

2021 TreePAC Seattle Council Candidate Tree and Urban Forest Questionnaire

1. CLIMATE IMPACT MITIGATION. As recent record temperatures of 108 F in Seattle have shown, Seattle needs to improve its climate resiliency to protect the health of its people and neighborhoods. For 12 years the city has delayed updating its Tree Protection Ordinance to increase protection for trees and urban forests, which are critical to reducing heat island impacts and increasing climate resiliency. SDCI claims they will be producing a draft by the end of the year but there will not be time to review, do a SEPA analysis and Council consideration until next year.

If elected, will you commit to prioritizing updating Seattle's Tree Protection Ordinance by July 1, 2022 including maximizing the retention of existing trees, especially large ones, and planting more trees, as part of a climate resiliency plan for low income and economic justice communities to respond to environmental inequities?

Tree preservation or tree replacement is key to improving the social health determinants of health for communities. I support increasing tree canopies on public land and preserving and replacing trees on private land to decrease the amount of pollutants and heat bubbles that disproportionately affect our largely BIPOC and low income communities in the face the climate crisis effects.

2. AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROJECTS.

As Seattle's population increases, so does the pressure for increased affordable housing. Significant tree loss occurs in Seattle when lots are clear cut for development. Advocates for more tree protection believe with better planning and regulations, we can both increase affordable housing and save more existing trees. Trees create healthy communities.

How do you think Seattle can succeed at maximizing the retention of its exceptional and significant trees while building new needed affordable housing?

We can protect and expand trees in Seattle *and* also build affordable housing across the city. Seattle can reduce its encroachment on wetlands, farmlands, and forests when we create a denser city. Protecting our trees is great for our elders, youth, and working families to enjoy and for their physical and mental health. I have long advocated for setbacks so we can have tree canopies that line our streets to protect people who are walking, biking, and waiting for public transportation. I have also championed projects like the new Habitat for Humanity South Park homeownership project that turned a single house into 13 new permanently affordable homes surrounding a courtyard with trees. Denser housing like this can help us build more affordable housing and while protecting our trees for our communities and the

environment. Trees are integral to our dense, mobile, high access opportunity neighborhoods. I have been endorsed by 350 Seattle, Washington Conservation Voters and Sierra Club because of my commitment to environmental justice along with housing stability and access.

3. PROTECT TREE GROVES.

Seattle's interim tree ordinance protects existing groves of trees (group of 8 or more trees 12" in diameter). [SDCI's Draft Director's Rule 13-2020](#) has proposed keeping a grove as exceptional even if a tree is removed during development. The Seattle Urban Forestry urged SDCI to include street trees in a grove if they are part of a continuous canopy.

Do you support adding these two changes to protect tree groves to conserve habitat and canopy cover?

Yes! We need to conserve our canopy cover for our health and the health of the environment-- this is a climate imperative and we must take bold action to protect our trees.

4. REQUIRE MAXIMUM RETENTION OF EXISTING TREES BY SITE PLANNING.

Seattle requires developers to identify all trees on site 6 inches DBH and "maximize the retention of existing trees" as they subdivide a property for development. However, once building plans are drawn up and building starts, there is no longer a requirement for developers to maximize the retention of existing trees. Minimal efforts are frequently made as a result to save trees outside the building footprint. Lots are frequently clearcut without this protection.

Do you support requiring developers to maximize the retention of existing trees throughout the entire development project, as Austin, Texas does, not just at the beginning as Seattle does?

Yes! We frankly can and must do both with careful planning in a region that is going to grow rapidly over the next several decades. Density done right in Seattle means having access to parks from our high opportunity access areas - including greater green space and requiring set backs to build around trees. Connecting our homes, workplaces, and services through transit is great but we must also include greenspaces. Urban tree canopies are vital to reducing air pollution and ensuring cooler temperatures as we face hotter summers in our city as a result of climate change. I believe in encouraging and protecting green spaces through tree-planting programs-- especially in historically redlined communities to fight urban heat bubbles that affect low-income and communities of color disproportionately.

5. DIRECTORS RULE UPDATE REQUIREMENT.

Over a year ago, SDCI issued a draft Directors Rule to update protection of Exceptional trees, but it is currently stalled in being adopted. The Seattle Urban Forestry Commission made a number of recommendations for increased protections.

Do you support the implementation of the [draft Director's Rule 13-2020](#) as written that would update the outdated 16-2008 Director's Rule on Exceptional Trees or should it be strengthened based on the [Urban Forestry Commission's recommendations](#) ?

I support the Director's rule and I know there is more to be done to protect our urban trees. I believe a stronger Director's rule is important, and also believe that the Urban Forestry Commission has done great work in protecting the tree canopy of our city and believe their recommendations should also be incorporated into updated tree protections, including updating our city ordinance. I would love to get back to work for another 4 years to implement these stronger recommendations in a timely fashion so we no longer put a hold on adopting important tree protections.

6. EXCEPTIONAL TREE DEFINITION.

The Urban Forestry Commission has recommended reducing the upper limit threshold for large exceptional trees to 24" DBH (Diameter at Breast Height) from 30" DBH. About half of Seattle's exceptional trees are less than 24 inches DBH but Douglas fir, western red cedar and big leaf maple trees currently are exceptional at 30" DBH. Portland recently reduced their upper threshold for exceptional trees to 20" DBH.

Do you support 24" DBH or 20" DBH for the upper limit for protection as Exceptional trees?"

Protecting large trees is important for so many reasons. In urban spaces, they provide heating and cooling, they purify the air, they are aesthetically pleasing, and can provide community play areas. Apart from all the benefits trees provide us, they have intrinsic value. Trees provide habitats to millions of species and they are living things themselves. Another important consideration is allowing flexibility to have reasonable approaches to build affordable housing, transit, bike lanes, or other intentional planning to make Seattle run well for all the people who live here. So often environmental protection is employed as a guise to keep resources away from those who need them most. I believe that implementing a 24" upper limit for exceptional trees is a good step towards striking a balance between effective city planning and environmental protection.

7. TREE REMOVAL AND REPLACEMENT PERMIT

Issaquah, Kirkland, Lake Forest Park, Medina, Redmond, and Woodinville all require permits for tree removal of 6 inches and greater DBH on private property. However, Seattle's DCI, which oversees protection of trees on private property, does not require permits to remove trees, but only has a complaint system that is not stopping illegal

tree removal. SDOT requires permits to remove street trees 6" DBH or larger and requires a replacement tree be planted. Permits would allow tracking of trees removed from private property outside development.

Do you support DCI requiring tree removal and replacement permits for private property owners and developers as SDOT currently requires to remove any tree 6" DBH and larger and that the trees be replaced on site or elsewhere in the city?

Yes! We need to protect our tree canopy which provides important ecosystem services. A complaint system is a poor means of tree protection because it puts the burden on neighbors (those of whom with more time and more trust in government are advantaged) and because tree removal is not something that can be un-done.

8. REPLACEMENT FEES.

Portland Oregon requires developers to replace all trees over 12 inches in diameter removed during development, either on site or pay a replacement fee. For trees 20 inches DBH and larger, if trees are not replanted on site they must pay an in-lieu fee of \$450/ inch in tree diameter removed to help plant new trees elsewhere in the city. This helps Portland to maintain and grow their tree canopy. In 2020 Portland had over \$4 million in their [Tree Planting and Preservation Fund Budget](#). Seattle has no such in lieu replacement fee or fund, even though there is a legal requirement ([SMC 25.11.090](#)) for replacement of all exceptional trees and trees over ≥ 24 " DBH removed by developers. It has seldom been enforced by SDCI and there is no record of where any off site trees were planted or any fees collected by the city to plant them.

Do you support Seattle requiring developers to replant trees they remove or pay a replacement and maintenance fee, to fund replanting trees in Seattle, so as to help maintain and grow Seattle's tree canopy to compensate for the many benefits and ecosystem services lost to the city and its inhabitants?

Yes. A replacement fee is an effective way to protect and maintain or forests and canopy covers while also encouraging the maintenance and replacement on site as well.

9. TREE CUTTING MORATORIUM.

According to [Seattle's 2016 Tree Canopy Assessment](#), just over 6000 exceptional large trees still exist in Seattle. A 2018 internal Seattle study ([Tree Regulations Research Project](#)) reveal that with tree removal "Conifers and large tree species are coming out with deciduous and dwarf species are coming in". Seattle has not updated its Tree Protection Ordinance since 2009, despite repeated Seattle City Council Resolutions to do so.

Do you support a 6 month or longer moratorium on cutting down large exceptional trees, while the City works to update its Tree Protection Ordinance?

We need to efficiently create a Tree Protection Ordinance which balances the need for intentional city planning with large tree, canopy cover, and green space protection- and much needed housing production. My concern with implementing a broad moratorium is the unintended consequence of this policy causing a rush of tree removals occurring in anticipation of a moratorium. I believe we can continue to support housing development and move forward an updated tree protection ordinance without delay. And I will work to make sure that our protection ordinance is updated by July 2022.

10. CREATE A NEW DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE .

The Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections currently oversees tree protection on private property. They have been repeatedly asked since 2009 to submit an updated Tree Protection Ordinance to the Seattle City Council to consider but 12 years later the city still has no new ordinance. SDCI is subsidized by money from development permits but gets no money for tree protection. This creates a conflict of interest. SDCI has no urban forestry division. Trees and our urban forest need a city department to represent them that does not have conflicting priorities. San Francisco has a Department of the Environment with responsibilities for a diversity of issues including the urban forest and climate.

Would you support moving tree and urban forest protection and oversight to a new independent Department of the Environment and Climate that includes an Urban Forestry Division to specifically coordinate and prioritize tree and urban forest protection?

There are several City departments that oversee trees and I believe there is value in coordinating that work and making sure there is consistency across our urban forest management. We need people who are specifically tasked with equitably planning urban forests and I would support a more central approach to coordinating tree management, including strengthening the City's Department of Sustainability and Environment

11. TREE CARE COMPANY REGISTRATION FOR COMPLIANCE.

The Seattle Department of Transportation requires Tree Care Providers to register with the City and sign off on acknowledging they understand and will comply with City regulations to protect trees. Because the current Tree Protection Ordinance only has a complaint-based system for trees on private property, trees continue to be removed illegally.

Do you support requiring the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, which oversees trees on private property including during development, to require Tree Care Providers to register with the city, get a yearly city business license, have insurance that also covers the city, file with State

Labor and Industries and acknowledge they understand and will comply with all city tree regulations?

Yes, tree protections are meaningless unless they are understood and enforced. I believe we need to make sure any licensing and registration is done equitably to ensure that all small businesses, including immigrant and refugee and BIPOC owned, have equitable access.

12. CHOKING INVASIVE VEGETATION.

Many trees in Seattle die as the result of invasive species like English ivy, killing them with their climbing vines. On steep slopes this greatly threatens slope stability and increases the risk of landslides. A good time to remove invasives is during development.

Do you support requiring developers as part of their landscape plan to remove all invasives on a lot, not just those on the “development site” or within 10 feet of a planted area as the [current landscaping Director’s Rule](#) states?

Yes. Development poses a good opportunity to manage invasive species.

13. TREE SURVEY AND TREE PLAN AT BEGINNING OF DEVELOPMENT.

Portland, Oregon requires that a comprehensive [Tree Inventory and Tree Plan](#) be done at the beginning of their development permit process. Developers enter the inventory into an Excel spreadsheet which can easily be added to a city database. This will help Seattle more quickly track tree loss and replacement during development. The current tracking is requiring SDCI staff to remove data from a site plan which is both time consuming and frequently incomplete because all the information is not on the site plan. It also eats up employee time and SDCI budget.

Do you support and will you push to include this provision in an updated tree protection ordinance?

Yes. Understanding what our forests and tree cover from a data perspective is crucial for planning effectively.

14. SPEED UP TREE CANOPY GOAL TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CRISIS

Seattle has had a 30 - year goal in its Comprehensive Plan to reach a tree canopy of 30% by 2037. Yet there has been no specific plan developed by the city detailing how we can reach this goal. The recent record temperatures in Seattle and the Northwest confirmed the deadly impacts of urban heat island effects on human life, especially in areas where there is low tree canopy. Mapping has shown these areas to be mostly previously redlined areas and low-income areas. Seattle needs a detailed plan in place to plant in areas needing more trees to address environmental equity.

Will you support developing a tree planting plan and prioritize moving the 30% canopy goal to 2030 as is being done with other climate mitigation timeline goals in Seattle?

Absolutely! We are failing to meet Seattle's Climate Action Plan goals, and thus failing our community. To counter this slow-down in progression, I have championed new efforts for new building efficiency standards for city buildings, including more labor and environmental requirements in housing development, MEETS for more energy efficient city buildings, GND in Jumpstart, and pushed for more housing in Seattle. I have supported efforts to move away from fossil fuel reliance in buildings and homes in a way that ensures a just transition for workers as well.

I will push for investing in green jobs that are sustainable, prioritizing climate and infrastructure needs in the budget such as sidewalk and bike lane improvements, transit investments, electrification retrofits, and with all the funding coming from the federal government and local dollars I'd like to see where larger infrastructure projects can include multi-modal build-outs as well as infrastructure upgrades to help move us away from reliance on single use occupancy vehicles. Putting energy and resources into tree planting is another important way to mitigate climate change and it has the added benefit of bolstering our green spaces.

15. DRAFT SEATTLE URBAN FORESTRY COMMISSION TREE AND URBAN FOREST PROTECTION ORDINANCE

At the request of several members of the Seattle City Council, the Seattle Urban Forestry Commission produced a draft [Tree and Urban Forest Protection Ordinance](#). Despite requests to discuss it with the Mayor's Office and SDCI, no meetings were ever held to jointly review the draft or consider its recommendations on what was needed to have a stronger tree ordinance in Seattle.

Will you, if elected, consider this draft for adoption as an alternative substitute bill, especially if SDCI does not produce in a timely matter a draft which significantly addresses the recommendations in [Council's Resolution 31902](#)

Yes. Protecting urban trees and forests is a climate and equity imperative. If re-elected, I will champion urban forest protection, including by considering the Seattle Urban Forestry Commission's draft.

Return completed questionnaires to [stevezemke@Tree PAC.org](mailto:stevezemke@TreePAC.org).