

# 2021 Tree PAC Port of Seattle Commissioner Questionnaire

## 1. RACE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE

**BACKGROUND** – The [2016 Seattle Tree Canopy Assessment](#) found there is a statistically significant inverse relationship between tree canopy and both people of color and people within 200% of the poverty level. The report found that in Census tracts with lower amounts of tree canopy, more of the population tends to be people of color and have lower incomes. These same conditions have been found across the country.

**QUESTION** – Given this relationship, how can the Port of Seattle create opportunities to work with underserved, low income and previously redlined neighborhoods with insufficient tree canopy, to protect remaining existing trees and increase new tree planting and forest canopy, thus reducing heat island impacts and other climate damage impacts?

*As a Port Commissioner, I've been a stalwart advocate for increasing tree canopy, especially (but not exclusively) in communities adjacent to port activity. Tree canopies provide protective habitat for wildlife; they cool the earth and provide much-needed carbon sequestration. This is especially critical in communities where harmful air emissions are prevalent due to industrial or heavy transportation activity (for instance around marine terminals and the airport). The Port can play a major role in increasing tree canopies by first understanding what canopies exist and where they are inadequate (this work has begun through the Port's "Green Cities Initiative" with Forterra) so that we have a baseline from which to work. Next, the Port can and must support the planting of new trees as well as committing to protecting existing trees. When tree removal must happen for safety reasons, it needs to be only as a last resort, and we need to replant at a minimum 4:1 ratio. All of this needs to be done in partnership with the cities, property owners and community groups.*

## 2. COMMUNITY POLL ON TREE PROTECTION

**BACKGROUND** - In September 2021, poll results were published by NPI showing strong support by voters for strengthening Tree Protections in Seattle.

See "[Seattle voters overwhelmingly favor policies to protect and expand the city's tree canopy](#)"

See "[Seattle voters back strong tree protection in recent poll](#)"

King County has a five-year goal from their 2020 Strategic Action Plan to plant, protect and prepare a combined 3 million trees by the end of 2025. This effort contributes to climate change mitigation, forest health, improved salmon habitat and more tree canopy in urban areas.

**QUESTIONS** – Do you agree or disagree that the Port should work with neighboring cities and the county in supporting stronger tree and urban forest protection ordinances and helping meet canopy and environmental equity goals in neighboring cities and King County?

*Yes, I absolutely agree (please see previous answer).*

If you agree what measures do you support that the Port currently does and what additional measures would you propose the Port take?

*As mentioned previously, having a baseline inventory of our urban forests and trees exist (or don't) there, is the first step towards increasing tree canopies. From there, the Port can and should support measures such as funding for tree planting; a 4:1 replacement ratio for trees that need to be removed for safety reasons from Port property, and support for municipalities and community organizations that support the goal of protecting urban forests and the trees within them.*

### 3. IMPACTS FROM PORT OPERATIONS

**BACKGROUND** - Many environmental issues are part of the Port's jurisdiction and operations, including airport and waterfront operations and maintenance, shipping impacts, cruise ships waterfront use and airport adjacent land development, oil and coal and other commodity transportation through Seattle and King County, and other port properties. Trees and urban forests are green natural infrastructure that helps to reduce air, carbon, heat, water, and noise pollution.

**QUESTIONS:** What do you perceive are the key environmental and open space issues before the Port?

*The key environmental and open space issues facing the Port are how to reduce the environmental footprint of Port operations while still meeting the transportation and logistics needs of the regional and state economy. But these two things are not mutually exclusive; we CAN mitigate the carbon footprint and still provide these services, and that's what I've focused my time on as a Port Commissioner. Some specific examples include: electrifying marine and airport cargo-handling equipment; installing shorepower at our marine terminals; using renewable natural gas to heat the airport, and bringing sustainable jet fuel to SeaTac. And of course, protecting the open spaces in airport communities, such as North Sea-Tac Park, and around our marine terminals, such as Port parks along the Duwamish. Sometimes these efforts require trade-offs, where we need, as Port Commissioners, to give equal consideration to the environmental impact of a decision as to its financial rate of return. My vision for the Port of Seattle is that we have the lowest carbon footprint of any Port in the country, with a focus on carbon reduction, carbon sequestration and energy efficiency. Pursuing this goal will allow us to create hundreds of green jobs, protect our beautiful natural environment, and still have a thriving economy.*

Would you propose changes to address these issues differently from past port activities with an eye to protecting and expanding the local tree canopy already on Port-controlled property and neighboring areas and in the county?

*The Port needs a tree canopy policy, as well as a broader policy regarding urban forest protection in King County. As co-chair of the Port's Sustainability, Energy and Climate Committee, I've been working on this issue with my colleague, Peter Steinbrueck. We need to set some audacious goals for planting new trees (both on Port property and throughout the region), and giving specific policy direction about tree protection, so there's transparency with the public, and Port staff, about our values. We NEED trees to help us mitigate the impacts of Port operations. It needs to be seen as an integral part of decision-making on port projects, not simply a "nice to do" extra attribute.*

#### 4. LACK OF PARK SPACE, OPEN SPACE AND TREES WITH DEVELOPMENT

**BACKGROUND** - King County has been one of the faster growing areas in the United States. The overall population of King County has increased from around 1.5 million residents in 1990 to over 2.26 million residents in 2020, an increase of 50%. This growth and loss of green space is occurring across urban areas in King County.

**QUESTIONS:** How can the Port of Seattle help to protect and increase open space, greenbelts and tree canopy, as Seattle and King County grows, and Port operations increase?

Has the Port inventoried its significant trees, canopy coverage, and exceptional trees?

Does the Port have a tree and urban forest management plan and a tree canopy goal?

*As mentioned earlier, setting specific goals and including tree canopy, greenbelts and protection of open space as an integral part of the decision-making process when making capital investment decisions is essential. You can't change what you don't measure.*

*An inventory of significant / exceptional trees has begun, and I'm proud of my work last month passing a Port Commission motion requiring the staff to inventory North SeaTac Park prior to any further planning or development on that property. For all Port properties, we need to have a better understanding of what's there, so we can make decisions about how best to protect it. I'm eager to work with community organizations and committed residents to determine the appropriate goals for tree canopy, etc.*

#### 5. WATER QUALITY ISSUES

**BACKGROUND** - Urban storm water runoff, especially from impervious surfaces, is considered the number 1 polluter of Puget Sound, affecting salmonids and other local marine life. Seattle Port operations and their proximity to Elliot Bay, the Duwamish River,

Puget Sound and other water bodies which are critical are in protecting habitat for salmonids and other wildlife in both marine and freshwater habitats.

**QUESTIONS:** What role do you see the Port playing in improving riparian and adjacent areas under its control?

Are tree plantings and protection being implemented in those areas adequate, or how could they be improved?

Can the Port buy more properties to serve as public open space, or plant more trees, to help mitigate the loss of canopy associated with SeaTac airport and maritime operations?

*I'm proud of my work and support for the creation of the first-ever Port-owned and managed stormwater utility, which has allowed the Port of Seattle to make unprecedented investments in stormwater clean-up, as well efforts to daylight critical watersheds like Miller Creek, and clean-up of the Duwamish. Tree plantings and protections can always be improved upon! I support the idea of the Port buying property to protect open space, particularly in areas adjacent to port operations where there are adverse health and environmental outcomes.*

## 6. RESPONSE TO CURRENT HEALTH IMPACTS

**BACKGROUND** - The Port of Seattle's Sea-Tac Airport airplanes fly over 250,000 plus living people within 10 miles of the airport with 50% vulnerable people of color and 29% vulnerable immigrants and refugees. Bad, polluted air quality in south Seattle is a leading cause of asthma for both youth and the elderly. It is already a critical environmental justice issue for underserved communities surrounding both the SeaTac and King County airports.

**QUESTIONS** - What is the airport doing about the adverse health impacts from current flights and can it do more?

Follow-up question - What is the airport planning to do regarding this issue to accommodate its planned increase in air travel and cargo which would increase adverse health impacts even more?

*Bringing in sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) to SeaTac is the most systemic way to address the air emissions issues associated with air travel. It's not an easy solution – we need to have significantly greater production of SAF, preferably in Washington State, and we need to make substantial investments to transport the fuel to SeaTac. However, it CAN be done, working in partnership with the state and federal governments. I'm proud of my work this year advocating for a Clean Fuels Standard, which is the first necessary toward creating a real market for SAF.*

*On the more immediate front, electrifying operations – such as cargo handling equipment on the airfield, and bringing in pre-conditioned air so that airplanes can shut off their engines while at the gate, are critical steps I've taken as a Port*

*Commissioner to reduce harmful air emissions at and around the airport. But clearly, having greater tree canopy is an important part of this strategy as well.*

## 7. URBAN HEAT ISLANDS

**BACKGROUND** – The [EPA](#) says “Conventional paving materials can reach peak summertime temperatures of 120–150°F (48–67°C), transferring excess heat to the air above them and heating stormwater as it runs off the pavement into local waterways. Due to the large area covered by pavements in urban areas (nearly 30–45% of land cover based on an analysis of four geographically diverse cities<sup>1</sup>), they are an important element to consider in heat island mitigation.” The heat island effect also affect temperature in the surrounding areas for those living there and have proven deadly.

**QUESTIONS** - What is the best way for the Port to have a truly positive impact on reducing “Urban Heat Island Effects” on Port property?

What emphasis does the Port give to protecting existing trees and planting more trees both it's on-site and offsite properties for climate impact mitigation?

Do you support increasing the use of the green infrastructure benefits of trees in helping to mitigate urban heat island impacts where possible in the Port's operations?

*There's no doubt that the large, paved surfaces at the airport and seaport have the effect of being heat islands. Being able to mitigate the impact of these areas through increased tree plantings and protection of existing canopies needs to be a critical element of the strategy.*

Please return questionnaires as soon as you can to [SteveZemke@TreePAC.org](mailto:SteveZemke@TreePAC.org) Thanks.