

2015 Urban Forest & Green Space City Council Candidate Questionnaire



Name: Alon Bassok

District: Position 9

1. Larger trees provide significantly more ecological value to Seattle's green infrastructure, by reducing storm water runoff, cleaning pollutants from the air, and providing animal habitat. **Do you support giving greater protection to large trees like Heritage Trees and exceptional trees? What measures would you propose to provide this protection?**

Yes, I support giving greater protection to large trees. I would consider looking into where a small fee could be placed to protect trees. This could possibly be a fee assessed during real estate sales or imposed when residents apply for permits to add-on to their homes.

2. Seattle's interim tree ordinance protects existing groves of trees (group of 8 or more trees 12" in diameter). The Department of Planning and Development has proposed removing this protection. **Do you support continuing the policy of protecting tree groves to conserve habitat and canopy cover?** Yes

3. Deferred maintenance results in the costly loss and replacement of trees and landscapes. **Do you support funding for the maintenance of public greenspaces,** including increased funding for the Green Seattle Partnership so that the goals to restore our parklands, greenbelts, and critical areas can be met? Yes

4. Seattle currently has a 23 percent tree canopy cover. Seattle's Urban Forest Stewardship Plan targets a 30 percent canopy cover goal by 2037. **To help reach this goal, do you support strengthening tree protection by requiring permits to remove trees on private property?** Yes

5. Seattle is one of the very few urban environments that still boasts an extensive, diverse, and impactful urban fruit tree canopy. Over the last six years, over 80,000 pounds of fruit has been gleaned from public and private property, and donated into the emergency food system. **Do you support funding to continue the maintenance of fruit trees on public land and gleaning of fruit from private property for food banks?** Yes

6. Seattle is one of the fastest growing cities in the United States. Over the last two years, there has been a 25 percent increase in apartment building, which often involves the destruction of single-family homes that provide open space and trees. In 2014,

Seattle reports that it has 5,546 acres of designed parkland plus natural areas. The Trust for Public Lands 2014 report places Seattle's ranking among the 200 largest U.S. cities as 188th -- that's 12th from the bottom. **What do you propose to stop this loss of open space, and to increase open space in the city?**

While our current population boom and housing crises requires us to build more housing, we also cannot build on every piece of land. Our city has had a vibrant park system and a history of protecting open space and now it is more important than ever to do that. I would propose that we need to perform a census of existing open space, which will help us understand what we have, what is endangered and where we can place protections. One way to protect space would be to put in place a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) plan for the city of Seattle. We also should take a harder look at large lots being subdivided. All or some of the space in those large lots could be purchased by the city or the Parks Foundation to create neighborhood space.

7. The Seattle 2035 Comprehensive Plan calls for the addition of 1400 acres of open space by 2035 to accommodate population growth. **What is your opinion of this goal? What ideas do you have to achieve this goal? Do you support this goal and saving current surplus city properties to help meet this goal?**

I agree with the goal of adding 1400 acres of open space by 2035. We should look into ways to utilize appropriate current city surplus to meet this goal, but I also hope we would look into a TDR-type program to also purchase open space currently in private hands to reach this goal.

8. Currently, the Department of Planning and Development is responsible for drafting the urban forest ordinance. **Do you support the Mayor and City Council appointing a citizens committee to prepare a draft urban forest ordinance instead, such as the Parks Legacy Committee and Parks and Green Spaces Citizens' Advisory Committee?** I would like to see a hybrid approach on this. It would be advisable to have a committee made up of both citizens and staff from the planning department. The mixed committee could give a fuller understanding to the urban forest ordinance.

9. The Department of Planning and Development is proposing to reduce the current long-term tree canopy aspirational goal in the Seattle Comprehensive Plan from 40 percent to 30 percent. **Do you support maintaining the 40 percent long-term goal in the Seattle 2035 Comprehensive Plan?** I support retaining the higher goal.

10. Trees and open space offer a number of community benefits: increased housing values; decreased rates of crime; offering protection against climate change; filtering stormwater run-off; and quality of life for communities. **Share with us your favorite tree or memory of an open space and why you support continued investment in these community resources.** When I was a small child (early elementary school) there was a field behind my house. My friends and I would spend our afternoon hours in this field. There were a number of small caves created by large boulders stacked on top of each other. There was a large tree with a top shaped like a rooster. Having visited this place recently, I realize it was not more than an empty lot. But as a child, some flowers, a tree to climb, and good friends created a sense of place that I remember fondly.

Please add any clarifications or comments you would like to convey to us regarding the questions above, or on protecting trees and the urban forest and open space in general.

Are you willing to meet briefly with representatives from TreePAC, at a time and place that is mutually convenient? Yes

Thank you for your participation!
Please return questionnaire by July 15 to info@treepac.org.