

2021 TreePAC Seattle Mayoral 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.

As Mayor, 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?

This summer we witnessed the vulnerability of our city to extreme heat, the West Coast experienced another summer of catastrophic fires, and a recent UN climate report paints a grim future for our planet if we fail to take immediate, coordinated action.

It is clear we cannot tolerate a significantly warmer world with increasingly severe weather fluctuations and must take comprehensive action at all levels of government, business, and society to address these threats. The next decade is critical for setting a new course and preventing the worst effects of climate change.

Protecting Seattle's tree cover and green spaces is central to fighting climate change globally as well as mitigating its effects for all Seattle residents. As mayor, I will prioritize protecting and planting Seattle trees. We know that communities of color and low-income communities disproportionately lack significant tree canopies and the benefits they provide. We will use environmental mapping to look at which neighborhoods lack adequate tree access and make addressing this issue an integral part of our climate action plan and environmental justice efforts.

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 clearcut 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 saving its exceptional and significant trees while building new affordable housing?

Protecting Seattle's exceptional trees as well as preserving – and expanding – diminishing tree cover is vitally important to mitigate the effects of the climate crisis. It is also an equity project. We need to protect tree cover in urban spaces where their beauty and environmental protection are accessible to everyone, especially poor, BIPOC, and disabled communities.

Seattle's housing crisis also presents a vital equity project. It is incumbent upon us to ensure that everyone in Seattle has access to affordable housing and shelter. To achieve that goal, we will need to, among other efforts, build more affordable housing faster.

These goals are not mutually exclusive. If we plan affordable housing developments with foresight, we can locate them around dense urban centers and near public transportation. By investing in urban density, we can reserve urban green spaces and protect existing exceptional trees. As mayor, I will commit to creatively championing both issues.

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, for all the reasons mentioned above and more, I believe these two protections make sense for maintaining our tree canopy. If a tree is to be removed during development, it becomes incumbent on us to better protect the others and maintain the existing canopy and habitat, rather than encouraging degradation and deforestation.

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, absolutely. This kind of loophole in tree protection is nonsensical and counterproductive. While in some cases trees may have to be removed during development, it is in our best interest to maintain and protect as many trees as possible. Asking developers to fully consider where they can protect trees on their property throughout the entire development process is not an unreasonable ask, especially when it directly impacts our air quality and climate impact.

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 a swift review of the proposed Director's Rule and Urban Forestry Commission recommendations so we can implement needed changes. After 13 years, it seems appropriate that we update and strengthen our Exceptional Tree protections, and I look forward to working with the Urban Forestry Commission as Mayor to ensure that environmental policy is written carefully so that its implementation matches its intent. We need to make sure our tree policy is top notch, and under my leadership as Mayor that will mean seeking input and collaboration from city staff, the UFC, arborists and climate scientists, and more.

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 bid 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?”

The Urban Forestry Commission’s recommendation of lowering the upper limit for protection to 24” DBH appears to be the best way to ensure continued protection and growth of our urban canopy, but I am open to learning more about how further reducing the upper limit from 30” to 24” or 20” will impact our ability to preserve our Exceptional Trees and affect further growth and development. We need to balance firm protections for Exceptional Trees with our ability to plan our urban spaces well to accommodate urban density and transportation.

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, I would support developing a tree removal and replacement permit system. Cutting down a tree is not something that can be undone. Therefore, reporting is an ineffective means of prevention by unnecessarily placing the burden of tree protection on neighbors. Part of planning adequate tree cover and canopy in Seattle requires protecting and preserving trees on private property. Designing the permit system with a reasonable turnaround time and robust cataloging would be in the best interest of all neighbors.

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?

I would support further replanting requirements and the development of a replacement fee program to maintain and grow our canopy cover. This is what it means to take environmental protection seriously and it is a commonsense approach. However, as we implement a policy that relies on fees, we need to keep equity in mind to ensure that we don't disproportionately disadvantage small or BIPOC businesses.

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?

I agree that we need to create a modern, well-planned Tree Protection Ordinance that balances principles of equity with environmentalism and our transportation and housing development needs. I am concerned with trees at immediate risk during this process, but also believe that a moratorium has the potential to disrupt this process by giving developers a reason to cut down more trees before it's implemented and distracting from our ultimate goals. We need to efficiently and thoughtfully create an ordinance without being disruptive in the meantime.

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?

This certainly seems like a reasonable proposal. Centralizing tree and urban forest protection will allow those working on it to efficiently coordinate. My plan is to hire the best climate scientists and environmental leaders to guide our efforts to defeat climate change. Putting them under a new department, in addition to relevant urban forestry needs, may be the approach needed to best protect our environment and ensure reduction of climate pollution.

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?

To ensure all Tree Care Providers are informed of our city's laws and environmental protections, I think it would make sense to create a registration process. Customers should also want providers to be well educated on requirements around their trees on private property, including fees and other obligations. I would be interested in learning more about what Tree Care Providers are currently required to register with and how they are informed of existing laws and regulations.

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 within 10 feet of a project as the current landscaping code states?

Invasive species threaten biodiversity, local ecosystems, and choke and kill trees. Development presents a good opportunity at a reasonable time to get invasive species under control while a lot is in the process of development. I believe we can design a strong policy with reasonable timelines and accommodations that ensure development can occur and invasive species are removed.

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 implement this requirement?

Yes, I strongly support this kind of program and database. We should also ensure statistics and tracking around our tree canopy are widely available to the public. Part of creating affordable housing, accessible transportation, and sufficient greenspaces and tree cover is understanding where trees are in urban spaces now. Requiring tree surveys is a great opportunity to collect necessary data, and is in line with my vision for a city that embraces accessible open data. In addition to environmental mapping, we can develop a modern dashboard to make sure we stay on track with a strong tree inventory.

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 prioritizing this goal by moving the 30% canopy goal to 2030 as is being done with other climate mitigation timeline goals in Seattle?

Yes. Protecting trees and green spaces is a key to reducing the impacts of both heat waves and urban flooding is to preserve open spaces and tree cover. Natural vegetation has numerous benefits to the environment and can help moderate the impacts of climate change on neighborhoods. Vegetation has a natural cooling effect, reducing the impacts of heat waves. The permeable surfaces in open spaces absorb heavy rains, reducing urban flooding. Trees can even improve air quality. We will ensure that as we build more housing to meet our city's growth, we will preserve open spaces and natural vegetation across the city and take actions to increase open spaces in neighborhoods that have been underserved by historic land use policies.

Further, growing up in the redlined Central Area, spending my days at the Arboretum, Garfield High School, and other recreational areas, I learned how big a difference access to parks can make for members of marginalized communities. A map of Seattle's historic and even current tree cover creates a near 1:1 overlay with historically white neighborhoods versus those that were redlined and deprived of amenities such as parks and greenways, bike and pedestrian infrastructure, and land use planning that preserved trees and prevented "heat sinks" in urban areas. Expanding access to parks, tree cover, and other forms of urban forestry is a climate equity priority.

Protecting urban trees and forests is an important goal of mine and it's one I will approach seriously and ambitiously.

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 Mayor, direct SDCI to consider this draft and its provisions, publicly discuss it with the Seattle Urban Forestry Commission and consider it for adoption if SDCI does not produce a draft ordinance or incorporate UFC's

major provisions in their draft and the recommendations in [Council's resolution 31902](#)?

As I have discussed, environmental and urban protection are priorities for me as a mayoral candidate. I look forward to working with the Seattle Urban Forestry Commission. If elected, I will consider the UFC's draft of the Tree and Urban Forest Protection Ordinance and advocate for needed protections.

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