Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections

Date:	March 18, 2021
To:	Councilmember Dan Strauss, Chair, Land Use and Neighborhoods Committee
From:	Nathan Torgelson, SDCI Director; and Michelle Caulfield, OSE Acting Director
Subject:	Tree Protections Update – 1Q 2021 Report

The City Council adopted Resolution 31902 on September 16, 2019, directing SDCI and OSE staff to explore strategies to protect existing trees, increase Seattle's tree canopy cover, and balance City goals to support future growth and density as provided in the City's Comprehensive Plan. The resolution also directs SDCI and OSE to provide quarterly reports to the Chair of the Land Use and Neighborhoods (LUN) Committee on progress made. SDCI and OSE delivered the 1Q report to the LUN Committee on February 12, 2020 to share the project scope. The 2Q and 3Q reports were respectively delivered remotely on July 22 and November 25 to share progress made, next steps, and actions accomplished to date, including the status of the 2020 Urban Forestry Management Plan Update and the proposed draft . This is the 1Q 2021 report which summarizes all the work accomplished over the past few months, including work underway and anticipated next steps to further tree protections on private property.

Progress Made on the Urban Forest Management Plan update (UFMP)
We shared a draft UFMP for public review from October to December 2020 and received 178 public comments: 165 responses to the online comment form and 13 direct emails from residents and organizations including Seattle Green Spaces Coalition, Green Cities, TreePAC, Laurelhurst Community Club, and University of Washington. All of the public comments have been posted online for transparency.

After reviewing the public input in detail, our interdepartmental Urban Forestry team of City staff produced a summary of comments and provided initial recommendations on how to incorporate public input into the plan. It is important to note that the majority of comments were related to the current tree regulations, which were shared with the SDCI team leading that work.

Next steps for the UFMP:
1. The team's recommendations are being reviewed internally.
2. The team will produce the SEPA Checklist for SDCI to issue a Determination.
3. The team is expecting to present the plan to Council in the spring.
4. We envision the UFMP, once finalized, to be a web-based document. In addition, the 8-page Executive Summary will be printed and translated into Amharic, Cantonese, Khmer, Korean, Mandarin, Oromo, Spanish, Somali, Tigrinya, and Vietnamese.

Progress Made on Tree Protection Updates
SDCI, OSE, and other partners continue to work to improve tree protections, including:

- *Improved enforcement:* We continue to have enforcement success and have levied penalties in a range from $10,000 to $99,000. This includes illegal tree removal under the triple penalty provision.

- *Lidar Project Award:* The City has successfully obtained funding from the US Department of Interior to acquire Lidar data. This data will be used for a canopy cover assessment that will allow us to analyze canopy cover change over time, using our 2016 data as a baseline.

- *Collaboration with the Urban Forestry Commission (UFC)*: SDCI and OSE held five deliberative sessions with the UFC over the past 14 months. The most recent session was held on January 22, 2021 in which SDCI and OSE staff shared considerations to the proposed draft Director's Rule 13-2020. These sessions have provided an opportunity for staff to benefit from the expertise of the Commissioners

and to collaborate on technical issues. Staff has also attended UFC meetings, most recently on February 10, to keep the UFC up to date with the tree protections update. At that meeting, staff answered questions about the status of the proposed draft Director's Rule.

- *Updates to Director's Rule for Exceptional Trees:* SDCI is in the process of responding to the feedback on the proposed draft Director's Rule. We hope to have more to share about the draft Rule soon.

Work Underway

Public Outreach on Tree Ordinance
SDCI and OSE have developed a community engagement plan that will prioritize culturally and linguistically appropriate engagement with residents of low-income and low-canopy neighborhoods. This effort will include, but is not limited to, homeowners, renters, builders, neighborhood groups, environmental organizations, and climate and environmental justice organizations (with a focus on BIPOC communities). The team is in the process of engaging a consultant to implement a citywide survey to measure residents' attitudes regarding the existing tree codes as well as to facilitate public input through focus groups. On a parallel track, the team is seeking to work with the Department of Neighborhoods' Community Liaisons to seek feedback and engage BIPOC communities to gather input about the tree protections update and to identify potential impacts and mitigation strategies for these communities.

Outreach and engagement will take place from March through June 2021. SDCI and OSE will document community input, which will be considered as part of the tree protections update. Throughout this process, City staff will seek to better understand stakeholders' perspectives and keep them engaged in the process based on their interest level.

Updated Education and Information
SDCI hosted two virtual home fairs, on January 30 and February 6, and over 600 people signed up for the events. The programming included information posted on SDCI's webpage about tree regulations, the permitting process, and code compliance. The January 30th Home Fair also included a presentation on tree regulations, follow by a question and answer session. In addition, staff is preparing a letter to tree service providers about tree regulations to provide updated information about the current regulations and best practices to help inform how to do tree work in Seattle.

Council Requested - Tracking Tree Removal and Replacement
SDCI GIS analysts continue to capture tree-related information from approved permit applications in the development review pipeline. This new, improved data set will help SDCI and OSE determine tree canopy coverage on properties that have undergone development, which will help us monitor canopy coverage over time and inform future policy and code development.

Racial Equity Analysis
SDCI and OSE are evaluating the strategies identified in Resolution 31902 through a racial equity lens. Feedback received from BIPOC communities during public engagement will be used to help shape recommendations for upcoming legislation.

Future Work
SDCI and OSE anticipate that we will be ready to present recommendations to the Mayor and then Council after the public outreach phase is completed in June.

Copy: Aly Pennucci and Yolanda Ho, City Council Central Staff