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Land Use & Environment Committee

Street Tree Maintenance Manual

Agenda Date: 12/21/2017
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Title

Street Tree Maintenance Manual

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Not referred to a committee

City Manager Recommendation:

Receive the information. Briefing only; No action requested.

Report

Issue:

Whether to receive a briefing on the update to the Street Tree Maintenance Manual (STMM). Formerly known as the Master Street Tree Plan, the new name reflects the true nature of this document as an internal document used by the City staff to guide maintenance decisions for the street trees downtown and along 10 (ten) major arterial streets.

Staff Contact:

Shelly Bentley, Urban Forester, Community Planning and Development, 360.753.8301

Presenter(s):

Stacey Ray, Senior Planner, Community Planning and Development

Kate Hartman, Water Resources Habitat Biologist, Public Works

Gary Franks, Parks Maintenance Manager, Parks, Art and Recreation

Kevin McFarland, Sound Urban Forestry

Background and Analysis:

Street Tree Maintenance Manual

The Street Tree Maintenance Manual (STMM) is intended to provide City staff with the data and guidance needed to perform consistent and predictable street tree management and maintenance for a resource worth over \$6 million. The guidance in this document should help staff to:

- Prune and maintain street trees to protect their health, safety, and value;
- Maximize the benefits and reduce the cost of street trees by using resources efficiently; and

- Communicate with business owners, property owners, and community members about street tree management.

Rather than a “Master Street Tree Plan,” which is formally adopted and has a broader scope, the STMM is focused solely on the management of street trees in the downtown and on 10 major arterials. See Attached map.

The STMM will also be periodically reviewed and updated to respond to changes in the tree population and industry best management practices.

Urban Forest Strategic Plan

How the City manages the urban forest, including street trees, has evolved based on the completion of an Urban Forest Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan) in 2015 (See Attachment). City staff has formed an interdepartmental policy team to clarify roles and coordinate responsibilities. The team also works together to implement the recommendations outlined in the Strategic Plan.

In 2016, the City applied for and received a \$15,000 grant from the USDA Forest Service and Washington State Department of Natural Resources Urban and Community Forestry Program to inventory all 2,500 street trees the City currently manages. The inventory data made clear the current condition of the City’s managed street trees, and led to the policy team dedicating staff time and resources to develop the STMM.

Street Tree Current Conditions

In the 1990’s and early 2000’s, the Urban Forestry Program led to the planting of thousands of new trees citywide. The strong emphasis on planting trees significantly increased Olympia’s street tree population; however, the City has struggled to provide consistent and thorough maintenance. Practicing mostly responsive management for more than 15 years has resulted in a street tree population that needs significant attention.

Current conditions identified in the inventory confirm that our trees are far below basic industry standards for tree maintenance. Continued growth without pruning will make maintenance more difficult and expensive, as tree conditions will deteriorate with longer lengths of time between pruning cycles. Not only does this reduce the realized benefits of street trees, but raises the City’s level of risk.

Street Tree Maintenance Manual

Based on what was learned from the inventory, and an in-depth analysis of our street tree population and urban forestry program current conditions, the STMM outlines a recommended level of service which meets basic industry standards for tree maintenance, and how to go about achieving it.

The desired level of service includes a dedicated, permanent crew that practices safe and efficient tree work. Shorter, more frequent pruning cycles keep trees pruned away from street lights, traffic signs and buildings, which improves safety and reduces citizen complaints. Pruning trees when they are young also results in less work later, saving money and maximizing a street trees’ benefits.

Attached is a comparison of today's level of service and what's needed to reach the desired level of service identified in the draft STMM.

Next Steps

The City departments represented on the Policy team are already moving towards implementing the guidance in the STMM to the extent possible with existing resources. For example, Parks, Arts, and Recreation has developed an annual plan for street tree inspection and maintenance in 2018 to be carried out by the department's full-time arborist.

The Policy team will also continue looking into possible funding options to reach the desired level of service identified in the STMM, and for starting work on an Urban Forest Management Plan (as recommended in the Strategic Plan). However, no funding has been identified for this effort at this time.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

Residents and businesses downtown and adjacent to major corridors for which the City maintains the street trees.

Staff convened a meeting of community stakeholders as part of the process to develop the STMM. Several overarching themes emerged from the group's discussions:

- The acknowledgement that trees contribute greatly to the streetscape;
- The importance of maintenance, and particularly protecting sidewalks; and
- Urban forest planning is but one element of urban design along a streetscape.

Options:

N/A

Financial Impact:

None at this time. Street tree maintenance activities for 2018 have already been identified based on current levels of funding and staff capacity within the Parks, Arts, and Recreation Department.

Increased service levels as recommended in the STMM, and/or completion of an Urban Forestry Management Plan, would require additional resources.

Attachments:

Street Tree Map
Strategic Plan
Fact Sheet
Draft Manual
Maintenance Comparison