

TO: Neighborhood Tree Team members and Portland tree advocates
FROM: Bruce Nelson, Cully Tree Team 3 October 2023
RE: Portland Urban Forestry Commission Meeting September 21, 2023:
Summary and Comments

NOTE: This document is not an official document of the Urban Forestry Commission. I am a private citizen who is an unpaid volunteer member of the Urban Forestry Commission. I write this document as a private citizen.

Conflict of Interest Policy –

“Members of City advisory bodies are public officials, based on State law ORS 244.020(15), and as such are required to disclose conflicts of interest. Under the Oregon Revised Statute 244.020(3), an appointee has a conflict of interest when participating in an official action which could or would result in a financial benefit or avoidance of detriment to the public official, a relative of the public official, or a business with which either is associated.”

These meetings usually occur on a monthly basis, on the third Thursday of the month. Official minutes of the meetings are available at the website for the Urban Forestry Commission (UFC), once they are approved by the Commissioners (usually 1-3 months after the meeting). You can see and listen to You-tube recordings of the meetings. Go to the link at the UFC website <https://www.portland.gov/trees/ufc> or to the You Tube site <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL1ToXf0RSV44U3FpC0nwIUqtFOmFulxMY>

The decisions made at these meetings may affect volunteer tree advocacy and influence Portland Parks and Recreation Urban Forestry (PP&R UF) processes and actions. If you do not wish to receive this summary & commentary on monthly meetings, let me know.

Italicized text indicates my own point of view and/or items not necessarily expressed during the meeting. **Red bold text is used for my required statement that this is not an official or adopted statement from the Urban Forestry Commission, as well as the conflict-of-interest policy for the City of Portland. Bold black text is used for subject headings, and occasionally either to identify who is saying what or for emphasis.**

The monthly UFC meeting was held Thursday 21 September 2023, 9:30 am – 11:30 am. It was held as a joint Zoom and in-person meeting at the Portland Building, 1120 SW 5th Avenue, at a meeting room on the second floor.

UFC Members Present Adrienne Feldstein co-chair & meeting facilitator; Roberta Jortner co-chair; Ivory Iheanacho, J.R. Lilly, Justin Misner, Melinda McMillan, Bruce Nelson, Leah Plack, and Megan Van de Mark

UFC Commissioners Absent Derily Bechthold, Casey Clapp

PP&R UF Staff Present Jenn Cairo, City Forester (PP&R UF); Casey Jogerst, Permitting and Regulation Manager (PP&R UF); Brian Landoe, Strategy and Planning Manager (PP&R UF); Belinda Judelman, Planning & Policy Analyst (PP&R UF)

Other City Staff: Bryan Poole, Capital Project Manager (Portland Bureau of Transportation); Robin Johnson Craig, Project Manager (PP&R)

9:30 a.m. Public Comments: Alec ? testified. *I could hardly hear him. I will try to listen to the tape. I believe he has developed some sort of software program that he believes could greatly assist PP&R UF in tracking its data on trees.*

9:40 a.m. Meeting Minutes Approval Minutes from the August 17, 2023 UFC meeting were approved with edits suggested by co-chair Jortner and Commissioners Misner and Nelson.

9:45 a.m. City Forester's Report Jenn Cairo, City Forester (PP&R UF)
--The latest communication with the Governor's Office is that the Governor is no longer interested in pursuing the temporary elimination of City tree codes or other aspects relating to trees as part of the proposals she would support coming from her appointed Housing Production Advisory Committee (HPAC). City Forester Cairo and Brian Landoe agree that this situation changes daily and so it is important to keep informed and engaged in this area.
Some background information on this topic. The Governor has committed to expediting the building of more residential units quickly. Some members of HPAC want to see a temporary reprieve from restrictions they feel are burdensome in building new housing in Oregon, specifically those that protect natural resources (like trees and natural areas), and those imposed by the urban growth boundary.

--With the oncoming fall, tree planting season will begin. On October 14th, at McCoy Park, the annual Arbor Day festivities sponsored by PP&R UF will occur from 10 am to 1 pm. Activities will include:

-recognizing this year's winner of the Bill Naito Community Service Award for outstanding work by a volunteer individual or organization on behalf of trees in Portland;

-tree planting in the park;

-informational tabling by community groups and PP&R UF.

--Friends of Trees has been awarded a \$12 million grant as part of the federal Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). PP&R UF is one of 11 different partners in this grant. Megan Van de Mark, deputy director of Friends of Trees, played the lead role in writing the grant application, with great assistance and support from Brian Landoe of PP&R UF. The original proposal was for \$17.9 million. Friends of Trees Deputy Director Van de Mark has not yet received communication from the US Forest Service about limitations on how the \$12 million can be spent. All of the funds are to be spent in areas that meet the JUSTICE 40 specifications used by the federal government.

Some background information on Justice 40:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/environmentaljustice/justice40/>

“For the first time in our nation’s history, the Federal Government has made it a goal that 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain Federal investments flow to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened by pollution. President Biden made this historic commitment when he signed Executive Order 14008 within days of taking office.”

--PP&R UF has been awarded a \$2,000,000 grant from the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) to plant 10,000 private trees. This will allow for an expansion of existing programs.

The final steps are being worked out with FEMA before this grant is finalized. This may be held up a bit if there is a federal government shut-down. The grant is part of FEMA’s Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program. According to Brian Landoe in his follow-up e-mail to my questions on this, the money will “fund our current Free Street Tree Planting Program and Yard Tree Give-away Program to plant 10,000 trees over the three-year period of performance. Consistent with those programs the street trees will receive three years of establishment care. BRIC grants have a local match requirement which is being provided by the Tree Planting and Preservation Fund.”

--Portland City Council had the first reading on the Portland Clean Energy Fund's five-year Climate Investment Program (CIP). At the second reading City Council will vote on it. *For more information on the CIP, see the following link:*

www.portland.gov/bps/cleanenergy/climate-investment

I think this involves potentially \$74.8 million for 2023-2028 in Green Infrastructure, which is spelled out as trees. It is unknown to me how this money will be used and by what entities (public, private, non-profit or some combination). I believe this is in addition to the \$40 million that is specifically going to be channeled through Urban Forestry over the next five years, which was approved by City Council in October 2022.

--PP&R UF staff (*perhaps Belinda Judelman*) are working closely with the consultant team now and over the next few months in the next phase of the Portland Forest Plan modifications. A website will be developed. Preparations are underway to form the Community Advisory Committee.

Until then, information on the existing plan is at the following site:

<https://www.portland.gov/trees/urban-forest-management-plan>

--The Portland Permit Improvement Project is continuing. Portland City Council has approved this effort. It is not clear exactly how this will affect PP&R UF. This project is only dealing with permits for private development. The lead for the City on this endeavor is Michael Jordan.

<https://www.portland.gov/permitimprovement>

--At the October UFC meeting, a presentation will be made by PP&R UF staff on the current work done on Tree Permitting and Regulation.

10:00 a.m. 122nd Avenue: Humanizing an East Portland Arterial Street

Bryan Poole, Capital Project Manager (PBOT)

Manager Poole briefly reviewed the history and current situation on 122nd Avenue. PBOT has a project to provide upgrades to this street, based on safety needs and input from the local community. The hope is to make this corridor "more friendly." *Manager Poole did not define what the term "more friendly" meant.* The road has seen 23 fatalities between January 2014 and May 2023 and is on PBOT's list of 30 highest fatality corridors. Since 2018 PBOT has been planning improvements that meet two goals: increase safety, improve pedestrian and bicycle access and support better transit; and identify incremental improvements to support the growth and development of 122nd Avenue as a Civic Corridor.

PBOT has used several SAFE STREETS for ALL (SS4A) grants for work on 122nd Avenue. These include the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (2021), which allocated \$5 billion of federal safety fund grants to be available over 5 years. PBOT was awarded a \$25 million grant for its proposed 122nd Avenue project with PBOT providing a \$5 million match. Safety improvements along 122nd corridor are the focus for this grant. This includes street lighting where gaps exist, pedestrian crossings, speed reader boards, signal upgrades to manage speed and safety, intersection improvements at high-crash locations, protected bicycle/scooter lanes, installation of trees, repaving/reduction of travel lanes (from 5 to 3) south of Powell, which will allow a tree boulevard in the middle of 122nd in this area, and a roundabout installation at SE Harold.

Further refinement is underway to:

- a. determine specifics on pedestrian crossings south of Powell Boulevard;
- b. Locate additional areas for trees;
- c. Identify the locations of medians and bus stop curb extensions;
- d. Identify the type and location of intersection improvements;
- e. Clarify where additional street lighting is needed.

At this time the areas under consideration for tree installation include:

1. South of Powell with a design option that could create a boulevard-type street with space for large trees (perhaps like NE Ainsworth between NE 6th Avenue and NE 37th);
2. Curb bump-outs south of Powell which may be suitable for trees;
3. Design options like parking protected bike lanes and buffered bike lanes with parking along the curb that allow for locations for trees;
4. Design refinement and public engagement in spring/summer 2024 before entering final design, all of which could include more trees;
5. Increased traffic north of Powell makes it hard to find suitable locations for trees, but medians might be possible and these may include trees.

Potential issues/trade-offs: Community support, upfront costs, less parking and protection for people biking, transit accommodation, access management, tree maintenance and liability.

PBOT is building on lessons it has learned from the extensive Building a Better 82nd Avenue about tree planting in roadway medians. These include:

1. Reducing long-term maintenance costs through appropriate design, increased soil volume, and a longer contractor-required establishment period;
2. Increasing size of tree wells and fully excavating to increase soil volume;
3. Working with bureaus on flexibility concerning tree plantings near underground utilities;
4. Identifying (with Urban Forestry) tree species better suited for medians (drought tolerant, growing more upright rather than out).

Reference was made to a PBOT pilot project that adds trees between the curb and vehicle travel lanes.

www.portland.gov/transportation/planning/trees-curb-zone

Manager Poole stated the design phase should be concluded in early 2024 and will include project refinement and public involvement. Construction should begin ~2027. The project will not address all the needs of the corridor. The primary focus “is improving safety but the hope is that the project will leverage additional benefits to the community and environment.”

UFC member Van de Mark commented that trees do add safety to travel corridors and so it is appropriate to consider them as an important component. UFC co-chair Jortner reminded all present that during times of extreme heat, trees near sidewalks are a very important safety component for pedestrians. Trees in medians are less beneficial to pedestrians. UFC member Plack suggested considering spaces for large-form trees – a shade reservoir. UFC member Nelson asked if PBOT has ever considered building structures for shade along sidewalks, when street trees are not possible.

10:30 a.m. North Portland Aquatic Center Robin Johnson Craig, Project Manager (PP&R)

Access to swimming facilities for people of color and low-income residents is a priority of PP&R as it addresses its equity and diversity goals. Manager Johnson Craig presented information pertaining to the upcoming PP&R project of building a North Portland Aquatic Center at Northgate Park. The decision about where this swim center would be built (from 6 possible locations in North Portland) involved much community feedback, with the final decision made by the City Commissioner overseeing PP&R, Commissioner Dan Ryan. UFC Commission Misner shared that Northgate was the least favored site for community members,

based on Misner's read of the room at the various community meetings he attended.

According to the Parks Tree Survey data that is available online, most of the trees on the north, west, and south perimeter of the park are Norway maples with a few ashes, crabapples, horse-chestnuts, and Douglas-firs. This is not very good tree diversity.

Along the east side of the park there is more species diversity but this side will be impacted by necessary sidewalk construction. Manager Johnson Craig did not know how that would impact trees along this portion of the park. UFC member Nelson believed that sidewalk construction along the east perimeter of the south would likely lead to the demise of many existing trees in that area.

Construction of the Aquatic Swim facility and parking for it will require the removal of some 6 trees. This is less than the original estimate of ~30 that UFC member Misner had heard at various community meetings on this project.

The rugby field will need to be placed in another Portland Park. Where it will go has not yet been decided.

UFC member Van de Mark lives close to Columbia Park and wondered if the now closed pool there would ever be reopened. Manager Johnson Craig did not know. *In the past, PP&R decided to shut this pool because it had insufficient monetary resources to keep it open in a safe manner.*

<https://www.opb.org/article/2023/01/01/north-portland-columbia-pool-oregon-aquatic-center/>

UFC member Iheanacho wondered if the trees that will be lost could be kept as part of a naturalized area. Manager Johnson Craig said that would not be possible as there needs to be an access road to the parking lot. Many trees will be planted as part of shading the parking lot area. *Even though she did not give a number, it seems reasonable to assume the trees planted will exceed the trees lost. But the canopy lost will possibly not be regained for many years, if ever, depending on the tree selection and the long-term health of those newly planted trees.*

11:00 a.m. UFC Statement on Oregon Governor's Housing Production Advisory Council (HPAC) Workgroup's likely recommendation to Governor Roberta Jortner, UFC co-chair and co-chair of UFC Policy Committee

UFC member Jortner reviewed the decision of the UFC Policy Committee to draft a letter to the Portland Mayor and City Council members, rather than the Governor or HPAC, expressing UFC's concerns about the proposals before HPAC that call for eliminating the authority of tree codes, urban growth boundaries, and regulations pertaining to natural areas as these relate to new development of housing for the next 10 years. To date, the Portland City Council has chosen to remain neutral on this topic. The UFC Policy Committee decided that since a letter to the Governor or to HPAC would first need to be reviewed by the Portland Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, which follows the guidance it receives from the Mayor and City Council, it would be expedient to address the letter instead to the Mayor and Portland City Commissioners. The focus for the UFC Policy Committee was to stress the importance of trees and housing, as both are needed to provide essential services to Oregon residents.

City Forester Cairo had heard that currently the Governor's Office was saying they did not expect to back the recommendations eliminating existing tree and natural resource regulations during this housing emergency. Both Manager Landoe and City Forester Cairo agreed that things can change rapidly.

The decision of UFC was to accept the draft letter and send it to the Mayor and members of the City Council with the signatures of UFC co-chairs Feldstein and Jortner.

11:15 a.m. Bill Naito Community Tree Award, Weston Miller, Community Stewardship Coordinator (PP&R UF)

Coordinator Miller reported on the nominee for this year's Community Tree Award. There was only one nominee this year – the Connecting Canopies Coalition. Their work was described to UFC members. UFC approved this nominee for this year's award. The official presentation will be made at the October 14th Arbor Day festivities.

Next Urban Forestry Commission Meeting:

The next UFC meeting will be 9:30 am – 11:30 am, October 19, 2023. It is likely that this will be a hybrid meeting with both in-person (Portland Building, second floor meeting room) and Zoom for attendance and participation. Check the link below prior to the meeting for the agenda, meeting materials, and how you can

gain Zoom access to this meeting.

<https://www.portland.gov/trees/ufc/events/2023/2/16/urban-forestry-commission-meeting>