

TO: Neighborhood Tree Team members and Portland tree advocates
FROM: Bruce Nelson, Cully Tree Team 24 January 2024
RE: Portland Urban Forestry Commission Meeting January 18, 2024:
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 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, January 18, 2024, 9:30 am – 11:30 a.m. It was held as a Zoom meeting only, due to water issues in the Portland Public Services building.

UFC Members Present co-chair Adrienne Feldstein, co-chair Roberta Jortner, Derily Bechthold, Casey Clapp, Ivory Iheanacho, J.R. Lilly, Justin Misner, Bruce Nelson, Leah Plack, and Megan Van de Mark

UFC Commissioners Absent Melinda McMillan

PP&R UF Staff Present Jenn Cairo, City Forester (PP&R UF); Brian Landoe, Analyst III (PP&R UF); Casey Jogerst, Permitting and Regulations Manager (PP&R UF); Rick Faber, Code Compliance Supervisor (PP&R UF)

Other City Staff: None

9:30 a.m. Public Comments None

9:35 a.m. City Forester’s Report Jenn Cairo, City Forester (PP&R UF)
--The recent snow and ice have resulted in 405 tree emergency requests stemming from fallen trees and branches blocking roads and from downed power lines. The icy road conditions make travel and work treacherous. The PP&R UF crews do not employ any systematic analysis as to why these tree failures are occurring. The focus is removing the hazardous trees and branches blocking the roads. City Forester Cairo reminded all that the number of trees failing in this storm is a very, very small proportion of the trees in our urban environment. It is understandable the concern and fears that many people have regarding trees, and they must be acknowledged. Regular tree inspections by skilled arborists are appropriate *for the health of the urban forest we live in.*

--The Urban Forest Management Plan update process is proceeding. January 11, 2024 was the first meeting of the project’s Community Advisory Committee. *The selected members of this group are: Je Amaechi, Anjeanette Brown, Paula Byrd, Marco Diaz, Emma Dugan, Davineekaht White Elk, Aloe Garza Galleyos, Lurii Kochnev, Efrain Larios, Cathy Liang, Melinda McMillan, Mikah Meskel, Teresa Montana, Daniel Newberry, Pedro Scotto, Sosefina Talanoa, Litzi Venturi, Hanna Voronina.* At the group’s first meeting UF staff reviewed the process that will be followed and background information on the role of the Portland Urban Forest Management Plan.

--The Design Review Advisory Committee (DRAC) has three openings. For those interested, see <https://www.portland.gov/bds/drac/about-drac> .The deadline for applications is February 15. It would be helpful to have tree advocates on DRAC. *This advisory committee within the Bureau of Development Services (BDS) “is a citizen advisory body, representing those with interests in the outcomes of policies, budgets, regulations, and procedures that affect development review processes.”*

--The Science and Education group within PP&R UF will be holding a Tree Summit (*first one since COVID 19 shut many things down in 2020*) to review recent findings of the PP&R UF Street Tree survey team done in 2022 and 2023. The Summit will be held Saturday March 2nd at Rigler Elementary School at 5401 NE Prescott Street. Ed Washinton, former UFC member and chair, will give the keynote address. The summit will also include tree walks in the Rigler School Arboretum. <https://www.portland.gov/trees/documents/rigler-elementary-school-tree-walk-guide/download>. Lunch will be provided. The latest information will be available in Tree Bark. <https://www.portland.gov/trees/get-involved/tree-bark-newsletter>. The lead on this event is Nik Desai. nik.desai@portlandoregon.gov

--Discussions are ongoing to meet a July 1, 2024, deadline to have a functioning Single Permitting Authority (SPA) for development on private property. This action was authorized by Portland City Council in August 2023. The goal is to create one authorizing power for all permits relating to new development (plumbing, electrical, trees required, building and more). This involves consolidating permits that are currently issued by Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS), BDS, PP&R, Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT), and Portland Water Bureau (PWB).

PP&R has expressed concerns about how this consolidation will affect the city’s overall tree canopy. In the past, PP&R UF has not had sufficient staff to ensure that follow-up was done for tree planting requirements in private development. Will this change with the creation of SPA? Will staff exist at SPA to do this? That question has not yet been answered. At the February UFC meeting, BDS staff working on SPA will do a presentation and will be available to answer questions and hear statements from UFC members.

10:03 a.m. Recap of the Joint Parks Board, Urban Forestry Commission and Public Utilities Board presentation on Natural Resource Service Area consolidation planning Jenn Cairo, City Forester (PP&R UF)

The PP&R board held a meeting on Tuesday, January 9, 2024, to which members of the Urban Forestry Commission and the Public Utilities Board were invited. At

the meeting, which most UFC members attended, PP&R staff reported on progress in the ongoing discussions among staff of the bureaus engaged in natural resource management. The lead bureaus are PP&R and BES. The focus of these efforts is to deliver better City management of natural resources.

UFC members expressed some dismay at what they saw as the lack of community involvement in this discussion. City Forester Cairo explained that City Council mandated that this discussion occur and gave a specific timeline in which it needed to be concluded. That has made for a difficult situation. UFC members hoped there would be more opportunities for community engagement on this matter in the future.

In the aftermath of the passage of the City Charter changes approved by Portland voters in November 2022, the City Council passed Resolution 37609 as a means for City government to better prepare for the changes to come. Portland City Council in Resolution 37609 include the following statements:

“In partnership with Commissioner Mapps, the Bureau of Environmental Services, Portland Parks & Recreation, Portland Water Bureau, and the Portland Bureau of Transportation will initiate a process and develop a work plan to be delivered to the City’s Chief Administrative Officer by Fall 2023. The work plan should include details and timelines for the integration of services related to nature, green infrastructure, watershed management, natural areas, urban tree canopy, and other areas of alignment, including a new organizational and reporting structure that reforms and enhances central service delivery, meets regulatory and financial requirements and best practices, and includes community engagement and consideration—in order to directly support the City of Portland’s commitments to addressing homelessness, community safety, economic recovery, and livability.” <https://www.portland.gov/council/documents/resolution/adopted/37609> This work is part of that endeavor. The goal is to have clarity on these items so that the budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024 can reflect this new agreement.

10:30 a.m. UF Code Compliance for Non-development Rick Faber, Code Compliance Supervisor (PP&R UF)

Supervisor Faber has been in this particular position for about a year. He has worked in other positions at PP&R UF for over 10 years. He outlined the ideal process for UF Permitting and Code Compliance as:

- Permit application;
- Review of application by PP&R UF staff;

- Approval or not;
- Action by applicant;
- Verification of completed action by PP&R UF

If a known violation or an emergency occurs, the prescribed process is:

- Action has been taken by property owner;
- Action taken is reviewed by PP&R UF;
- PP&R UF informs property owner of action needed to be taken;
- Responsive action is taken by property owner;
- PP&R UF verifies that necessary response has been done by property owner.

Many non-development cases have required tree planting:

- 2020 had 2,842 cases
- 2021 had 2,412 cases
- 2022 had 2,517 cases

Cases involving **street trees** in non-development situations totaled:

- 771 in 2020
- 805 in 2021
- 727 in 2022

Historically PP&R UF has not had sufficient staff to verify that required planting has occurred. *Jeff Ramsey of PP&R UF reported that close to 1,900 trees that PP&R had required to be planted in 2016 were not planted.*

<https://www.portland.gov/sites/default/files/2021/tree-planting-compliance-report-2016.pdf>

The passage of the Parks Levy in 2020 has allowed for funded staff time to address the urgent need for the verification step and to be able to inform the public that this step is occurring. This positive action should lead to more trees being planted annually.

The PP&R UF staff working as part of Supervisor Faber's team include Chris Ward, Roger Hedges, Amanda Lister, Anna August, Autumn Blankenship, and John Garcia. They are either Tree Inspectors or Code Specialists. The team began working in late 2023 so it is too early to see results.

With the high amount of requested non-development permits, Supervisor Faber has developed a self-certification program for required tree plantings on non-development private property. The hope is that this will expedite the review

process, since applicants can present visual information online that can be reviewed without a site inspection. But a team member *will* visit all required street tree plantings. Applicants have 365 days from the issuance of a non-development permit to follow through with the required planting.

Supervisor Faber is considering more ways to get people to plant required trees. The only tool currently available is putting a lien on the property. He would like to come up with a tool that allows the City to plant the required tree and bill the property owner. Other possibilities include waivers or assistance for some residents, and incentives for planting. Multiple tools are needed.

UFC member Clapp wondered if there is a statute of limitations on when the tree needs to be planted. Supervisor Faber said property owners have 365 days to comply.

UFC member Van de Mark wondered if going forward there will be compliance checks. For example, if UF requires a homeowner to plant a Douglas-fir tree of a certain minimum size, will UF check to see if that has actually happened? Supervisor Faber said that is the hope. His team is just starting to do this work.

UFC co-chair Jortner is excited to see this development. She wondered if PP&R UF was reaching out to the arborist community to inform them of this new activity on the part of Urban Forestry. Supervisor Faber said this information will be provided at the upcoming local provider workshop that UF puts on for local arborists. It is still true that verification of street tree planting in new development projects is not currently being done by PP&R UF.

UFC member Clapp wondered if any work is being done by PP&R UF to help educate the public about tree basics and tree maintenance. After the City plants a ROW tree, does any follow-up information go to the property owner about appropriate care for the tree? Is there any work from PP&R UF to provide “positive messaging” on the newly planted tree? City Forester Cairo said she aspires to have this kind of work done sometime in the future.

Co-chair Feldstein wondered what Supervisor Faber is using about metrics for evaluating the work of his group. Supervisor Faber said his group really just began working in January 2023; it’s too soon to have meaningful results.

City Forester Cairo expressed hope that SPA (Single Permitting Authority) would lead to an increase in canopy. At this point, this is an aspiration only.

11:00 a.m. Update on Portland Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund, City Forester Jenn Cairo, PP&R UF

The Portland Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund is the same as Portland Clean Energy Fund (PCEF). It is common to see reference to PCEF.

On December 13, 2023, City Commissioner Carmen Rubio reported that unexpected revenue (\$540 million) is being collected for PCEF. When City Council learned of this additional revenue, they instructed City bureaus to look for work they do that PCEF could support, using PCEF guidelines. These were to be “shovel-ready projects.” <https://www.portland.gov/rubio/news/2023/12/13/rubio-proposes-additional-climate-investments-clean-energy-funds>

One such “shovel-ready” project is PP&R UF’s desire to provide maintenance for Portland street trees. The Davey Resource Group’s study of several years ago spelled out the costs and procedures for PP&R UF to deliver a street tree maintenance program. *This study/report does not appear to be available online or at least I can’t find it.*

PP&R UF had hoped to have street tree maintenance included in the request for funds as part of the 2020 Parks Levy passed in November 2020. Unfortunately, in polling done prior to putting out the levy measure, street tree maintenance did not do well on the survey, so it was not included in the ballot measure. But PP&R UF remains interested in trying to find a means to fund a street tree maintenance program.

Part of City Commissioner Rubio’s December 13, 2023 proposal was for the use of \$100,000,000 for street tree maintenance. *Specifics are not included: Is it a 5-year, 7-year or 10-year pruning cycle for street trees? Is it for all street trees or just those in specific neighborhoods?*

PP&R UF would oversee this maintenance, but it is likely that private providers would be doing most of the field work of planting, watering, structural training, routine pruning, and tree removal. The PCEF Committee will meet on January 25 to hear presentations from various City bureau directors about their requests for specific projects that could be funded with PCEF dollars.

UFC member Van de Mark wondered what UFC can do to support this proposal. City Forester Cairo thought that a timely letter to City Council supporting this proposed use of PCEF funds would be helpful.

It was agreed that Bruce Nelson will discuss this in the upcoming Policy Committee meeting and provide public testimony in support of the proposed funding for tree activities at the January 25 PCEF meeting. UFC co-chair Jortner will write a draft letter of support addressed to the City Council and bring it to the February UFC meeting for consideration. At the February meeting UFC will select someone to represent UFC at PCEF.

Next Urban Forestry Commission Meeting

The next meeting will be 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m., February 15, 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>