



Environmental Services Commission Minutes

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Center for Urban Waters – 325 E D St
Zoom Meeting

February 13, 2025

Commissioner Beaumier called the meeting to order at 4:11 p.m.

Commission Members Present: Mike Yaden, *Esther Beaumier, Jonathan Paul, Jeff Paradise, Karen DiNicola, Matthew Benedict, and Chad Sutter (arrived at 4:33 p.m.)

Commission Members Absent: Bruce Martin, Mindi Kellar, David Dailey, and Marty Campbell

Commissioner Beaumier welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting the Chair and Vice Chair were not present and she would be acting as the presiding officer. Discussion followed and it was determined that although there was not the presence of a quorum, the Commission would continue the meeting and hear the presentation.

Informal discussion followed.

Public Comment

The public comment period is reserved for items on the current agenda only. Comments will be limited to the amount of time announced by the chair, presiding officer, or staff liaison, no more than five minutes per person per meeting.

No Public Comment was received.

Urban Forestry Program 101

Mike Carey, Urban Forest Program Manager, provided background information on the Puget Sound Urban Forest, the benefits of trees, tree equity, and state and local policy. He stated in 2018 Tacoma's tree canopy cover was 20%, the lowest assessed canopy in the Puget Sound Region. He then noted that a healthy urban forest promotes well-being, boosts the economy, helps children learn, improves safety, mitigates pollution, and manages stormwater.

Discussion followed regarding:

State and Local Policy

1. Commissioner DiNicola inquired whether the City Council was aware of the particular Clean Water Act permit requirement to adopt and implement tree canopy goals and policies to support stormwater management.

- a. Staff stated the City Council is aware of the requirement. He stated staff also plans to publish a document in the next few years showing how trees affect the stormwater, noting the Department of Ecology specifically links trees to stormwater budgets.

Chair Sutter arrived here, at 4:33 p.m. Commissioner Beaumier noted the presence of a quorum and continued as presiding officer.

Mr. Carey continued the presentation by reviewing the City's policies and issues identified with the Urban Forest Management, including outdated tree-related ordinances that had not been updated since 1927. He briefly discussed consequences for illegal tree removal, noting generally offenders are required to replace the tree and comply with current Code and zoning requirements. He then provided several maps and graphs used to evaluate inequality, the current tree canopy, and land use in the city. He then discussed ways ("levers") staff is evaluating ways to provide services to its citizens and close the tree canopy gaps, while minimizing impact and liability. Mr. Carey talked about the City's Urban Forestry program staff of three and each of their roles, noting they provided internal support services to 25 workgroups across ten City departments and external support services to the community, developers, permittees, contractors, government, and NGO's.

Discussion followed regarding:

Depaving

1. Commissioner DiNicola inquired whether staff has investigated the City's current parking lots and other unused public spaces as places to plant trees.
 - a. Staff briefly discussed the City partnership with the Pierce Conservation District for the Depave Program. The program looks at nominated underutilized spaces and works with community members to remove the old pavement, replace it with soil elements/grass/trees, and recycle the old asphalt. The City is not actively working to identify other opportunities.

Local and State Policies and Regulations

- a.
2. Commissioner Benedict asked if Urban Forestry is putting forward regulatory changes related to Home in Tacoma trees.
 - a. Staff stated the City Council requested to have the conversation about trees separate from Home in Tacoma. He will be presenting to the Council's Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability Committee and they will provide direction for next steps.

Connection with other departments

1. Commissioner DiNicola asked how Urban Forestry works with Tacoma Public Utilities (TPU).
 - a. Staff stated TPU has their own Arborist and Public Works was just approved to hire an Arborist.

Mr. Carey discussed tree healthcare and tools used to prioritize tree maintenance. He then briefly discussed the Hazard Tree Assistance Program, and several public incentive programs, such as Grit City Trees, Tree Coupon Program, Branch Out, Green Blocks, and the previously discussed DePave program. He also reviewed how tree planting is prioritized and the metrics used.

Discussion ensued throughout the presentation regarding the following:

1. Commissioner DiNicola asked what it would take for the City to take over trees in the right-of-way.
 - a. Staff stated it would be a huge investment for staff as well as legal ramifications with incidental costs. The City Council is starting to explore other scalable options, such as potentially entering into an agreement with the Downtown Business District to have the City maintain and care for those trees. Staff also noted that the City Council would need to decide how to proceed, not Environmental Services.
 - b. Commissioner DiNicola stated that presumably if the City took over and did the work themselves, could it be done faster.
 - c. Staff stated it is true that relying on others takes time and energy, but doing it ourselves would significantly increase costs and the City's liability.
2. Commissioner Paul asked how the Urban Forestry Policy balances with housing policies and impacts to affordable housing.
 - a. Staff stated there needs to be a balanced approach including research and access to the tree canopy. There is a need to have a tree canopy and still meet the housing needs of the community.
3. Commissioner DiNicola stated it would be good to know about different research projects happening within the city.
 - a. Staff briefly discussed the GRIT program and other upcoming projects.

Staff Reports

ES Director Recruitment

Kurt Fremont, Interim ES Assistant Director, stated the job announcement has been advertised and the first round of supplemental questions is being sent out to candidates. The goal is to select approximately eight candidates to interview, noting he would like to have a commissioner on an interview panel. He stated the hope is to have the position filled late 2nd quarter of this year.

ES Division Reorg

Mr. Fremont stated leadership is discussing the creation of a 7th division in Environmental Services, the Science Division. He noted this division would be science focused, have no impact on the budget, and help to flatten out the department's current structure.

Commissioner Other Items of Interest

Commissioner DiNicola inquired when there would be an opportunity to discuss future topics. Mr. Fremont noted this year the commission is intentionally keeping the schedule flexible by refraining from scheduling out the full year in advance. Staff will meet monthly with the Commission's Chair and Vice Chair to plan each month's agenda. If there are topics commissioners would like to see added to a future agenda, please let staff and the Chair know.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:03 p.m.