

2021 Tree PAC Port of Seattle Commissioner Questionnaire

Submitted by Peter Steinbrueck, Candidate for re-election to the Seattle Port Commission, Position 4.

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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?

An important way in which we are helping communities of color, underserved, and low-income communities is through the \$10 million South King County Community Fund, established by me in 2019 with full support of the commission to provide resources and support to historically underserved near airport communities. The Fund awards economic recovery and environmental grants to dozens of ethnically and culturally diverse communities. As a few examples of the equity-based funding, the Environmental Grants Program supported New Start Community Garden in Burien, Partners in Employment, a community program which works with immigrant and refugee youth to learn about and paid work on park restoration, tree planting, park maintenance, and removing invasives. Another highly successful environmental justice and equity based project, the SKCCF environmental Grants program funded the Hilltop Park restoration in Burien, working in partnership with EarthCorps' young adult crew members to clear 60,000 square feet of invasive blackberry bushes. Community volunteers are planting native trees and continuing restoration work.

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.

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

Yes, we do work closely with neighboring cities and the county to protect an increase urban tree canopy, centering equity, with \$450,000, award to support long term forest stewardship in heat island cities of SeaTac, Burien, and Des Moines in partnership with Forterra's Green City Partnerships program to plan, steward, and restore urban forests in historically underserved, near airport communities. Most recently I co-sponsored a Port Commission policy directive to remove 55 acres of commercially zoned port owned land from future aviation development, with the goal to provide an ecological inventory of the land to protect the densely wooded area and possibly fully integrate the property for long term tree preservation, open space and recreational benefit.

2. 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?

All our transportation operations and facilities, whether the seaport, airport, and cruise, must move more aggressively toward greater environmental sustainability and clean, renewable energies. We are making great strides on all fronts, including full electrification of the Seaport by 2030, comprehensive strategies (under my 2019 SeaTac Ground Transportation Access Plan) to increase transit ridership and reduce private car trips at the airport, and in restoring environmental health and water quality of the lower Duwamish River and East Waterway as superfund sites. In addition, the Port owns and maintains 23 public parks, (many of which were contaminated industrial sites), providing open space, recreational opportunities, habitat restoration along the banks of the Duwamish, and extensive tree-planting. Among our most important projects we are working on at the Port is the cleanup of the Duwamish River. While the responsibilities are shared between the Port, the City of Seattle, and King County, we are committed public partners with EPA on the sediment cleanup actions.

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?

Yes, and I am. The Port's Century Agenda calls for the port to become the "greenest Port in America," through responsible environmental stewardship including aggressive climate protection goals. But when it comes to public environmental health and climate protection, we can and should move faster. This year, I was made co-chair the Port Commission's Sustainability, Environment, and Climate Committee. In my Port wide environmental leadership role, I have gone right to work in setting new and aggressive goals (announced by me on Earth Day 2021) to: 1) Establish Port Tree Stewardship Plan and Tree Planting for Community Benefit and Carbon Sequestration. Plant 100,000 trees by 2030 targeting under-served tree desert communities in South King County; 2) Conduct an Energy Audit of all Port building facilities and evaluate potential for converting every HVAC system to clean renewable fuels; 3) Double Sound Transit ridership to Sea-Tac airport and improve regional BRT bus service to Sea-Tac; 4) Transition Port vehicle fleet to all electric or hybrid electric; 5) Identify potential for converting Solid Municipal Waste to biofuel for aviation, working with King County on feasibility study. Note that MSW produced in the U.S. 2018 was 292.4 million **tons** or 4.9 pounds per person per day. Of the MSW **generated**, approximately 69 million **tons** were recycled, and 25 million **tons** were composted about only one third. We can and should do better, as this is one of the highest forms of humanly caused, preventable pollution and GHG emissions.

3. 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 Port is one of the largest public landowners in King County, with properties that include greenbelts, noise buffers, sea sides, and riparian corridors. As responsible environmental stewards we must continue the clean up work while expanding, urban tree canopy, ecosystems, and improving habitat. At Fisherman's Terminal we are developing an extensive water collection plan to collect, clean, bio filter a re-use storm runoff. We are even working on a pilot project at Smith Cove, to restore under water habitat in the shoal waters of Elliott Bay with eel grass and kelp gardens.

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

Yes, under my determined leadership and direction the Port environmental staff recently conducted a first-ever comprehensive tree inventory of all non-aviation Port-owned properties (about 1800 acres), for the three-fold purpose of measuring total canopy coverage, identifying all significant and heritage trees, and advancing stronger tree protections and land stewardship.

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

The port has tree protection policies in place and has adopted the city of Seattle's Tree Stewardship and Management Plan. However, I think that could be made stronger, more explicit, and more comprehensive. My goal as the lead tree advocate at the port is to develop a stronger Tree Protection Policy and Land Stewardship Plan, that is inclusive of habitat restoration in wetlands, creeks, and other riparian corridors on its property, and to expand tree canopy for eco-services, carbon sequestration, addressing heat island effect, and public enjoyment. Please see:

4. 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?

The Port has a direct responsibility for the cleanup of riparian corridors and adjacent areas under its ownership and control, where historical pollution has degraded habitat and entire eco-systems. We are doing that, but it takes time, and a lot of money to undo the damage caused by more than a century of past industrial polluters. The Port has restored and enhanced over 31 acres of fish and wildlife habitat at 16 sites throughout the Duwamish River, Elliott Bay, Puget Sound, and Lake Washington Ship Canal. In addition, the Port has Created and enhanced 177 acres of wetland, including 350,000 new trees and shrubs, enhanced two miles of stream habitat, and restored more than 30 acres of intertidal and saltwater habitat. Much of this work has been voluntary action. The Port is an environmental leader among ports nationwide, and as Port Commissioner I will continue advocate for, and to advance these efforts.

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

There is always more room for improvement, and there can never be enough trees! As chair of the Port's Sustainability, Environment, and Climate Committee, my environmental priorities include planting 100,000 more trees, focusing on heat islands and underserved areas of King County, both on Port properties and non-port properties, where the Port has the authority to leverage resources and support community-based projects.

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?

It is possible for the Port to buy land to preserve as open space, but there are legal restricts as the Port is not a general-purpose government. To create new public open space, there must be a clear Port related purpose under the port's charter as authorized by the State, such as noise buffering and habitat mitigation. We can also protect against the loss of tree canopy by being good land stewards. I have been a strong leader and advocate on the Commission for strengthening our tree stewardship policy and am working with the City of SeaTac to the long-term transfer 55 acres of forested land for inclusion in North SeaTac Park that is currently zoned Aviation Commercial. I recently wrote a Port blog, "No Paving Paradise at SeaTac Park," and passed a Commission policy directive to assess ecological conditions and conduct tree canopy inventory at 55-acre LO6 property within the North SeaTac Park.

5. 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?**

There can be no environmental sustainability without addressing related environmental justice issues. The Port is working on many fronts to reduce noise and air pollution impacts on near airport communities. Under the \$10 million South King County Community Impact Fund (a grant program I started in 2019), the Environmental Program funds many community projects intended to address health impacts of SeaTac airport. We are also engaged with community members and elected leaders of six airport area cities, including SeaTac, Burien, Des Moines, Normandy Park, Tukwila, and Federal Way, through the Highline Forum, and SEA Stakeholder Advisory Roundtable (StART). Significant progress is being made through Late Night Noise Limitation, enhanced aircraft noise monitoring, acceleration of the Noise Abatement Program, and more. Health issues related to air quality such as ultrafine particulate distinctly associated with aircraft are the subject of a recent UW Department of Environmental & Occupational Health Sciences study, which found that communities under flight paths near the airport are expose to higher levels of ultrafine air pollution particles compared to roadways. The Port is committed to reducing emissions associated with using fossil fuels and supports development of low carbon alternative fuels, such as renewable diesel and renewable natural gas, electrification, and sustainable aviation fuel (SAF). The Port actively lobbied hard for nearly ten years, for the Low Carbon Fuel Standard recently passed in the Washington State legislature. I serve on the Port - King County Task Force that is looking into the use of converting solid municipal waste to energy. Emerging

technologies and innovation in aircraft design and propulsion are may also significantly reduce air pollution and noise.

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?

Air travel demand is not driven by the airport, but by global increases in air travel. The same is true for air cargo, driven by consumer demand. Our Sustainable Airport Master Plan now under review at the federal level. Environmental impacts associated with the growth of air travel at SeaTac are under study through the NEPA and SEPA processes, which should identify and mitigate adverse environmental impacts including health related impacts of noise and air pollution. To address long-term growth in air travel, the Washington State Commercial Aviation Coordinating Commission is charged with studying the question of siting of a second regional airport, and is required to make a recommendation for a single preferred location and development timeline by February, 2023. Siting a second regional airport will be very challenging and will have its own major environmental challenges, will require as much as 1200 acres, be located near a dense urban area, served by road transportation facilities, and cost billions of dollars. Besides, no community wants to be located near a major airport, and there is no available land that isn't a greenfield or in agricultural use. Developing more alternatives to air travel in the future, such as expanded rail, fast trains, and reducing our travel demand may be necessary.

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?

With the recent record breaking temperatures this summer, I authored a blog “Hot Weather is a Wake-Up Call,” drawing data from the King-County heat-mapping study, which identifies communities in King County with fewer trees and more pavement likely to become heat islands under temperature extremes. In the face of rising temperatures these areas, many of which are lower income populations and communities of color, more urban tree canopy is needed, which is why I am advocating for the port to be a leader in land stewardship and tree planting. It is well established that trees not only provide shade and filter pollution, they sequester climate-changing carbon, and ease the

negative effects of urban heat and noise. This is an environmental justice issue. The Port under my leadership is directing funds that help bolster ecological and environmental health in the cities of SeaTac, Burien, and Des Moines. Through our partnership with Forterra, these three cities have developed their own 20-year tree stewardship plans to restore urban forests and increase tree canopy. As port Commissioner, I am committed to being a responsible steward of our land's trees, open spaces and natural eco-systems, including forests, riparian corridors and wetlands.

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

Under my strong leadership, the Port has inventoried over 1800 acres of its own forested lands, is advancing a new and comprehensive tree and land stewardship policy, and is more committed to extensive tree-planting and habitat restoration throughout King County.

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, by investing more in green infrastructure and trees wherever possible on Port properties and elsewhere is what is needed and what we must do. I have been a champion at the Port for trees, Tree Stewardship Policy, and expanding eco-services through equitable community investments and our Sustainability Framework Policy guiding new project developments.

Please return questionnaires as soon as you can to SteveZemke@TreePAC.org Thanks.