Plan Update. This year staff delivered the 1Q 2021 report on March 23, and 2Q report on July 14, which summarized all the work accomplished over the past few months, including work underway and anticipated next steps. This is the 3Q report for 2021.

## **Progress Made on the Urban Forest Management Plan update**

When we submitted the 2Q report in July, the Plan was undergoing internal review prior to publishing the final version. On September 14<sup>th</sup> the Plan was finalized and published, concluding 3 years of work by department staff, the Urban Forestry Commission, and other important external stakeholders.

We are excited to have completed this planning document, which helps provide the necessary care and protection for the City’s important urban forest resource by providing a framework for policy and action that guides City government decision-making to help Seattle maintain, preserve, enhance, and restore its urban forest. Seattle’s urban forestry functions are organized in an integrated approach, where the responsibilities for the work are housed in nine departments that conduct the work, and the departments work together to develop this Plan to ensure effective management of this citywide resource. The plan was originally created in 2007 and we strive to update it every five years, with the first update completed in 2013. The Plan covers the current status of the urban forest and details on the existing management approach, including a matrix outlining the responsibilities and priorities of those nine departments with urban forestry responsibilities. It also includes the outcomes, strategies, and actions that frame and guide our urban forest management. The Plan and the Executive Summary have been posted to the Trees for Seattle website: [www.seattle.gov/trees/management](http://www.seattle.gov/trees/management). In addition, hard copies of the Executive Summary are being printed.

## **Progress Made and Work Underway on Tree Protection Updates**

SDCI, OSE, and their partners in other departments continue to work to improve tree protections. This includes work currently underway to conduct and summarize feedback from targeted public outreach and to increase enforcement and track tree actions on private property:

### Public Outreach

SDCI/OSE conducted five listening sessions in July and August 2021. Participants were stakeholders with technical expertise and/or lived experience working with current tree regulations, including homeowners, builders, arborists, real estate agents, environmental groups, and community organizations. Each online session was facilitated, and groups were limited in size to approximately 2-9 participants per session to allow for focused feedback through a structured conversation. This approach allowed for participants to

share their individual experiences, as well as engage in conversation with each other for an iterative feedback loop. The feedback provided in these sessions was both thoughtful and constructive. An executive summary report is being prepared and will be made available on the SDCI website in the next few weeks.

In parallel to the listening sessions, SDCI and OSE worked with the Department of Neighborhood’s Community Liaisons in July and August to prepare outreach materials and translate them into multiple languages. In September, the team launched their engagement work with BIPOC communities using culturally and linguistically appropriate engagement methodologies tailored for each audience. We anticipate that the Community Liaisons will be reporting back to SDCI and OSE early/mid-October after completing this important step of the work. Those results will also be posted on the SDCI website.

Council Requested - Tracking Tree Removal and Replacement

Additional staff hired in Q1 2021 have allowed for SDCI’s GIS analysts to continue making progress expediting the entry of tree-related data into our GIS system. All tree-related data that is being captured by the analysts and tracked in GIS will support data driven decisions of the effectiveness of tree protection regulations. This new and improved system is helpful because tracking tree removal and replacement will help SDCI and OSE determine tree canopy coverage on properties that have undergone development, which will help us monitor changes over time and inform future policy and code development. In addition, complete tree-related data will improve the effectiveness of our administration and enforcement of tree protections.

Code Compliance Update

We continue to focus on our enforcement efforts and over the past three years, have levied penalties ranging from \$10,000 to \$99,000. This included enforcement against willful and malicious tree removal, which allows for tripling the penalty amounts for illegal tree removal. At mid-year 2021, illegal tree removal penalties have amounted to \$38,124.

**Next Steps**

SDCI and OSE will work to conclude the public outreach, summarize the results of the public outreach, and incorporating public input we have received, refine and develop the initial recommendations and identify areas where more detailed analysis may be necessary. Included in this work will be an assessment of how the tree protection updates could be implemented and what resources will be necessary for it to be effective. The table below outlines upcoming milestones and tasks through the end of Q4 2021.

Task	Milestone
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Conclude public outreach</li> <li>– Summarize results of public outreach</li> <li>– Conduct any necessary technical and data reviews/analysis</li> <li>– Complete Racial Equity Toolkit</li> <li>– Develop initial recommendations that reflect feedback from outreach and analysis</li> <li>– Initial assessment of implementation and enforcement needs, including technology and business practice updates and staff resources</li> </ul>	September/October 2021
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Draft initial recommendations</li> </ul>	November 2021
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Issue SEPA decision</li> </ul>	December 2021

Copy: Aly Pennucci and Yolanda Ho, City Council Central Staff