



Land Use & Environment Committee

Urban Forest Strategic Plan

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Title

Urban Forest Strategic Plan

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Not referred to a committee.

City Manager Recommendation:

Receive a briefing on the development of an Urban Forest Strategic Plan.

Report

Issue:

Staff will provide an update on the development of an Urban Forest Strategic Plan.

Staff Contact:

Stacey Ray, Associate Planner, Community Planning and Development, 360.753.8046

Michelle Bentley, Urban Forestry Program, Community Planning and Development, 360.753.8301

Presenter(s):

Stacey Ray, Associate Planner, Community Planning and Development

Background and Analysis:

Community Forestry Assistance Grant

The Urban Forestry Program has experienced significant funding and staff reductions over the last four years, that have resulted in a decline in services and management activities. Staff resources from Community Planning and Development, Public Works and Parks, Arts and Recreation are all involved in managing our urban forest and have all been impacted by these reductions. These issues were raised during 2014 budget discussions, and as a result, Council directed CP&D staff to develop options for how to structure, fund, and manage or improve the Urban Forestry Program.

To help accomplish this, the City has been awarded a \$10,000 Community Forestry Assistance Grant to develop an Urban Forest Strategic Plan. On June 10, 2014, Council approved entering into an Interagency Agreement with the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (WADNR) to

formally accept the grant funds provided by the USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program.

The project has been slowed by the lack of response to the initial Request for Proposal. This lack of response forced staff to spend time searching for qualified firms to respond to the RFP.

Urban Forest Strategic Plan

An Urban Forest Strategic Plan will provide direction on how to build a sustainable urban forestry program by identifying challenges, understanding existing conditions, establishing key objectives, and developing short and long-term strategies.

A Strategic Plan will provide a fresh look at the current program organization and departmental and staff responsibilities, resulting in recommendations to staff and Council for how best to move the program forward in a sustainable way. Specifically, the Strategic Plan will address the following:

- Key present and future challenges;
- Existing resources;
- Goals, objectives, strategies, and priorities;
- Resources needed to implement the strategies and potential sources;
- Recommendations for how to organize and structure the Urban Forestry Program;
- Options for engaging community volunteers and partner organizations; and
- Recommendations for short-term and long-term implementation actions

Please see Attachment 1 for a PowerPoint presentation shared by staff for LUEC on April 24, 2014. The presentation describes what an Urban Forest Strategic Plan is and how it would provide options for how to structure, fund, and manage or improve the Urban Forestry Program.

Terra Firma Consulting

The WADNR grant funds will be entirely dedicated to the services of a professional consultant to develop the Strategic Plan. A cross-departmental staff selection committee has selected Elizabeth Walker of Terra Firma Consulting. Ms. Walker has over 20 years of experience in community forestry, with extensive skills in public engagement, drafting of tree ordinances and urban forest management and planning. She has recently completed Urban Forest Strategic Plans for the cities of Covington, Snoqualmie, and Shoreline. Please see Attachment 2 for Ms. Walker's submittal in response to the City's RFQ.

Ms. Walker will work closely with staff from CP&D, Parks and Recreation, and Public Works, as well as several community volunteers who participated on an Urban Forestry Sub-Committee during the first quarter of 2014. The sub-committee was formed to carry out a Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC) work item, and was made up of representatives from PRAC, Utility Advisory Committee (UAC), Planning Commission (OPC), and at-large community volunteers. The sub-committee formally completed their work and ended after delivering a set of recommendations on urban forest management to LUEC in April 2014.

Project Timeline

Ms. Walker's work will begin with kick-off meeting with staff and former sub-committee members in December. Throughout January and February, Ms. Walker will conduct background research, survey and speak with staff and former sub-committee members, meet with committee members, and draft a Strategic Plan. The final Strategic Plan will be due to staff in March, and both staff and Ms. Walker will present the resulting options and recommendations to Council in April 2015.

- Background Research, Staff Interviews and Meetings with Advisory Committee - November 2014 to February 2015
- Submittal of Strategic Plan -- March 2015
- City Council Meeting - April 2015

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

An Urban Forest Strategic Plan could have citywide impacts; it could potentially change how the program is organized, services are provided to residents, and trees are managed citywide.

Options:

None; staff is providing a briefing for discussion.

Financial Impact:

Entering into the Interagency Agreement with WADNR has resulted in an additional \$10,000 in grant funds towards completion of an Urban Forest Strategic Plan. The grants funds will be entirely dedicated to hiring a professional consultant.