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COMPLETE

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First Name: Bruce
Last Name: Harrell
Email: info@bruceforseattle.com
IP Address: 69.72.28.81

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Q1

Please share your information below:

Name

Bruce Harrell

Position

Mayor of Seattle**Q2**

The Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections oversees trees on private property and during development. They get most of their funding for development but almost none for overseeing tree protection. To protect and grow our trees and urban forest, we need a city department that does not have conflicting priorities. San Francisco has a Dept. of Environment, with responsibilities for a diversity of issues, including the urban forest and climate. In Seattle, six city departments and the Office of Sustainability and Environment currently oversee tree issues. Would you support moving tree and urban forestry protection into a new independent Department of Environment and Climate that includes an urban forestry division?

Yes,

Comments::

Yes, I recently issued an Executive Order focused on tree preservation on private property and this very issue is one of the items that will be actively considered in the coming months. Specifically, the EO states that, "Representatives in the Mayor's Office shall convene staff from the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections and the Office of Sustainability and Environment to begin exploring the transfer of select SDCI tree-related functions to OSE, with the goal of increasing public confidence and transparency in the City's activities related to tree preservation and reporting." More detail is included in the EO itself, linked above, but this will be a comprehensive look at all the current tree-related functions within SDCI that might be more appropriate to house with the City's Office of Sustainability and Environment.

Q3

Next year, Seattle will be updating its 5-year tree canopy assessment. Previous studies have only reported on Seattle's canopy area. The environmental and climate benefits of Seattle's urban forest are, however, most dependent on the volume of Seattle's canopy, which cleans the air of pollution, reduces stormwater runoff, provides shade and habitat for birds and other wildlife, reduces urban heat island impacts, and supports the mental and physical health of Seattle's human population. While funding for canopy volume was approved in the city budget in 2021, it was never implemented. In next year's canopy assessment, would you support the city funding and including a canopy volume assessment?

Yes,

Comments::

Yes, and thank you for bringing this nuance to my attention. While I would like to confer with OSE's subject matter experts to learn why canopy volume was not included in the 2021 Tree Canopy Assessment study, it definitely sounds like this additional information would be helpful to include to better understand the extent to which our tree canopy is providing environmental benefits related to wildlife habitat and ecosystem services related to climate benefits. Accordingly, my administration will ask OSE to make sure this additional analysis is conducted for the upcoming study to provide a more complete assessment; hopefully the budget that OSE has allocated for the canopy study is sufficient to include this additional work, but we will follow up with them and try to locate other funding possibilities if not.

Q4

Ivy is killing many trees in Seattle. Washington State recently banned the sale of invasive English and Atlantic Ivy. Would you support increased efforts to remove ivy from trees, including on city and public property, on private property, and when property owners and developers apply for permits to build on their property?

Yes,

Comments::

Yes, this is a good flag and more awareness and action is needed to address this issue. My Executive Order asks City departments to look at what the City can do to address pests and diseases that are impacting our Urban Forest (see item #7). My staff can follow up and ask the departments to expand this work to include options for increasing support to manage the threat that ivy and other noxious/invasive plants pose to maintaining a healthy urban forest.

Q5

Currently the cities of San Francisco, CA; Philadelphia, PA; Bellevue, WA; and Vancouver, BC all have assumed responsibility for taking care of street trees which are in the right of way. Seattle currently is responsible for taking care of street trees they planted. Would you support Seattle taking over care of all street trees to help ensure public safety and reduce the burden of residents, particularly in low-tree or low-income areas?

Yes,

Comments::

This is something we could take a look at, starting with understanding how the cities mentioned above work to do this. This would, however, represent a fairly big policy shift for the City and would likely require a significant infusion of new resources. Consequently, as City government is constantly needing to balance competing needs, priorities, and resource constraints, this is not a change I'd be comfortable committing to without a better understanding of trade-offs and opportunity costs. That said, I can see the appeal and benefits of moving in this direction and can ask department staff to conduct the requisite research and analysis to assess feasibility and develop potential options. In the meantime, I have consistently supported and uplifted Seattle's excellent Trees for Neighborhoods program that provides the following benefits, including long-term educational support to help get newly planted trees sufficiently established to withstand our dry summers and other stressors. A little detail on the program is included below: Free trees delivered to your property! Up to 3 trees each year with a lifetime max of 6 trees per property. Help choosing the right tree and planting location. A watering bag and mulch for every tree. Training on proper planting and care. Assistance applying for street tree planting permits. Watering and care reminders for the first 5 years and future workshop opportunities. Street tree health evaluations for the first two years to let you know how your trees are doing. For those who need physical help planting their tree, assistance is available on a limited basis. Under my administration, we have also expanded Trees for Neighborhood's reach whereby new homeowners with properties that include newly planted trees are proactively contacted by the City to enroll in the program's watering and care reminders- even if the trees were planted by developers and not obtained through the program.

Q6

Many Seattle lots lack trees or have room for more. Portland's Treebate program offers a one-time water, sewer, and stormwater bill credit for planting a tree. Would you support a similar program in Seattle?

Yes,

Comments::

Possibly, and happy to take a look at this, but as mentioned above, our Trees for Neighborhoods program provides free trees for private property owners and a ton of free support related to selection, planting, and on-going care. City departments estimate participants save ~\$200 annually, so it seems like Seattle's program, while structured differently, provides a fairly robust benefit as well.

Q7

Many cities in Washington State require developers to pay impact fees for meeting increased services as density increases. Accessible parks in neighborhoods are important for urban areas. Shoreline, WA, recently passed a Parks Impact Fee. A recent study by SDOT has found that tree canopy goals cannot be met even by planting trees in every available street-side spot. Would you support a parks impact fee to create more accessible parks in neighborhoods, including pocket parks and recreation areas, as neighborhood density increases? If not, indicate other sources of funding that you would support to meet the need for neighborhood green areas.

Yes,

Comments::

While Parks could always use more funding, Seattle has a relatively well funded and robust (and well-loved) park system. Seattle Parks and Recreation has over 1,000 employees and a proposed 2026 Budget of ~\$270 million in operating costs and \$87 million in capital. It receives revenues from a variety of sources, including General Fund (~\$128 million in 2026), Metropolitan Parks District revenues (~\$129 million in 2026) and several other revenue sources, such as Real Estate Excise Taxes. That said, more green space and parks will be needed as Seattle continues to grow. I'm not sure, however, that impact fees are the best way to fund new services, including parks, as they would increase the cost of new housing in the city- already very costly and unaffordable for many households in Seattle. Given that, during my first year in office, I oversaw the renewal of the Metropolitan Park District. The Park District will be up for another renewal in 2028 and I would support an increase in Metropolitan Park District revenues to continue to support and also expand the City's great park system.

Q8

In 2020, Seattle approved funding in the budget for conducting a Natural Capital Assessment of the city's urban forest, but never followed through on conducting the study when COVID struck. The study was to quantify the value of Seattle's urban forest and other natural assets to the city. Would you support Seattle funding and conducting a Natural Capital Assessment Study?

Yes,

Comments::

Yes, this sounds like a worthy endeavor that we could maybe do in conjunction with the upcoming canopy assessment discussed above. My administration can follow up with appropriate City staff to learn more about the history of this and what it might cost to complete. Seattle's natural capital is one of its greatest assets and biggest draws. As an avid fisherman, I have a great appreciation for the restorative benefits of being out in nature and the interdependencies of human health and happiness and access to the natural world. For this reason, I have also supported a variety of new youth initiatives and programming for our young people to connect with nature, which research shows supports overall well-being and mental health. A healthy Seattle environment benefits not just humans but wildlife as well. With Trump's assault on all manner of environmental protections, it's especially important for local and state governments to demonstrate leadership in this area and be an advocate for mother nature. Being able to quantify and speak to the specific ecosystem services and benefits of Seattle's natural habitat via a Natural Capital Assessment can help us better educate the public in this regard and hopefully increase appreciation for nature's value.

Q9

Bellevue, Kirkland, and Edmonds all define a tree grove to be protected as 3 or more significant trees 6" DSH with overlapping or touching crowns. Seattle currently defines a grove as 8 or more trees, 12"DSH as a grove?Would you support reducing the number of trees required to constitute a grove in Seattle, thereby protecting more trees and habitat for birds and wildlife?

Yes,

Comments::

I would be open to exploring this issue with City staff- it has not been a consideration that has been elevated to me before and I need to learn more. Thank you for bringing this to my attention.

Q10

Advocates for protecting and growing Seattle's trees and urban forests believe that with improved and updated oversight and clearer regulations, we can both increase the needed housing and save more existing trees. Can you think of additional ways Seattle can succeed at saving more of its healthy and large trees while building new housing.

My recently released Executive Order focused on tree preservation on private property includes a few ideas in this regard:

Develop a conservation easement incentive program for private property owners to preserve singular or exceptional trees and tree groves in perpetuity. The creation of this program is supported by a \$100,000 investment in my proposed 2026 budget.

Create permitting-related incentives for on-site tree retention as part of the Permitting, Accountability, and Customer Trust initiative, and examine current permitting practices that can inadvertently discourage tree preservation during housing construction.

Develop a citywide tree pest readiness and response plan to monitor, prevent, and control tree pests, minimizing their spread and impact on Seattle's urban forest and building climate resilience.

Engage with federally recognized Tribes to preserve historical and cultural resources on private property.

Update the stormwater code and incorporate new and innovative solutions to support tree canopy goals, including bioretention cells.

Additionally, as discussed above, city staff will look at moving some tree preservation and enforcement related functions in SDCI to the Office of Sustainability and Environment.

This Executive Order builds on actions I have taken over the last three years to protect, preserve, and plant more trees in the Emerald City. This includes the creation of the One Seattle Tree Plan to replace trees on public property on a 3-to-1 ratio; utilizing a \$12.9 million grant to plant more trees in under-canopied neighborhoods; expanding the Trees for Neighborhoods program to support planting and maintenance of new trees; and establishing a new tree nursery to grow 500 trees locally every year. The new tree nursery is set to open later this month.

The City remains committed to achieving 30% canopy coverage by 2037 and supports many programs and partnerships to maintain, protect, and expand Seattle's urban forest. Seattle has nearly doubled tree plantings as part of a broader effort that has added 30,000 new trees through public and private initiatives since 2022.

But I am always open to more ideas and welcome TreePac's ideas and appreciate your advocacy for Seattle's trees and natural environment.