

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?

Access to trees and the climate mitigation benefits they provide is an important equity issue. Ensuring a strong tree canopy and green space access is an area where the Port has an obligation to support its neighboring communities. I have been an advocate for using Port owned lands to create new tree canopies and greenbelts where feasible.

Further, the Port has worked closely with local communities through the Airport Community Ecology program, providing funding for cities including SeaTac, Burien, and Des Moines, along with help from nonprofits and other stakeholders, to plant hundreds of trees. The Port should work to improve tree canopy coverage for communities of color and low-income communities, where canopies are disproportionately lower, and where the positive environmental – and health – effects will have the greatest impact.

I will continue this work and look for opportunities to expand it, as well as to support our parks and protect open spaces. I'll also continue to use my platform to advocate for thoughtful development through density that promotes affordable housing with access to parks that reduce the need for driving and don't infringe on existing green spaces.

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?

I strongly agree. While we should aim to do as much as we can as a Port Commission, it's clear the main responsibility for maintaining, protecting, and expanding tree canopy lies with cities and the county. I have frequently advocated for protecting trees, and will continue to support robust canopy protection ordinances across King County and its 39 cities.

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

Yes, I support the Port's existing efforts to partner with local communities, cities, and nonprofits to protect trees. I believe we must continue to make it a priority to preserve and replant native trees and plants, as well as work closely with King County and the King Conservation District. We should take additional steps to encourage local governments who we have not previously partnered with to take local action, including by providing support where possible and collaborating with additional nonprofits.

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 impetus behind my initial campaign for the Port of Seattle Commission was a belief that we needed to accelerate the Port's actions to address climate change. With less than a decade left to avert the worst outcomes of the climate crisis, it's clear to me we need leaders who act boldly and urgently on this issue for today and the future. I remain inspired by both the threat – and the opportunities – presented by the climate crisis.

I believe the Port has a critical responsibility to take the lead in environmental justice to address both climate change and local impacts of air, water and noise pollution. Since I was elected, I have acted on that ideal, serving on the Port's Energy and Sustainability Committee and leading efforts to make the Port of Seattle a regional and national leader. The steps we've taken toward sustainable aviation fuels at SEA and for complete electrification of the Seattle central waterfront are truly innovative. However, there remains work to do.

Some of the major environmental and space issues facing the Port include existing pollution clean up, electrification of Port vehicles, new terminal development, potential airport expansion, traffic congestion, and more. I'm committed to bringing a lens of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and pollution, while using this opportunity to expand tree canopy and other green and open spaces.

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?

Absolutely, we must look for every opportunity to protect and expand tree canopy as we continue this work. Again, trees are an important mitigator of climate impact – they reduce air pollution, provide cover during extreme weather events, and more. As we support communities most impacted by Port activities, planting trees and expanding tree canopy is an important strategy we should adopt.

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?

The main priority is ensuring smart and thoughtful growth. I've personally advocated for protecting our rural areas and greenspaces, trees and farms by focusing growth in urban areas. We can thoughtfully design our cities to protect existing trees. The Port specifically has an obligation to protect open spaces, greenbelts and tree canopies as the region grows – better utilizing the spaces we have, rather than expanding for the sake of expansion. Again, in our work through the Airport Community Ecology program we should advocate for expansion of tree canopies in the neighborhoods most impacted by our Ports and, often, by growth.

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

We have inventoried specific areas to better understand how we can improve forest management practices and protect these critical resources. I am committed to continuing to inventory the trees in our jurisdiction and collaborating with neighboring communities to gain a stronger understanding of what is at stake.

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

I would gladly work with advocates for trees, arborists, and other environmental leaders to develop a strong urban forest management plan that includes robust tree canopy goals.

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?

Addressing pollutants in the water is a top priority for the Port – for protecting our own health, habitat health, and wildlife health, especially our Southern Resident Killer Whales and salmon. We are continuing to increase investments in stormwater treatment and also vessel discharge. Our most significant improvement came when we established our own stormwater utility, allowing us to reinvest in our stormwater infrastructure directly rather than working with a third party interested in only meeting the minimum acceptable levels of treatment.

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

The Port has become a center of excellence in certain areas of natural climate solutions. In 2018, we started a pilot carbon sequestration project in Elliot Bay, by establishing a kelp and eelgrass plot near our terminals. The goal is to create a replicable model for waterfronts around the Puget Sound. We have made protection of natural resources a priority through replanting trees and native plants, restoring wetlands, and conserving and re-establishing waterways, estuaries, and other marine habitats. We are currently planning more than 60 acres of restoration efforts along the Duwamish river watershed through establishment of three mitigation projects in Seattle and Auburn. We just

recently funded a project for the city of Des Moines to restore the Miller Creek watershed, a long dormant salmon spawning stream.

If re-elected, I'll continue to advocate for similar projects, while also looking for ways to partner with King County on their climate action efforts, including their work to plant and conserve 3 million trees, and with King Conservation District who take on highly detailed work across the county to protect and restore our natural resources.

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?

We are consistently looking for opportunities to both plant more trees, including through programs referenced throughout this questionnaire, and protect open spaces. I'll continue to collaborate with fellow Port Commissioners and local governments on these efforts. We are also introducing mitigation banks – places where the Port remediates past environmental harms and returns sensitive habitats like shorelines to perpetual protected status.

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?

We've funded scientific studies of the impact of air and noise pollution on neighboring communities, and our advocacy federally has resulted in new money and authority for the Port to redress failed insulation systems on homes under flight paths.

Last year, the Commission passed the Duwamish Valley Community Benefits Agreement, drafted in tandem with the communities of South Park, Georgetown and surrounding neighborhoods. The agreement recognizes historical impacts and commits the Port to being a partner in a plan for shared prosperity for historically marginalized residents. We also passed the South King County Fund, providing \$10million for community initiated projects in County areas most impacted by Port operations.

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?

Prior to my joining the Commission, the Port opposed State efforts to consider alternative locations for commercial aviation, based on a state study recommending that all efforts to maximize capacity at SEA should be exhausted before shifting focus to a second major airport. The reason I advocated for the Port to change its position from opposing to supporting is twofold. First, Based on the projected growth forecast by the FAA and other reputable sources, aviation demand will outstrip even the most aggressive of capacity outlooks for SEA. Second, the recommendations of a second site commission will inevitably elucidate the challenges of constructing (or expanding on an existing) commercial aviation facility, which will better inform public discussion on the merits of the consequences of increasing passenger aviation.

Airplanes aren't the only source of pollution around the airport, however. Vehicle traffic on airport property and its connected streets and highways match the impacts of airplane traffic and we must address this issue head-on. I've worked to create a transportation management association that would incorporate all 350 businesses that operate at the airport to reduce commutes, incentive transit use to the airport and limit congestion.

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 cities¹), 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?

Simply put, we must plant more trees, protect existing trees, and expand tree canopy, while at the same time working urgently to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and our contribution to climate change and global warming.

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

This is an important priority for the Port, in tandem with our efforts to plant and protect trees through the previously mentioned Airport Community Ecology program. I will continue to be a strong advocate for considering the impact our Port programs and initiatives have on our trees, and improving tree canopy where possible.

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?

Yes, 100%. One of the greatest positive health and environmental impacts we can have on our community is by planting and protecting trees.