

**TUMWATER TREE BOARD
MINUTES OF HYBRID MEETING
DECEMBER 9, 2024 PAGE 1**

CONVENE: 7:00 p.m.

PRESENT: Chair Trent Grantham and Boardmembers, Alex Chacon, Brent Chapman, Brodrick Coval. Michael Jackson, Tanya Nozawa, and Jim Sedore.

Staff: Planning Manager Brad Medrud, Sustainability Coordinator Alyssa Jones Wood, Engineering Services Manager Bill Lindauer, Associate Planner Dana Bowers, and Maintenance Worker 1 – Landscaper Chase Olson.

CHANGES TO AGENDA: There were no changes to the agenda.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

JULY 8, 2024 TREE BOARD MINUTES:

MOTION: **Boardmember Coval moved, seconded by Boardmember Sedore, to approve the minutes of July 8, 2024 as published. A voice vote approved the motion unanimously.**

TREE BOARD MEMBER REPORTS: Coordinator Jones Wood introduced new member Alex Chacon. Boardmember Chacon described his education and professional experience. Boardmembers introduced themselves and shared information on their professional background and interest in urban forestry.

COORDINATOR'S REPORT: Coordinator Jones Wood reported on the recent approval a fulltime position of Urban Forester in the City budget. Funding was also included for study materials and Arborist certification for three staff members in Utilities and for deferred maintenance of City urban and community forest properties.

Coordinator Jones Wood displayed photos of a recent tree pruning workshop for 25 City employees from Parks and Recreation and Utilities. The workshop was provided by the Department of Natural Resources.

Manager Medrud introduced Associate Planner Dana Bowers who recently joined the City. She previously was a planner at Thurston County.

Manager Medrud reported on the delay of reviewing urban forestry amendments because of resources necessary to complete the update of the Comprehensive Plan and the new Climate Element. Many of the new policies supporting those plans will be important as work resumes on any amendments to the urban forestry codes. Internal drafts of the landscaping code, tree and vegetation protection code, and street trees were completed during the initial review. At that point, staff reviewed the state's Wildland-Urban Codes currently in process by the Legislature. However, proposed legislation created

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conflicts with the City's codes resulting in delaying the implementation of the City's code updates to work with the state on changes to the code and to include more accurate maps. The next step is to reinstate the review process in 2026 rather than as initially scheduled in 2025.

Planner Bowers introduced herself to the Board. She was previously employed by Thurston County. She led the process for adoption of the Forestland Conversion Code for the county to protect trees in the county from development.

Boardmember Sedore commented on the quandary the delay creates as the City is obligated to enforce existing codes while development proposals continue to be processed under older standards that do not meet desired standards. Manager Medrud said the delay is unfortunate as staff is resource limited and there are many issues that are problematic. The City is guided by state-mandated changes that consume resources from other work items in addition to handling competing interests within the City. Permitting staff work closely with developers to ensure adherence to City codes.

Boardmember Chapman asked staff to speak to the difference between a variance and an exemption within the development code. It appears there might be some capacity for permit reviewers to utilize current codes and standards and grant fewer exemptions and/or variances. Manager Medrud described how the current code enables exemptions that likely should have been permitted outright. The presentation to the Board by Planner Baruch speaks to why staff is proposing changes to the code to address the issue formally to avoid the appearance that staff continues to issue exemptions and variances for development to proceed. The approvals are not for issues that are outside of the code but do enable the exercise of elements in the current code to enable proponents to pursue a development proposal, otherwise denials of applications could likely lead to legal challenges.

Coordinator Jones Wood addressed questions on the responsibilities of the Urban Forester position, as well as how the position will be funded moving forward to include grant responsibilities the position must satisfy. The Urban Forester will focus on implementation of the Urban Forestry Management Plan and developing incentive programs associated with the River Network Grant. Grant requirements include hiring the urban forester, deploying heat sensors throughout the community, obtaining data on urban heat and relative humidity, and developing three incentive programs. Currently, the plan for utilizing funds from the Tree Fund has not been developed primarily due to the lack of staff capacity.

Several Boardmembers expressed concerns with no progress on planting more trees funded from the Tree Fund and requested follow-up by other staff on future plans to utilize the funds to plant more trees in Tumwater. Boardmember Chapman conveyed interest in helping to support efforts by

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staff. Coordinator Jones Wood explained that the approval of the new budget includes other indirect positions to help support plantings and maintenance by staff by the addition of maintenance staff in the Facilities Department. The Urban Forester position is responsible for urban forestry. The Parks and Recreation Department has planted some replacement trees that died or were damaged.

Boardmember Coval expressed concerns about the under-utilization of the Tree Board. He questioned how the Board could be better utilized and leveraged during the pause of the code amendments. Coordinator Jones Wood shared that Boardmember Nozawa communicated with her earlier about the same concerns. She suggested deferring the conversation until later in the meeting during the Board's responsibility discussion and ways the Board can contribute and support efforts.

PUBLIC COMMENT: There were no public comments.

**DISCUSSION –
URBAN FORESTRY
MANAGEMENT
PLAN** Coordinator Jones Wood introduced staff members representing the City's Community Development, Parks & Recreation, Transportation & Engineering, and Water Resources & Sustainability departments.

IMPLEMENTATION: Coordinator Jones Wood shared a spreadsheet on the status of items in the Urban Forestry Management Plan that were delayed and not completed this year or in prior years:

ACTION

Support and incentivize the use of large-canopy trees in appropriate areas to provide maximum benefits.

STATUS

The action is scheduled to begin after code amendment updates have been completed, as it includes a new approved and prohibited tree species list.

The Board questioned the delay as a street tree list was previously developed. Coordinator Jones Wood advised that there was some disagreement with some species on the list. The list will be revisited as part of the code amendment process. Boardmember Coval cited a California university's development of a list of climate appropriate species of urban trees. He asked about any comparable effort in the state. Coordinator Jones Wood advised of Puget Sound climate adaptive tree list. The City's draft street tree list was assessed by an intern at the Evergreen State college who offered suggestions on the removal of some trees species. The list was also reviewed by Department of Natural Resources staff from the Urban and Community Forestry program. Some progress was achieved on the draft. The revised list will be presented to the Board for review and discussion.

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Implement, in coordination with the Noxious Weed Board and the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), an invasive flora and fauna species control strategy citywide to safeguard the health of the community and urban forest.

Boardmember Coval questioned the use and intent of “incentivize” within the action. Boardmember Sedore explained that during assessments, more credits for development proposals were assigned to existing larger trees, which speaks to the “incentive” for developers to either retain larger trees or replant with larger tree. Manager Medrud added that older trees have greater value for a variety of reasons. The intent was to incentivize through that specific method.

Parks staff are in contact with the Noxious Weed Board when issues arise on City park properties, but not proactively.

The Board questioned the process for development of a policy or procedure. Staff advised of the process to identify as many noxious or invasive species to the extent possible and remove the plants mechanically. In some instances the use of herbicides is used. The City has not implemented a plan to replace treated areas with native plants because of the lack of staff capacity.

The Board discussed whether staff employs current best practices for park operations and the necessity of creating or specifying specific practices to utilize currently accepted best practices. Staff noted that the department has not adopted standards for using best practices other than following the National Recreation Parks Association standards, which the department is implementing.

Staff and Boardmembers discussed the process of developing a policy/procedure or as alternative, developing a standard operating procedure using resources from the Noxious Weed Board. Staff pointed out that the process could result in some disagreement with Noxious Weed Board information and that a better source could be obtained from the Noxious Weed Boards in King and Snohomish Counties. Many factors are involved when developing either a policy or procedure.

Chair Grantham recommended contracting with a consultant to develop any plan/procedure.

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Coordinate with the Fire Department on actions to minimize fire risks associated with urban forestry.

Remove trees and understory in specific situations identified in the Tumwater Annex to the Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan for the Thurston Region to guard against wildfire.

Develop a program to work with public and private property owners in maintaining and providing for public safety with the community and urban forest.

Regularly review and update the Public Works standards, the Development Guide, and facilities procedures for the maintenance of City trees and the community and urban forest and modify to reflect best tree management practices and employee safety.

Review the Urban Forestry Management Plan regularly to monitor its progress, maintain its schedule, revise based on new information, and ensure that it is working with other City strategic priorities, plans, and regulations.

Use adaptive management to review the effectiveness of specific Actions during the Urban Forestry Management Plan timeline.

Develop a stable funding source and budget for maintenance of natural forests on City lands such as critical or shoreline areas and their buffers and other such areas.

The Fire Department plans to begin working soon on the Hazard Mitigation Plan that has been adopted.

Track annual removals, The Fire Department plans to begin working soon on the Hazard Mitigation Plan that has been adopted.

In response to questions about the specific areas, Manager Medrud explained that the intent is identifying structures or areas that have a higher risk factor for wildfire.

Evaluate effectiveness of the program as compared to the Goals, Objectives, and Actions of the Plan.

Coordinator Jones Wood recommended delaying the action until the Urban Forester is hired to develop the program of working with public and private property owners.

The action was delayed until the code amendments are finalized as they will inform the changes in the Development Guide and Public Works Standards, as well as the Drainage Design and Erosion Control Manual as it includes some tree and plant species as often prescribed by the Department of Ecology.

The action was delayed until the Urban Forester is hired. However, the tree canopy assessment is scheduled next year, which will inform the update of the Urban Forestry Management Plan. Funding was provided for data purchases with GIS capacity available in 2025 to conduct the assessment.

Action is pending on the hiring of the Urban Forester.

Deferred maintenance of street trees and trees in parks was prioritized in the draft 2025-2026 budget. Systematic rather than reactive maintenance for natural forests and critical areas was delayed.

The Board suggested pursuing grants from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for maintenance. Coordinator Jones Wood advised that DNR funds maintenance but it is a lower priority in the criteria for funding.

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Actively maintain the City Tree webpage to educate the public on the importance of trees, property care and maintenance, and other tree related information.

Evaluate webpage after codes have been updated to reflect new or changed information.

Boardmember Sedore recommended considering other forms of communication to streamline and provide current information to the public without reliance on the webpage related to the urban forester. Staff responded with information on the lengthy process involved for public outreach and communications.

The Board offered an opportunity for the Board to develop similar information that is presented as the Board's recommendations/information rather than the City's to avoid a rigorous process. Manager Medrud offered that it would be appropriate for the Urban Forester to review the current webpage on trees as the information reflects what is in the code. There likely are opportunities to add more information on tree care and other resources instead of delaying until the code amendments are completed.

Discussion ensued on the number of visitors to the webpage. Suggestions were offered to confer with other jurisdictions with similar webpages.

Planner Bowers reviewed desired formats for urban forestry-focused webpages.

Coordinator Jones Wood reviewed the City's current tree webpage, with most of the information related to the code. It is possible to add some additional educational resources.

Establish administrative procedures to enhance City interdepartmental communications and aid in the further success of the Urban Forestry Management Plan.

Delayed pending the hiring of the Urban Forester.

Formalize relationships with organizations and green industries that share common aims affecting community and urban forest sustainability.

Delayed pending the hiring of the Urban Forester.

Prior to joining the City, Planner Bowers was organizing an urban forestry roundtable for Thurston County forestry. The City's Urban Forester will be instrumental in pursuing relationships.

Work with local tree and landscape contractors, as well as retail and wholesale

Delayed pending the hiring of the Urban Forester.

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landscaping firms, to stock trees suitable for the urban environment

Use the City website and social media for periodic articles on the proper care and maintenance of trees on public and private property. Delayed pending the hiring of the Urban Forester to benefit from their forestry expertise.

Identify tree specimens, including heritage trees, on City property that illustrate proper tree care and discuss in articles on the City website and social media. Delayed pending the hiring of the Urban Forester to benefit from their forestry expertise and after the code amendments.

Coordinator Jones Wood addressed questions on the status of the Davis Meeker oak tree. A second tree assessment is scheduled pending permit approval from the state. No invasive testing can be completed as part of the assessment without a state permit. The second forester was hired and has completed some preliminary work on the assessment.

The Board discussed the lack of the communication about the status of the tree and the lengthy process for the second tree assessment to be completed.

**DISCUSSION –
MIYAWAKI
FORESTS:**

Boardmember Sedore reported DNR featured an article on a Japanese practice for forestry and is offering the information to tree boards and forestry professionals as an option/recommendation. Several communities have implemented some of the techniques. The technique is planting high density species on a plot of land and watering regularly for three years creating a mini nature preserve or forest. The intent is to create a low to no maintenance diverse plant community after three years.

Boardmember Chapman shared information on some landscaping practices on Capitol Campus using natural and successive and progressive plantings requiring minimal maintenance while ensuring the needs of security and aesthetics are integrated.

Boardmember Sedore said the Japanese method is intense and focused with a wide variety of grasses and plants.

Chair Grantham said the main concern with the planting concept for public buildings and spaces is the ability to see through areas for security purposes. Areas that do not need to be maintained or areas of slopes could be conducive for that type of planting.

The Board discussed areas within the City that might be conducive to the planting method. Boardmember Sedore noted that the community has natural areas that are being transitioned to high intensity residential and commercial uses. Consequently, many of the undeveloped natural areas are being removed. He suggested considering whether replanting those areas using the Miyawaki planting method would be beneficial for the City.

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Boardmember Coval commented that he viewed the websites of Washington sites, which were planted in 2024. Public safety within an urban area might not be conducive for that type of planting. He has some skepticism as to that particular planting method.

Boardmember Jackson cited a 4,000 square foot site in Washington planted with 1,000 plants comprised of 40 different shrubs, perennials, ground covers, and forbs.

NEXT MEETING: The next meeting is scheduled on January 13, 2025.

ADJOURNMENT: **With there being no further business, Chair Grantham adjourned the meeting at 9:11 p.m.**

Prepared by Valerie L. Gow, Recording Secretary/President
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