

# Tukwila Tree and Environment Advisory Committee

## Meeting Notes

### Meeting 7, March 13, 2013

**Committee Members in Attendance:** Sean Albert, Nancy Eklund, Stephen Reilly, De'Sean Quinn, Sharon Mann, Kathleen Wilson

**Committee Members Absent:** Christian Faltenberger, Don Scanlon, Heidi Watters

**Members of the Public in Attendance:** Daryl Tapio, Rick Forschler, Vicki Lockwood, George Fornald, Richard Jordan

**Staff in Attendance:** Carol Lumb, Sandra Whiting, Nora Gierloff  
The meeting began at 5:35 p.m.

### Topics of Discussion:

1. Welcome to Committee members and visitors.
2. Public comment: (Time is set aside at the beginning of each meeting for brief public comments; the Committee is meeting in work session format, therefore, questions or comments from the public that come up during the course of the meeting should be directed to staff via e-mail or telephone calls after the meeting. These communications will be passed along to the Committee)

Public comments were presented by 5 residents of Sea-Tac: Richard Jordan, George Fornald, Vicki Lockwood, Daryl Tapio and Rick Forschler, a member of the SeaTac City Council. One of the attendees, Mr. Tapio, owns rental property in Tukwila, and is a developer who has done projects in Tukwila. He sent a letter via email on 3/13/2013 directed to the Committee with a request that copies be distributed by staff to the Planning Commission, City Council, Mayor and City Administrator. In general all the comments from the public were aimed at recommending that Tukwila not expand tree regulations to private property, particularly residential property - that property owners and developers value trees and only remove trees for specific reasons. All the commenters expressed the view that tree retention can be achieved through education and incentive programs and that regulatory requirements are not needed to maintain existing canopy coverage in residential areas. Mr. Tapio presented a hand-out to Committee members on tree policy issues providing reasons trees are removed, benefits of trees, the negative aspects of regulations and benefits of property owner control of trees. Mr. Tapio also believes that there is no representation on the committee for small developers.

3. Check-in with Committee members: The Chair asked if Committee members have any questions or comments from the previous meeting that they wanted to discuss.
  - The Committee discussed the remaining meeting schedule in relation to deadlines for completing work by the end of May, in time for preparing for staff presentation of the Committee's recommendations on natural environment and urban forestry goals and policies to the Planning Commission in June.
  - Members in attendance agreed to meet until 8:30 pm at the April and May meetings and to hold the date of May 29<sup>th</sup> open for a final meeting, if it is necessary.

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### 4. Housekeeping:

- Following up the discussion about the remaining time left for work on the goals and policies there was a discussion on whether too much time has been spent “word-smithing” the goals and policies and whether this would slow down the remaining review process. It was stated that the committee’s role is to provide broad policy guidance and that staff should be writing the actual language. Others felt that there had not been a lot of time spent at Committee meetings reworking goal and policy language, but rather that time had been split between receiving information at meetings often via PowerPoint presentations and then discussing goal and policy language. Some members of the Committee felt that some level of “word-smithing” was needed to ensure that goals and policies reflected what the Committee intended to say.
- The Committee approved the meeting notes from the 2-27-13 meeting with no corrections/revisions.
- Reminder that the next meeting will be on **Wednesday, April 10, 2013.**

### 5. Review of draft staff proposed urban forestry policies:

The Committee discussed the staff-proposed policies, using the edits submitted by Committee member Nancy Eklund as a starting point for some of the language. Issues discussed were:

- a. General: The Committee discussed the use of incentives and education versus regulation (in general) as varying approaches to goals and policies for urban forestry. Tacoma’s urban forestry element of their Comprehensive Plan was cited as a good example of a “softer” tone than some of the staff-proposed policies and uses words like “encourage” and “collaborate”.
- b. Goal 1 and Policies. There were no suggested changes to the staff-proposed goal or policies. Note: later in the meeting, the policy of establishing a heritage tree program was briefly discussed – the committee supports this as a way to bring people together and to educate the public.
- c. Goal 2 and Policies.
  - Committee members asked about the source of the proposed canopy goals. Staff indicated that they were developed through discussions with the tree canopy study consultant (Davey Resource Group) based on their experience in what cities have been able to achieve for certain kinds of land use categories. In general, the Committee recommended considering more aggressive goals, at least for office, commercial, the urban center and the Tukwila South areas of the City. Since achieving goals in these areas will be mostly based on landscaping and street tree installation as the areas develop/redevelop, staff suggested that this issue be revisited after the discussion at the next meeting, which will deal with landscaping and street tree policies. The Committee agreed.
  - There was some discussion regarding the time frame for achieving the canopy goals (currently shown as 15 years – which is the timing for updates to the Comprehensive Plan), and staff was concerned about achieving higher goals in such a short time. The Committee also questioned whether canopy studies will be done periodically to monitor progress - staff replied in the affirmative, although the frequency has not been discussed.

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- Staff proposed deleting policy 1.b as it will be duplicated by the proposed rewording for policy 1.d. The Committee agreed.
- There was considerable discussion regarding proposed policy 1.d. - prohibiting the removal of tree stands or groves on undeveloped property without an approved development permit.
  - Some Committee members thought that prohibiting tree removal until a site development was approved was a good policy.
  - Other Committee members thought that rather than tree retention through regulation that tree retention should be achieved through education, incentives and flexible development policies. There was concern that regulating trees on undeveloped property would result in not allowing a property owner to realize the full development potential and would be prohibitively restrictive for future development.
  - There was also concern that if the current tree replacement table was required, that there would not be enough room to plant all required replacement trees on a property in question. Concern was raised on the density requirement of 70 trees per acre and of how does this translate to a 7200 sq. foot lot. Staff clarified that the current tree replacement requirements only apply in sensitive areas and the shoreline, and that these would not necessarily apply to development outside of these areas – unless that is the direction provide by the Committee
  - Staff also pointed out that the proposed policy would not mean that no tree removal would be allowed to accommodate development – that it was merely a proposal to prevent tree removal for no reason, without an actual plan for development.
  - Staff pointed out that since most of the undeveloped properties appear to be in areas zoned for residential uses, there are really not that many incentives that could be offered (such as additional building height or smaller setbacks) that would not interfere with neighborhood character or be opposed by existing residential property owners.
  - It was suggested that not regulating trees on undeveloped property may result in some “tragedies” regarding tree removal, but that the City should work with property owners to discourage tree removal before there is an actual plan to develop the site.
  - It was suggested that staff hold some focus group meetings with developers and property owners whose property is large enough to develop, to obtain input on how such a policy would affect them before finalizing the Committee’s recommendations.
  - Also, since it is not known at this time how much property with tree canopy might be undeveloped, it was suggested that staff should obtain this information to inform the discussion.
  - The Committee was unable to reach consensus on this proposed policy and asked staff to develop a new policy that would set forth a “middle ground” approach.
- The Committee agreed that the City should not regulate tree removal on already developed private property (unless it is in a sensitive area, the shoreline or required as part of a landscaping permit).

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- The Committee agreed that the City should not regulate tree removal on underdeveloped property – i.e. those that could be subdivided or short platted (with the same exceptions as the previous comment).
  - Policy 3 generated some concern about what is meant by “in-kind”. Staff proposed striking the beginning of this policy to clarify the intent.
  - Policy 4. The Committee expressed concern about limiting topping trees under overhead utility lines. Staff replied that the policy was intended as protection of tree roots and not to prevent utility companies from pruning trees beneath utility lines. The policy will be clarified and a reference provided to the Utility Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan where this issue is discussed in more detail.
  - Policy 5 should be changed to make it sound less regulatory.
  - Policy 6 was clarified by staff as applicable to trees required under landscaping plans or street trees. The language will be modified to reflect that.
- d. Goal 3 and policies. The Committee had no comments on this goal or policies. Staff proposed deleting the first policy, as it is duplicated in one of the policies under Goal 2.
- e. Other. One Committee member asked why the current tree code exempts only cottonwood trees and not alders. Staff replied that they believe cottonwoods were targeted because they are brittle and tend to drop branches – not a good characteristic for urbanized areas. Alders are not necessarily compatible for highly urban uses – like street trees. However, both cottonwoods and alders are important native trees for sensitive areas and the shoreline. Since the current tree regulations only apply in those areas, exempting cottonwoods from permit requirements is contradictory to the goals for sensitive area and shoreline protection.
6. The meeting closed at 7:45 pm.
7. **Action Items for staff follow-up:**
- a. Staff will incorporate agreed changes discussed to policy language, using strike-out/underline.
  - b. Staff will consider options for a “middle ground” for the policy regarding prohibiting tree removal on undeveloped property and bring these options back to the Committee for its consideration.