

TO: Neighborhood Tree Team members and Portland tree advocates
FROM: Bruce Nelson, Cully Tree Team 7 January 2024
RE: Portland Urban Forestry Commission Meeting December 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 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 on December 21 2023 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; Roberta Jortner, co-chair; Derily Bechthold, Casey Clapp, Ivory Iheanacho, J.R. Lilly, Melinda McMillan, Bruce Nelson, and Leah Plack.

UFC Commissioners Absent Justin Misner, Megan Van de Mark.

PP&R UF Staff Present Jenn Cairo, City Forester (PP&R UF); Brian Landoe, Analyst III (PP&R UF); Paul Anderson, Forestry Operations Manager (PP&R UF); Joel Smith, Parks Tree Maintenance Supervisor (PP&R UF).

Other City Staff: Todd Lofgren, Deputy Director (PP&R).

9:30 a.m. Public Comments

Albert Kaufman testified that he was dismayed that we are entering the third growing season when Friends of Trees (FoT) has very little City support for its community-based tree plantings within Portland. These are desperate times when it seems even more imperative that multiple approaches be used for increased tree planting. For nearly 20 years, Friends of Trees was able to plant street trees in many different Portland neighborhoods, thanks to support from City bureaus. Although many trees are now being planted by PP&R UF, what has been lost is the large-scale community engagement in these plantings. He would like to see a return to these community-engaged tree plantings of new street trees and structural training of young street trees.

City Forester Cairo said no tree planting seasons have been missed. In the current planting season (November 2023 – April 2024), PP&R UF will oversee the planting of 3,500 trees. Many of these will be planted by volunteers. An example of this was recently in the press about a school tree planting that occurred at the Montessori Earth School near SE 148th and SE Clinton.

UFC co-chair Jortner thought that FoT community-based plantings would serve as complementary to those of PP&R UF. Why won't the City re-engage? City Forester Cairo stated that FoT chose not to try to reup their contract. She also reminded UFC members that PP&R UF is participating in the Investment Recovery Act-funded project that FoT is the lead on and is very excited about this collaborative effort.

9:40 a.m. City Forester's Report Jenn Cairo, City Forester (PP&R UF)

--UFC members are required to give notice to PP&R UF if they anticipate being unable to make a meeting. Certain items require a quorum for decision-making so it is important to know that a quorum will be present at those meetings. *Bylaws of the Urban Forestry Commission Section VI.B state "Any member who does not give notice that they intend to be absent from a scheduled meeting for more than 25% of the meetings in any 12 months of the service may be removed by the Elected-in-Charge."* (City Council member overseeing PP&R)

--PP&R UF staff CJ Kanowski and Jeff Ramsey have developed a software app called Tree Canopy Explorer to help locate where tree canopy is within Portland. This is a tool that PP&R UF staff are using and it is available to the public to use. <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/7556b8b1017949cdb56145ec33aef814> *I spent a few minutes exploring what I could. It appears there is a lot of information brought together here but it is pretty slow to download on my home computer. I will check it again later, but it is possible you will need a lot of something magical to quickly download data in a usable form.*

--The next stage of the Urban Forest Management Plan update is being done by two different committees. The Technical Advisory Committee (*attendees list has not been released*) held its first meeting in December. This group is composed of individuals mainly from City bureaus that interact with trees in some capacity. *I am not sure if this group also includes representatives from the commercial arboriculture sector.* The Community Advisory Committee had 60 applicants. Its composition will be released once finalized. This committee is expected to meet sometime in January.

--The Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) has been granted \$26.6 million as part of the Investment Recovery Act. This money was awarded by the U.S. Forest Service for urban and community forestry investments. \$10 million goes to federally recognized Native American Tribes and Tribal organizations in Oregon. The remaining money will be awarded once ODF issues its request for proposals. A portion will be used by ODF to administer a grants program, with \$12.5 million going out in the form of grants. See <https://www.oregon.gov/odf/forestbenefits/Documents/ucf-ira-funding-faq.pdf>

--The Bureau of Development Services (BDS) is laying off staff due to the current decline in building and the expectation that this will continue for the next 18 months. Two UF staff personnel will be laid off as part of this. Their

responsibilities will be assumed by remaining, more senior BDS staff. The Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) will also see staff cuts, primarily due to the decline in gas revenues as people drive less, drive electric cars, and are often able to work remotely.

--The Portland Clean Energy Fund (PCEF) has (once again) discovered it is collecting higher revenues than expected. This opens up the potential for funding additional types of activities allowed by the public-initiated, voter-passed PCEF proposal. City Commissioner Rubio has proposed allocating an additional \$100 million over a five-year period for street tree maintenance. This would move that responsibility from the adjacent property owner to the City. At this point this is a broad proposal that will undergo much discussion before any actions occur. PP&R UF has received approval to use PCEF funds to continue its arborist training program, which targets BIPOC community members for entrance into the arboriculture field. It provides field work and training with PP&R UF. PP&R UF believes this training is unavailable in the Portland metro area, since arborists training programs at Oregon State University, Clackamas Community College and Portland Community College all cost money to the student.

UFC co-chair Jortner expressed excitement about the possibility of PCEF resources being allocated to street tree maintenance. She asked what the next step is in this process. City Forester Cairo shared that at the January 18th PCEF meeting, 6-8 pm, there will be a discussion about various proposed additional funding options.

<https://www.portland.gov/bps/cleanenergy/grant-committee/events/2024/1/18/pcef-committee-meeting-jan-18-2024>

This is a huge opportunity for a history-making change in City policy. It has been policy for a very long time that the adjacent property owner is responsible for the upkeep of trees in the right-of-way. This is a common practice west of the Mississippi River, but not east of it. Very few cities of Portland's population put all responsibility of street tree care on the adjacent property owner. This contributes to the hesitancy of many city property owners to plant street trees. For residents of limited income this places an additional burden. City take-over of street tree maintenance could lead to:

- 1. Routine planting of appropriate street trees in currently vacant tree-planting locations in a strategic manner;*
- 2. Systematic structural training of young street trees and safety pruning of larger street trees, both of which will increase the health and longevity of*

street trees and reduce the amount of emergency storm work related to street trees;

3. *Organized plan of tree selection to contribute to greater tree diversity;*
4. *Equitable provision of street tree services;*
5. *Increased community engagement in street tree planting and structural training of young trees;*
6. *Challenging transition time as residents and City staff work through which street tree tasks and in what geographic areas are prioritized;*
7. *Clarification on responsibility for the repair of sidewalks damaged by street tree roots;*
8. *Strong action by the City that demonstrates climate action leadership in recognizing the benefits of street trees for all Portland residents, regardless of income or geographic location.*

10:00 a.m. PP&R Levy Year 2 Report Claire Flynn, Levy Coordinator (PP&R)

Ms. Flynn reported on progress to date of Parks Levy fund spending. The levy funds have played a critical role in supporting PP&R activities of all sorts. *Most of the report deals with non-tree PP&R activities.*

<https://www.portland.gov/parks/2022-23-parks-levy-annual-report>

<https://www.portland.gov/parks/documents/2022-23-parks-levy-annual-report/download>

I quickly scanned the above documents. Of interest to me is the effort cited by PP&R UF in which there was community engagement with residents at Tamarack Apartments, an affordable housing complex managed by Home Forward. Tree planting on the grounds involved community engagement. PP&R UF needs to develop more positive community engagement activities like this one in tree planting and maintenance. With sufficient publicity this would help develop voter support for these activities, especially in light of the precarious nature of taxpayer support for any government activities.

Ms. Flynn also shared the report of the Oversight Committee for the Levy. This 5-person appointed group of non-PP&R staff do an audit to verify that PP&R Levy Funds are being used in the intended manner.

<https://www.portland.gov/parks/ploc-report-fy23>

Roberta Jortner, UFC co-chair, thought the following comment in the above report was especially significant:

“The PLOC (*Parks Levy Oversight Committee*) also encourages PP&R to continue investing in Portland’s tree canopy and building PP&R’s Urban Forestry team’s capacity to enhance tree planting and care. Given the impacts of climate change, this investment is more critical than ever.”

10:25 a.m. Sustainable Future Polling Data Todd Lofgren, Deputy Director (PP&R)

The link below provides the slides that Deputy Director Lofgren used for his presentation.

<https://www.portland.gov/parks/documents/bond-and-levy-feasibility-survey-december-2023/download>

PP&R Deputy Director Lofgren asked:

- What is the level of voter support for passage of another 5-year levy when the current Parks levy expires in 2026? This levy is currently providing a significant amount of funding for PP&R programs.
- What is the level of voter support for a bond measure that addresses the \$600 million backlog in PP&R capital improvement projects that are needed?

PP&R contracted with FM Research-Opinion Research and Strategy to survey likely voters. City Commissioner Gonzalez requested that the survey include questions about support for Fire and Rescue, in addition to those for PP&R. *A levy is used to generate funds for operational expenses including routine maintenance and staffing of a public entity. The state limits the length of levies to no more than five years. Bonds are typically used for capital improvement projects (like construction of new buildings, new parks, new highways, new swimming pools) and are assessed to property owners for multiple years (20 years commonly in Portland).*

Survey results included:

- 60% say the City is headed in the wrong direction overall;
- 70% are satisfied with the quality of services provided by Portland Fire and Rescue;
- 75% are satisfied with services from PP&R;
- 54% support a \$600 million bond measure for needed capital improvements for PP&R;

- 70% support renewal of the existing PP&R levy once it expires in 2026, which is an increase from the support shown for the levy in 2020;
- Support for a bond measure does not change significantly if the bond measure is for \$250 million, \$400 million, or \$600 million;
- Support for a bond measure increases significantly if it is combined with requests for funds for Fire and Rescue;
- Support drops by 16 points for a levy that includes Fire and Rescue and PP&R, as compared to one that is the same as the existing PP&R levy;
- Some indication that passing a levy and a bond in the same election may be difficult.

It is important to put specific dollars to this discussion. For the Parks levy, the assessed rate is \$0.80 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. Looking online, the average value (real market value) of a residential property with a house in Portland is ~\$520,000. For purposes of this exercise, let's say the assessed value is \$300,000. The cost for the average property of this value would be $\$0.80 \times 300$ or \$240 annually for 5 years for the PP&R levy. The current PP&R levy is expected to generate around \$48 million annually for 5 years. That means a total of \$240 million over 5 years. No assessed rate was given for the bond measure that might be proposed. It has been stated often that PP&R has a backlog of at least \$600 million in needed capital improvements. Assuming that these funds need to be raised over a 20-year City bond issuance, where bond holders are getting a return of 1.5%, I guesstimate the bond would cost taxpayers around \$0.65 per \$1,000 of assessed value. Using again the house with a real market value of ~\$520,000 and an assessed value of \$300,000, this property owner would pay \$195 annually for 20 years to fund the PP&R capital improvements. There was support in the survey for including capital improvements (\$200 million) for Fire and Rescue in the bond measure. My guesstimate is that would add about \$0.22 per \$1,000 of assessed value. Our mythical property with a real market value of \$520,000 and an assessed value of \$300,000 would pay an additional \$66 annually for 20 years for these capital improvements for Fire and Rescue.

No decision has been made on whether or not to bring a bond or levy to voters. Many steps need to first occur. What is unknown is exactly what the Governor means when she says she wants no new taxes at this time.

PP&R sees very limited options for generating sufficient operational funds. The state does not currently allow for the formation of Parks districts that are administered by a city council. Attempts were made by Portland to pass a bill in the legislature that would amend ORS 266 to allow for a city governance option

for a Parks and Recreation District special district in cities with a population over 600,000. Currently only County government elected officials or an independent elected board can govern Parks and Recreation special districts. *Presumably Portland will continue trying to get a change in this state law.* Olympia and Seattle both have Parks districts.

10:50 a.m. Overview of Work by Parks' Operations Group

Paul Anderson, Forestry Operations Manager (PP&R UF)

Manager Anderson's oversight responsibilities include:

- Overseeing arborist crews that prune trees in parks and some other public spaces, using bucket trucks, lifts, climbing techniques, and a variety of other tools;
- Managing the City's 24-7 emergency response during (usually weather) events that cause tree damage on public property that poses danger;
- Developing and implementing a systematic maintenance tree pruning regime for all "developed" PP&R parks;
- Planting trees in parks (goal is to increase by 50 trees annually), with 3 years watering/inspection plus structural training at about 5+ years after planting;
- Managing pest management (inspection, treatment on selected high-value public trees, removal as needed) including for Dutch elm disease and emerald ash borer.

PP&R Levy Funds have helped Parks develop for the first time in its history a routine maintenance program for trees in developed parks. In the past, the bureau only regularly did emergency pruning of park trees. The work of Joel Smith (Parks Tree Maintenance Supervisor) has helped build out this maintenance program. Having the Parks tree inventory completed and stored electronically has provided a base from which to start. Trees were also inspected to determine specific maintenance needs. Levy funds provided for increased staffing for pruning and purchase of needed equipment. These funds also paid for staff to better coordinate pruning activities of Parks crews. The developed tree maintenance plan focuses on criteria to use for prioritizing work, developing standards of practice for tree work crews, creating a coordinated plan, and exploring how to incorporate climate change into this work. *No explanation of what was involved in this last was offered.*

Manager Anderson listed these priorities in prioritizing Parks pruning work: find hazards and deal with them appropriately; perform routine tree maintenance on a scheduled basis; always use Parks' standards of practice; perform tree inspections routinely, with the goal of looking at every tree every 2 to 3 years; prioritize care for trees in developed parks in low-canopy, low-income neighborhoods.

The PP&R UF Operations group, which meets weekly, has evaluated the trees in 93 parks. Inspections and tree maintenance have been completed in 54 of those parks as of Dec 2023.

UFC co-chair Jortner asked if any work was being done to save tree snags for wildlife. Joel Smith replied that he is very familiar with the work of former UFC member Brian French in this area. PP&R UF does consider saving snags for wildlife whenever it seems appropriate without creating a public hazard. With the routine inspection program of trees that PP&R UF is implementing, the preservation of snags will be more likely. He is hoping to develop a map of snags available to PP&R UF staff and signage to inform the public what snags are, the benefits they bring, and that a specific tree snag has *purposely* been saved. PP&R UF often have to work around nesting birds, greatly assisted by working closely with BES wildlife biologists.

11:20 a.m. UFC Policy Committee Update Bruce Nelson (UFC member)

UFC member Nelson reported briefly that the UFC Policy Committee is hoping to bring to UFC in February 2024 its draft bylaws as well as an explanation of the past and future work of this group.

11:23 a.m. PP&R Budget Advisory Committee Report Leah Plack, (UFC member)

UFC member Plack reported information from the recent meeting of the PP&R Budget Committee. Both she and Melinda McMillen represent UFC on that committee. The upcoming change in City government structure will cost more money than was anticipated. This could affect general fund dollars available to PP&R in the upcoming fiscal year. There is a strong drive within PP&R not to charge fees for services delivered to the public. PP&R is seeing cost increases with inflation, labor agreements, and contracts. It is assumed that PP&R will try to extend the current Parks levy. Current projections suggest PP&R will be operating in the red by 2025 unless changes are made.

Next Urban Forestry Commission Meeting:

The next UFC meeting will be 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m., January 18, 2024. 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/ufc>