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June 24, 2018

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PROPOSED REVISION OF THE TREE ORDINANCE MUST BE STRENGTHENED

Dear Mayor Durkan and Members of the Seattle City Council:

The Eastlake Community Council urges you to provide strong leadership now to significantly strengthen Seattle's tree ordinance to protect our trees and urban forest.

The urban forest is integral and vital to Seattle life, providing many benefits and amenities to those who live or work in our city, or visit for business or pleasure. Trees help clean the air and enhance public health, reduce stormwater runoff, mitigate climate change, decrease the impacts of heat and wind, provide habitat for birds and wildlife and give us a connection with nature in our neighborhoods.

Seattle's rapid growth is reducing these beneficial impacts as trees are removed. In its current form, the tree ordinance was of little help to prevent the loss of many of Eastlake's trees during the last 20 years, when our neighborhood became one of Seattle's fastest growing neighborhoods. This tree loss was despite Policy OS-19 of the 1998 Eastlake Neighborhood Plan to "Encourage the protection of existing trees and careful planting of new trees to enhance the Eastlake neighborhood."

Eastlake once had a profusion of large trees in private yards and along the streets. But in recent decades, many were cut down or damaged and it is harder than ever to get them replaced. In the last decade the city greatly reduced the size of yards required around new multifamily zoned residential buildings, precluding large new trees from the developments. Planting strips along streets are among the few sites for planting of conifers like Douglas fir, cedar, or sequoia, but SDOT discourages them.

It is urgent that you act now to stop the loss of trees, particularly exceptional trees and tree groves, and to promote environmental equity as we increase our tree canopy.

We urge you to act now by updating our current tree ordinances and regulations as follows:

1. Adopt a policy of a net increase of Seattle's tree canopy each year to reach the city's current goal of 30% tree canopy. This requires maintaining and strengthening current protections for significant or exceptional trees, tree groves, Heritage trees, environmentally critical areas and natural areas.
2. Require the replacement of all trees removed that are 6" diameter at breast height (DBH) and larger with equivalent sized trees (e.g. small, medium or large) – either on-site or by paying for replacement and maintenance mitigation costs into a City Tree Replacement and Maintenance Fund. Allow the Fund to accept fines, donations, and grants to pay for acquiring land and creating easements and Tree Protection Trusts.
3. Expand the existing tree removal and replacement permit, two-week notice and posting system used by SDOT to cover all public and private trees 6" DBH and larger on both public and private property in all land use zones. Allow removal of no more than one significant non-exceptional tree per lot per year.
4. Establish one citywide database to track tree removal and replacement permits and changes in the tree canopy. Post on-line all permit requests and permit approvals for public viewing. Expand SDOT's existing tree map to include all the trees in the city that are removed and replaced.
5. Require a detailed Urban Forest Canopy Assessment for all development projects before any development starts. Require entry of this detailed tree inventory into a public database. Require replacement trees to be the equivalent tree size at maturity.
6. Expand SDOT's existing tree service provider's registration and certification to include all tree service providers working on trees in Seattle.
7. Consolidate tree oversight into one city entity, the Office of Sustainability and Environment, as was recommended by the Seattle City Auditor in 2009. Give OSE the additional authority needed to ensure that trees have an independent advocate for their protection and to avoid conflicting goals in other city departments.
8. Emphasize native trees and vegetation, particularly conifers, to maximize sustainability and environmental services. Require the removal of invasive plants during development. Increase incentives for protecting trees. Provide public assistance for property owners who need help complying with the city ordinance. To ensure compliance, increase penalties, fines and enforcement. Ensure environmental equity in maintaining and increasing our tree canopy across the city.

In addition to the above recommendations, we support other recommendations by the Seattle Urban Forestry Commission and the Coalition for a Stronger Tree Ordinance.

Founded in 1971, the Eastlake Community Council represents those who live or work in Eastlake or own a business or property there. We ask City officials to strengthen Seattle's Tree Ordinance as outlined above. This letter was authorized by a unanimous vote at the June 20, 2018 meeting of the Eastlake Community Council board of directors.

Sincerely,

Ann E. Prezyna

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