

TO: Neighborhood Tree Team members and tree advocates  
FROM: Bruce Nelson, Cully Tree Team 6.3.20  
RE: Portland Urban Forestry Commission Meeting 5.21.20:  
Summary and Comments

These two-hour meetings occur on a monthly basis, on the third Thursday of the month at City Hall, usually in the Lovejoy Room. Official minutes of the meetings are available at the website for the Urban Forestry Commission, once they are approved by the Commissioners (usually 1-3 months after the meeting).

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/60405>

The decisions made at these meetings often affect the volunteer tree advocacy work we are doing. I will send you timely commentary on these monthly meetings. If you do not wish to receive this, let me know.

*Italicized text indicates my own point of view and/or items not necessarily expressed during the meeting.*

The monthly Urban Forestry Commission meeting was held Thursday, May 21, 2020, 9:30 am – 11:30 am, as an online Zoom meeting due to COVID 19 demands.

**Urban Forestry Commissioners Present** - Vivek Shandas (Chair), Anjeanette Brown, Gregg Everhart, Barbara Hollenbeck, Lorena Nascimento, Bruce Nelson, Daniel Newberry, Damon Schrosk, Megan Van de Mark

**Urban Forestry Commissioners Absent** - Brian French

**Urban Forestry Staff Present** - Jenn Cairo (City of Portland Forester), Brian Landoe (Budget and Programs Analyst)

**Deputy City Attorney**- none present

**Visitor Presenters** – Jason Smith (Portland Parks and Recreation – Senior Management Analyst), Sarah Huggins (Portland Parks and Recreation – Systems Development Charge Program Manager), Gena Gastaldi (Portland Bureau of Transportation - Planner), Michelle Marx (Portland Bureau of Transportation - Pedestrian Coordinator).

**Public Comments** -- No comments were made at the start of the meeting. Public comments were accepted from individuals who had notified Brian ahead of time that they would be listening in to the meeting and may like to comment. This

happened as part of the Urban Forestry Commission Priorities discussion of this meeting.

**Conflict of Interest Policy** – Vivek reminded UFC Commissioners of the importance of reporting any possible conflicts of interest they may have prior to the discussion and decision making on a specific agenda item. Conflict of interest should be interpreted as meaning a potential monetary effect for the Commissioner or family of the Commissioner through a decision made by the UFC. When in doubt, it is prudent to declare a potential conflict of interest prior to the start of the discussion.

“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.”

*(I am not sure of the source of the above information but it is placed on the agenda document that was posted at the Urban Forestry Commission website).*

### **City Forester Report          Jenn Cairo – City Forester**

Jenn gave brief updates on three different inter-bureau projects Urban Forestry is involved with –

1. Streets 2035: There is no update as COVID 19 support activities by city personnel has slowed work in this area.
2. Portland Parks and Recreation (PP&R) bureau staff and Bureaus of Environmental Services (BES) staff will be convening stakeholder groups to further the discussion regarding the tree planting coordination currently done by both bureaus. Despite city-initiated, COVID-19 support activities that have taken UF and BES staff time, the hope remains that the timeline of September will still be realistic for final decisions as to where these tree planting activities will be housed and under whose direction. *A safe bet is that UF will assume all control, with some sort of agreement with BES regarding continued funding for the type of BES initiated and supervised planting of trees, except that it will be done by UF. What is not clear is how long this funding will last, what level of oversight will be maintained by BES, and what exactly is the level of funding. With the short-term and long-*

*term financial insecurity of Portland Parks and Recreation, many questions remain.*

3. Title 11 amendment work (per City Council request) with Bureau of Development Services (BDS) continues. Gathering more data continues concerning consequences of: a) removing the exemption to the Tree Code, Title 11, for commercial properties currently zoned 1H, 1G1, EX and CX; and b) reducing the critical tree size threshold from 36” to 20” for inch-for-inch mitigation fees in lieu of preservation.

The anticipated timeline includes: a) multiple repeat June virtual workshops open to the public for sharing BDS-gathered data; b) sharing of this data at the UFC meeting; c) August UFC meeting will include more discussion on this matter (Nick Desai and Brian Landoe are the leads working with BDS on this, plus lots of input from other UF staff).

Jenn next shared a brief listing of activities involving UF staff.

1. There has been a large number of inter-bureau tree emergency work (wind-caused primarily) recently. In response to a question from Damon Schrosk, Jenn reported that the changed process in dealing with emergencies (developed a few years ago) worked smoothly. The new process does not involve tree inspectors doing any initial viewing of damaged trees but rather leaves that to members of the Tree Maintenance crew, under the supervision of Larry McGinnins.
2. Prepping for 2021 tree planting has begun. Planning work focuses on finding potential planting locations (streets, parks and schools).
3. UF staff are rethinking how to structure the Yard Tree Give-away program to accommodate the physical distancing necessary in light of COVID-19 safety concerns.
4. Several first-ever virtual UF workshops occurred, including a tree service providers workshop and a pruning workshop.
5. Tree permit requests were down with the start of the COVID 19 crisis but are beginning to go back up.
6. All Portland Parks and Recreation staff, including UF staff, are required to take a certain number of furlough days as a means of reducing PP&R costs. UF staff will take the days later in the year, at times that better fit in with the workload requirements at UF.
7. Many Urban Forestry staff continue to work from home.
8. Maintenance crews have had to modify some work practices to increase their personal safety and that of the public.

## **Portland Parks and Recreation Budget and Sustainable Futures Update**

### **Jason Smith and Sarah Huggings**

Jason Smith shared the most recent information from the Mayor's Office regarding the FY 2020-2021 budget (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021). The anticipated revenue loss from COVID-19 related circumstances is \$75 million for the City. This figure will likely be modified in the future as more is known. The Mayor is proposing to address this loss of revenue through:

1. Savings from forecasted excess revenues;
2. Reserves, set-asides, underspending;
3. Bureau budget reduction targets of 5.6%, with suggested means being:
  - a) reducing inflationary increases for materials and services,
  - b) wage freezes and furloughs for non-union represented employees and,
  - c) cost-saving measures agreeable to City/unions.

For PP&R, this means reducing services delivered, reducing staff and reducing employment pay. Most summer programs are cancelled due to safety concerns regarding COVID-19. These cancellations result in lower fee revenues for PP&R and lower staff expenses.

Urban Forestry will see some reduction in fees generated from regulatory permits, which will affect Urban Forestry's budget for FY 2020-2021. Upcoming discussions by bureaus and City Council in August as part of the Fall Budget Monitoring Process will address this very dynamic budget situation.

The simple take-home is that the budget situation is very fluid and not good. It is difficult at this time to accurately predict expected revenues that the City will be receiving. At this point the Mayor's Office is allocating additional dollars to PP&R for minor operations and maintenance (\$661,574), none for major maintenance, Sustainable Future staff position and work (\$358,650) and one-time work at the Columbia Pool (\$698,638). *I am not sure exactly what the money for the Columbia Pool is for. Earlier in May it was targeted for closure. There is considerable community opposition to this proposal.*

Sarah Huggings gave an update on the PP&R Sustainable Futures group. This is the group that is exploring longer term revenue sources to reduce dependence on current general budget dollars.

PP&R, with direction from City Council earlier this year (*before COVID-19 crisis*), was instructed to think big and develop financial means to expand PP&R services wanted by Portland residents. This also means addressing the \$450 million backlog of PP&R facility maintenance needs. The Sustainable Futures

group is looking at taking a request to the voters in November 2020 or May 2021 to begin addressing this challenge. Work with a pollster is helping guide this work. It is “a tricky time.”

*To the best of my knowledge, the immediate effects on Urban Forestry of the modified PP& R budget to date are:*

- 1. no or reduced hiring of seasonal employees;*
- 2. reductions in general budget dollars allocated through the Urban Forestry Fund;*
- 3. mandatory furlough days for all non-union staff;*
- 4. no yard tree give-away program in 2020.*

*At this point no lay-offs of permanent UF full-time employees have occurred. In looking at past data for UF, a bit over 30% of the revenue UF receives is from permitting fees. Additionally, a bit over 30% of UF expenses are for regulation and permitting. As an oversimplification, regulatory and permitting fees nearly cover all the expenses budgeted for Permitting and Regulation within UF. So, if there is a significant reduction in UF revenue generated from permit fees, this will create significant budgetary challenges for UF. It is possible that the COVID-19 challenges will lower the total collected even though some fees charges have been raised and will go into effect July 1, 2020.*

*Initially with the Stay Home, Stay Safe mandate, regulatory fees collected plummeted. Recently they have been climbing up, so predicting the overall affect is difficult*

### **Minutes – Brian Landoe**

Minutes from the February 20, 2020 meeting were reviewed. Minor changes were made and the minutes were approved as amended.

### **Urban Forestry Commission Priorities – Vivek Shandas**

Vivek facilitated a discussion to help guide UFC in identifying priorities for this year (2020). Previously identified priorities (2019) were shared:

1. Now – a) work on “large tree” amendment that is sunsetting 12/31/19; b) determine Title 11 amendment priorities; c) draft committee structure plan for formalizing policies on recruitment, membership and delegation of responsibilities; d) discuss UFC community outreach; e) identify strategy to identify and pursue additional financial resources for Urban Forestry programs.
2. Soon – participate in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training.
3. Future – determine what committees UFC needs to pursue its priorities.

Brian Landoe and Jenn Cairo shared a document listing the Urban Forestry strategic priorities. Using as guidance the Urban Forest Management Plan, UF wants to: a) improve its capacity relative to city tree maintenance and Tree Code compliance; b) work to elevate the urban forest as critical infrastructure needing consideration by City bureaus and citizens; c) use an equity and environmental challenge lens to guide all decisions; d) develop tree planting strategies and practices that help grow a more equitable forest; and e) develop a Street Tree Maintenance program.

Urban Forestry Commissioners each briefly shared their perspective on priorities for UFC.

Anjeanette: It is hard to set priorities without knowing the budget situation, so it seems preferable to put off priority decisions until budget dollars are known.

Barbara: The Annual Report should be done much earlier than July. It seems like the Urban Forestry list of priorities is more on the task level than bigger picture priority level.

Bruce: Focus on efforts to enable the City to take over the responsibilities of planting and caring for all street trees in Portland.

Damon: We need to identify sustainable funding sources for Urban Forestry activities. The concept of trees as critical green infrastructure needs to be elevated for city concerns. A priority should be figuring out ways to better do that.

Daniel: Urban Forestry priorities look more like a task list. His highest priorities are equitable distribution of canopy and preservation of large-form trees. We also need to be realistic about Urban Forestry staff capacity.

Gregg: With the massive large tree loss, changes to Title 11 Tree Code are essential to stop this loss. There is a need to show Portland citizens the real tree loss that is happening under current regulations and practices.

Lorena: Engage more of the Portland community in the urban forest.

Megan: It is hard to identify priorities when the specific role of the Urban Forestry Commission is not as clear as it should be. Certainly work for equitable canopy distribution is important as is work to broaden the support for the urban canopy in Portland. How do we work for more secure budgeting? But overriding all this work is the necessity to work on equity and outreach.

Vivek: It is important that the chair gives voice to all UFC Commissioners. A long-term perspective on the urban forest is helpful in determining priorities.

## PUBLIC COMMENTS ON UFC PRIORITIES

Ted Labbe: Trees are as a utility and should be viewed as such in city planning documents. Street tree maintenance needs to be better addressed than is happening under present rules. Ted believes the poll being conducted as part of the PP&R Sustainable Futures group includes questions concerning street tree maintenance under direct control of Urban Forestry. Training and onboarding of potential and new Urban Forestry Commission members is very important. The challenge of funding necessary Urban Forestry activities is also very important.

Whitney Dorer: It is important to remember that Friends of Trees (FoT) plays an important role in Portland's urban forest in engaging thousands of Portlanders in tree activities, from tree planting to tree pruning and supporting the many activities that make that happen. FoT is working to insure that they can continue to play this role in Portland.

Vivek committed to fleshing out the presented ideas into a document that we can discuss at a later meeting.

### **Pedestrian Design Guide Update – Gena Gastaldi (PBOT Planner)**

Work is ongoing to update the Pedestrian Design Guide (most recently reviewed in 1997/1998). This is a long-range planning guide. An earlier draft had been reviewed by various entities (including the Urban Forestry Commission) and comments were incorporated as feasible. The hope is to have this updated guide completed by the end of 2020 and ready for presentation to City Council.

Efforts are underway to use information from the recently adopted PedPDX document as part of the Guide and also to work with Streets 2035 to see that smooth coordination with that planning document happens.

Much of the Ped Design Guide focuses on the sidewalk details (location, users, width, materials) and attempts to address conflicts between various user groups (bikes and pedestrians in particular). To date, all of the stakeholders involved in this work are only City bureau employees. Next, the Pedestrian Design Guide

update will be taken to external stakeholders for comment. Certainly representatives from the Urban Forestry Commission would be very welcome. This would likely involve 3 or 4 meetings over the next 6 months. *Several UFC Commissioners were interested in serving on this external stakeholder group.*

The Sidewalk Corridor section draft outline should be completed by mid- June. Gena's presentation will be posted under the May 2020 Meeting Materials section for the Urban Forestry Commission. <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/80171>. The plan is to return to the Urban Forestry Commission in the fall 2020 with the more complete and revised document.

Urban Forestry Commissioners had the following comments and questions. Responses are in **bold**.

Megan: Explain how people can be involved in the external stakeholder meetings. **Meetings will occur June 15 – December 31<sup>st</sup>, about 1.5 hours each, likely 4 different meetings.**

Lorena : I have concerns about tree rooting space and sidewalk-related ADA challenges.

Gregg: Utility strips need to be more than 4' wide to accommodate trees. 4' x 6' concrete cut-outs are insufficient to grow healthy trees.

Daniel: It is really challenging to be sure that adequate space is allowed for trees.

Damon: There should be room to use known alternative construction methods for sidewalks to better protect trees. Hopefully there will be a toolbox of possible practices to allow for preservation and/or thriving of planting strip trees.

Bruce: Alternative sidewalk construction techniques must be allowed which will enable tree roots to safely escape the utility/planting strip.

Barbara: Be sure to plan for large-form trees both by width of strips and more tree-friendly sidewalk construction techniques.

Anjeanette: Sidewalks do not have to be in a straight line.

Vivek: Complete streets will be areas of the City that will get much warmer but that can be ameliorated if design is such that healthy growth of large-form trees is possible. There are definitely challenges with the current specifications on sidewalk width, when you consider physical distancing guidelines during the

COVID–19 crisis. Could sidewalk materials be developed and used that allow for more water penetration into the soil? Could coloring of sidewalks somehow reduce heat absorption? There is increasing evidence about the benefits of curb bump-outs.

Comments on the updates should be sent to [Gena.Gastaldi@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:Gena.Gastaldi@portlandoregon.gov)

### **Next Urban Forestry Commission Meeting**

The next Urban Forestry Commission meeting will be Thursday, June 18, 9:30 – 12 noon, as a Zoom meeting. Vivek requested that suggestions are certainly appreciated for how to improve our Zoom meetings and should be sent to him at [vshandas@pdx.edu](mailto:vshandas@pdx.edu)

The agenda is unavailable at this time. Check the link below in June for meeting agenda and materials: <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/80167>