Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee's
Subcommittee on Urban Forestry
Final Report
March 26, 2014

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Vision Statement
Build an urban forestry program that protects and multiplies Olympia's trees
to benefit our community, our environment and future generations.

Introduction -

The Olympia Master Street Tree Plan adopted by Council in 2002 clearly articulated some of the reasons that trees are an important and valuable feature in the City's life, an important asset that the government should protect and develop:

> Trees save energy and reduce noise pollution. They shade buildings, cool the air, provide protection from the wind and absorb unwanted noise.

> Trees improve water and air quality. They reduce erosion and filter pollutants out of the air, water and soil.

> Trees beautify our community, enhance property values and provide wildlife habitat.

> Trees provide a connection to nature, healthy ecosystems, and places to recreate and rejuvenate.

Since then, other aspects of the benefits urban forests provide have come into sharper focus for us. Areas that attract people to get out and walk improve their physical and mental health. The City's trees (particularly its evergreens) provide a range of ecosystem services, playing a significant role in reducing stormwater levels, shading and helping to preserve asphalt in the summer, and reducing CO_2 levels by capturing and holding carbon as they grow. A wide variety of research about the ways in which urban forests benefit cities is available through:

> Green Cities: Good Health (www.greenhealth.washington.edu)
> Green Cities Research Alliance (http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/research/gcra/)
> Human Dimensions of Urban Forestry and Urban Greening (http://www.naturewithin.info/)

Comprehensive Plan Goals and Policies

The final draft of the update to the Comprehensive Plan emphasizes the importance our community attaches to its trees in a new section dedicated to the City's urban forest. The sections on the Natural Environment as well those on Land Use, Transportation, Utilities and even Economy contain policies related to trees.

In particular, a new section on the urban forest in the Natural Environment establishes a clear long term policy vision for this area:

> GN3. A healthy and diverse urban forest is protected, expanded through planting new trees, and valued for its contribution to the environment and community residents.

>> PN3.1 Manage the urban forest to professional standards, and establish program goals and practices based on the best available science.

PN3.2 Measure the tree canopy and set a city-wide target for increasing it through tree preservation and planting.

PN3.3 Preserve existing mature, healthy, and safe trees first to meet site design requirements on new development, redevelopment and city improvement projects.

PN3.4 Evaluate the environmental, ecologic, health, social and economic benefits of the urban forest.

PN3.5 Provide new trees with the necessary soil, water, space, and nutrients to grow to maturity, and plant the right size tree where there are conflicts, such as overhead utility wires or sidewalks.

PN3.6 Protect the natural structure and growing condition of trees to minimize necessary maintenance and preserve the long-term health and safety of the urban forest.

> Planning Commission Recommendation,
> Introduction to the Comprehensive Plan

Brief History

As the final draft of the Comprehensive Plan points out, our citizens have expressed basically the same vision and desires since the beginning of comprehensive planning in the State:

> ...during community outreach for the 1994 plan, citizens expressed a desire for Olympia to become a "City of Trees." In response, the community developed several goals and policies to guide a new Olympia Urban Forestry Program. Since then, we've planted thousands of street trees, and been consistently recognized by the National Arbor Day Foundation as a Tree City USA.

> Planning Commission Recommendation,
> Natural Environment

However, since 2007, as one of the responses to its ongoing budget shortfall, the City has progressively reduced the staff and resources available to support this vision. The urban forestry program's budget has shrunk dramatically. Three FTE have been eliminated, leaving one half time City Forester to try to cope with ongoing needs and issues that kept several full time staff busy a few years ago. Currently, the Forester is so overworked than her voice mail warns callers that she may not be able to respond to questions about clearing, planting or removing hazardous trees for a couple of weeks, due to her backlog of calls, and that the City cannot provide any more ordinary support for questions about identifying or caring for trees. This is not an acceptable level of service.

Over the last several years, the City has devoted a lot of time, money and energy to *Imagine Olympia!*, developing an updated Comprehensive Plan articulating the vision and policies to govern the City's growth over the next decades. Our budget has stabilized, and seems likely to grow stronger over the next few years. As part of the upcoming Action Plan to develop practical plans to realize the new Comprehensive Plan's goals, we need to take a number of steps to reestablish and strengthen our programs to protect and develop the City's urban forest.

1. Strengthen and improve our long-term planning for the urban forest.

> a. **Change the City's budget processes to treat the City's trees on the same basis as other infrastructure assets, and track its condition through the new asset management system (if that's a suitable tool).**

According to the 2012-2017 Capital Facilities Plan, Council has established "Maintenance or general repair of existing infrastructure," as the top priority in its general guidelines for prioritizing Capital projects. However, the pruning and replacement of the City's deteriorating urban forest, and the removal of invasive species which threaten large areas of trees is not currently a priority at anything like the same level as re-roofing or patching asphalt.

(Since 1994, Seattle has defined its trees as infrastructure, and funded a good deal of its ambitious urban forestry program from the City's Cumulative Replacement Fund.) We should adopt this practice, and include the City's trees in our regular budget processes for maintaining and developing the City's capital facilities.

b. Reestablish a citizen's advisory committee to make ongoing recommendations to the Council on urban forest issues.

This might be constituted by bringing together a representative from other relevant advisory committees, such as PRAC, the Heritage Commission, and the UAC, or might be a separate committee, like the Tree Advisory Committee which fulfilled this role for a number of years.

Over the next couple of years, this committee should be charged with reviewing and making recommendations to the Council on ongoing issues about the City's trees, including:

i. Implementing the new comprehensive plan's policies relating to urban forestry, urban green space, and Gateways to the City. These policies all address increasing the number of trees and the extent of the tree canopy in Olympia.

ii. Reducing the City's potential liability from hazard trees on City property.

iii. Improving development regulations to maintain or provide trees close to new houses as well as in tree tracts somewhere on the margins of new developments.

iv. Developing an easement program to create adequate growing space for really large trees in the right of way in residential neighborhoods by curving the sidewalk out into what would otherwise be private front yards.

v. Exploring contained bamboo plantings as an evergreen tool for stormwater management.

vi. Exploring tree plantings in combination with stormwater ponds, like the pond behind the school garden at Stevens Field.

vii. Exploring the possible need for solar easements in the future.

viii. Putting any future wires that are not undergrounded on the south side of the street, to reduce the chance that people will not want to plant larger trees where the wires allow it because they do not want the shade falling directly on their houses and front yards.

ix. Exploring the extent to which the City's current arrangements for monitoring and enforcing the regulations on land clearing and tree removal, as well as the long term agreements for the maintenance and protection of tree tracts are (or are not) functioning effectively.

x. Exploring ways to increase the percentage of evergreens in the City's tree tracts, neighborhoods, and urban forest over the long run, so as to increase the benefits canopy foliage provides for stormwater management during the periods of heavy rain when we need them the most.

xi. Exploring changes in regulations and incentives to increase the number of spaces for really large trees in the city, such as requiring planting spaces in the corners of parking lots that are deeded to the City and used for planting and protecting such trees over time, and having areas in each City park and on school grounds dedicated to such trees.

xii. Expanding the coverage requirements of the Green Cove Creek area to the basin of the City's next most healthy stream, probably Ellis Creek.

xiii. Exploring collaborating with the Port to replace the parking lot at the mouth of Moxlie Creek with a short stretch in which the creek is open to the air and surrounded by trees.

xiv. Exploring developing a pocket park program to maintain at least one lot every few blocks in forest cover.

c. Draw on these recommendations to create or revise an Urban Forestry Master Plan for the entire City through collaboration between staff, interested citizens, and other significant landowners, particularly the State.

The 2000-2011 Master Plan for Street Trees has expired. We need an updated, revised and expanded plan, one that also provides long-term planning for the health of the City's entire forest, considered as an ecosystem including the trees in the City's parks and open spaces and those on private land. (Ideally, we should include State and Port land in the City in our strategic thinking as well.) The new urban forestry plan should include quantified yearly performance targets for forestry needs such as street tree planting and replacement, invasive species control, and the identification and removal of diseased and hazard trees which pose risks to the public or the health of the ecosystem. The effort should also address the roles and responsibilities for how urban forestry is managed across the City's departments, in order to ensure better coordination and collaboration.

2. Reestablish our landmark tree program to protect and showcase historic and spectacular trees in the city.

See the website for Portland's Heritage Tree program,

> http://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/40280

for example. (It recognizes over 300 trees for their "unique size, age or historical or horticultural significance," and provides a number of resources for learning more about them, including a slideshow with handsome photographs.)

In fact, our Council established a program like this in 1991, which is codified in Chapter 16.56 of our Municipal Code. This landmark tree program called for the creation within a year of an inventory of trees of exceptional value to the community because of factors like their association with historic figures, events, or properties; their being examples of rare or unusual species, or their exceptional aesthetic quality. It also established a system for protecting them. Unfortunately, the program it set up has not yet been carried out.

3. Develop neighborhood teams of volunteers to support the City's urban forestry goals in a variety of ways.

For the foreseeable future, the City will not have anything like the resources it would need to have staff alone successfully deal with the maintenance and development of the City's trees. (In 2006, to take one example, the Street Tree Master Plan estimated that we had 28,497 spaces available for street trees in the City, a stocking level of 21%, compared to average levels of 60% to 80% around the country and the state.) We must find effective ways to leverage staff efforts through collaboration with neighborhood associations and volunteers. The dramatic results of the Plant One Thousand Trees Day some years ago suggest that a great deal can be achieved that way.

a. Recruit volunteers to update and expand the City's inventory of its trees, so it includes the rest of the City's street trees, trees in parks, trees on state land, and trees on private property. (The City's current inventory only includes data on the street trees downtown from several different surveys between 2002 and 2011, and a 2007 survey of street trees in two neighborhood areas.) In addition to providing the

foundation for long term planning and maintenance, a complete inventory would necessary for FEMA damage reimbursement in the event of large scale tree losses.

See, for example, Portland's Tree Inventory Program, through which volunteers have mapped, measured and identified 40,000 street trees:

> http://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/53181

An impressive free open source program, OpenTreeMap, is being used by a number of cities, including San Francisco, Philadelphia, and Seattle, to support deep community engagement with those cities' forests.

> http://www.seattletreemap.org

b. Recruit, train and support volunteers to plant and maintain neighborhood trees, and to keep City staff informed about needs for more professional maintenance.

See Portland's Neighborhood Tree Steward program as an example:

http://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/45124

And Portland's Friends of Trees for another:

http://www.friendsoftrees.org/plant/neighborhood-trees

c. Create and support neighborhood fruit tree teams, on the model of Portland's Fruit Tree Project.

These volunteers cared for local trees, picked 70,000 pounds of fruit which might otherwise have ended up on sidewalks and in storm drains, and shared that harvest with over 9,000 families. The Project also maintains three community orchards. See:

http://media.portland.indymedia.org/images/2013/11/425884.jpg

Clarify Management of Urban Forestry

Currently the City of Olympia does not have clearly defined departmental roles for managing trees and urban forestry. With regard to street trees, for example - Community Planning and Development (CPD) is in charge of determining tree spacing and species, Public Works (PW) is in charge of overseeing tree maintenance as a whole, and Parks and Recreation (PR) undertakes major portions of the work involved in maintaining arterial street trees. This ambiguity is one result of budget reductions and staff from other departments doing their best to respond to the ongoing losses in urban forestry. However, at the outset of our subcommittee's meetings it was clear that communication between departments about urban forestry could be improved.

There seem to be some general rationales for the departments' different tasks and responsibilities. CPD has been in charge of code enforcement and developed the previous tree plan. PR appears to take on more of a land manager role, predominately managing trees on most of the City's major open and green spaces. PW performs a hybrid role, with responsibility for enforcing regulations about clearing and landmark trees, as well as managing the trees in the areas around city wells and stormwater facilities. A clearer definition of roles and better communication and coordination among the departments could be beneficial in urban forestry efforts.

This diagram illustrates the current roles and responsibilities of City departments:

Community Planning and Development

Olympia City Building Official

-Interpretation and enforcement of building and construction codes

-Clearing standards

-Tree plan requirements

Planning Staff (including urban forestry program)

-Hub for addressing tree issues on commercial and residential property

-Code enforcement of tree issues

-Review projects for tree requirement compliance

-Street tree spacing and species determination

-Interpretation and application of critical areas, landscaping and screening requirements.

Public Works

Stormwater Division

-Manage all city owned stormwater ponds (40-50 tracts, roughly 200 acres)

-Emerging role in aquatic habitat

Street Division

-All street work, including street trees

-Trees in roundabouts and medians (maintenance through contract)

-Root pruning or tree removal in sidewalks

-Storm event cleanup

-Landmark tree protection

Sewer/Water Division

-Tree maintenance at McAllister Springs well

-Trees located at pump stations

Parks and Recreation

-Trees in city parks

-Maintenance of street trees in downtown and arterial streets

-Assist in storm event cleanup

-Emergency response to down trees in rights of way

4. Support tree planting and care on private property that contributes to the City's forestry goals.

a. Provide ongoing professional development opportunities for local tree workers.

b. Create a voluntary City professional certification program for tree workers, and/or business license requirements for tree work.

See Portland's Local Tree Care Providers' Workshop program:

http://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/article/424016

c. Incentivize adding and maintaining trees with public value on private property through purchase rebates, cost sharing for work by arborists, free City nursery stock for planting, property tax reductions, etc.

d. Create neighborhood tree plans that provide suggestions and advice for possible tree plantings and care that will contribute to the long term development and maintenance of a beautiful urban forest experience in each neighborhood. Promote equal distribution of trees among neighborhoods, with special attention to maintaining equity for dense urban neighborhoods, where finding good planting spaces and protecting trees is harder.

e. Based on the tree inventory process, clarify the ownership and maintenance responsibilities for the trees in the right of way on each property.

f. Provide public educational workshops and materials, like suggestions about appropriate local trees for particular situations, regardless of whether participants wish to commit to volunteer work.

5. Support acquisition of green space to help ensure that the City can maintain a healthy tree canopy cover as future development occurs.