

Kirkland's Urban Forestry Management Plan

(Revised 9/13/13)



Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Technical Assistance

Prepared for the City of Kirkland based on Technical Assistance provided by Forterra on September 25th, 27th, and 28th 2012, funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program

INTRODUCTION

The City of Kirkland received a grant from Forterra, formerly known as Cascade Land Conservancy, as part of the Environmental Protection Agency's Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program to conduct outreach with key stakeholder groups on the City of Kirkland's Urban Forestry Management Plan. Forterra conducted focus groups with the following groups: neighborhoods and tree stewards, tree care professionals, and business and developers. These three focus groups were held on September 25th, 27th and 28th 2012, at Kirkland's City Hall. Key findings are outlined below and all focus group comments are included as originally recorded during each focus group. The main findings of these focus groups are grouped into three areas: outreach, education and communication; comments on draft Urban Forestry Management Plan; and opportunities to improve urban forest management. The corresponding recommendations are:

Outreach, education, and communication

- Create clear and concise text; use easily understandable graphics; and engage additional people through outreach around tree removal, maintenance, and recommended species usage.
- Provide an adequate level of service for staff to respond to code inquiries, and perform outreach, and support urban forest management.

Drafting the Urban Forestry Management Plan

- Clearly convey the benefits of maintaining and enhancing the urban forest canopy along with the potential costs relating to maintenance, solar access and reduced development flexibility.
- Identify how existing canopy will be maintained as parcels develop.

Improve Urban Forest Management

- When considering tree retention and replacement codes, requirements should be based on the function of a tree, not only on the size of the tree.
- Tree retention standards should include flexibility through opportunities to cluster homes, in-lieu fees instead of retention, and incentives to preserve heritage trees.

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

All three focus groups spent a large amount of time discussing opportunities and weaknesses around outreach, education and communication. Many of the respondents were not familiar with current requirements around tree removal and the permits required, especially in the annexation areas where these regulations are new. Clear, concise text, easily understandable graphics and outreach efforts to make more residents aware of the current requirements around tree removal, maintenance, recommended species and replacement was requested. In addition, there was an expectation amongst

all focus groups that the City needs to provide an adequate level of service to (primarily staff) to respond to code questions, perform outreach and support the effort of urban forest management. It was suggested that a workshop with developers and tree care professionals would be a good first step on outreach around the Plan and current codes.

Obtaining feedback on the draft Urban Forestry Management Plan was a priority at each focus group. Many respondents were not clear from reading the draft Plan what the overall goals and recommendations were. It was requested that report should use less jargon and present a balanced, professional tone. Additionally, the Plan should clearly convey the benefits of maintaining and enhancing the urban forest canopy along with the potential costs relating to maintenance, solar access and reduced development flexibility. It was requested that the executive summary needs to be much more concise with goals and recommendations clearly stated near the front. Regarding the 40% goal, many participants stressed that the report should identify how existing canopy will be maintained as parcels develop, especially in the annexation areas and whether neighborhoods, watersheds and or zoning types could have goals that lead to an overall citywide average. The overall takeaway regarding the management plan was that it should be much more concise, fully articulate the values/costs of the urban forest in Kirkland and make clear recommendations.

All participants in the three focus groups spent much of the time on the opportunities around urban forestry on both public and private lands in the city. Tree professionals stressed that codes should look at function instead of tree size when it comes tree retention and replacement. All groups stressed the need for some level of flexibility including the opportunity to cluster homes to conserve trees, in-lieu fees instead of retention and incentives to preserve heritage trees. Concerns were brought forward that trees on private property deals with property rights and city needs to respect private property rights. Tree professionals and developers both thought that a workshop involving these groups would be beneficial to further improve existing codes and regulations. Many participants thought the city could devote more resources to managing existing public tree canopy in rights of way and parks. Much of the feedback involving opportunities for management were closely tied to findings around improved education and communication.

FOCUS GROUP COMMENTS (as originally recorded)

Neighborhoods and Forest Stewards

Tuesday, September 26th, 2012 at 6:30pm in the Peter Kirk Room, Kirkland City Hall

Question: What are the opportunities/threats around urban forest management on private lands in Kirkland?

- Permitting process on tree removal—need to have education on the process and the requirements
- Most people are not even aware of the regulations
- Regulations are new to the annexation area—most people were under and overlay or King County regulations

- New construction tree requirements are confusing-it is hard to know what are the tree replacement requirements
- Can the city monitor whether people are complying with tree regulations/requirements?
- What about “tree credits”
- Need to consider the high density areas
 - Different requirements in multi-family and single family is confusing
- Need monitoring of trees in the right of way and on public lands
- Need good examples and graphics to explain current regulations
- Clear recommendations on preferred tree species for private lands, streets trees
- Offer Incentives for valuable trees (mature, unique species, heritage trees)
- Need resources (staff) to manage the urban forestry program
- It’s difficult to balance the private property rights and protecting the resource (trees)
- I don’t know what is protected in development regulations already?
- It’s a challenge because each jurisdiction (King County vs. Kirkland) has different regulations and requirements
- Tree planting programs---giving away free trees for people to plant on their property would be a good step
- Broaden the cities education efforts to raise awareness of those benefits

Question: What are the opportunities/threats around urban forest management on public lands in Kirkland?

- Invasive species are a huge problem, currently this is mainly addressed by a group of volunteers in the City of Kirkland
- We need to invest in long-term health of natural areas
- The city needs to take a more pro-active approach regarding funding, maintenance staff and planning
- Other green cities (re: Green Kirkland Partnership) have a much larger paid staff component (vs. volunteer) labor
- City has done an enough large, fancy parks (Juanita Beach) and improvements. Now they need to invest in restoration along with the quality and connectivity of the tree canopy

Question: What opportunities/threats do you see with Kirkland’s plans for balancing walkable, compact development with retaining and enhancing tree canopy coverage and ecosystem functions?

- I have concerns about more and more regulation and fees
- Keep it simple---people need to understand the regulations that apply to their property
- Need clear and consistent message/answers from all city departments
- Big houses on smaller lots are a threat to trees
- Can new developments be clumped to make room for trees?
- Need to keep working towards the 40% canopy goal in “old” Kirkland (pre-annexation)
- Kirkland needs to accommodate higher density, but where do trees fit as more development occurs
- Need to balance new density and infill with new open space within the city
- We need density to prevent sprawl, therefore need to invest in city open space as well. It’s about quality of life
- Use green roofs to offset loss of tree canopy

- Allow off-site mitigation for tree removal
- Opportunities to educate developers on regulations and incentives
- Highly visible properties need special protection, such as the area above Goat Hill (base of Finn Hill). City should conduct outreach for acquisition of future park land.
- These properties are under threat of future development and we can't count on this canopy just being here---it could be developed

Question: What are the strengths/weaknesses in the draft management plan?

- The plan needs clear, simple goals that tie into larger city goals and council goals
- It's unclear what the point of this plan is.
- What is the overall goal?
- Include data in the plan on how trees increase property values
- The plan needs a short executive summary, around 2 pages that is much more readable and makes the recommendations in the plan much clearer.
- "Adaptive" on page 15 is a powerful explanation (*unclear what this was referring to*)
- Need measurable goals which are much more clear and concise
- Sort out the difference between goals and strategies in the plan
- Should the 40% goal be split into smaller geographies (neighborhoods or zoning types)
- This goal (40%) may not be realistic
- Why is 40% the goal
- Style and tone of the report feels like corporate speak
- Quality of urban forest and trees are more important than quantity (i.e. percentage of canopy cover)
- Need to address community benefits of trees and the ecosystem services
- Report should help us understand what benefits are currently being provided
- Direct plan consultant to be more clear and concise in their writing

Tree Professionals (arborists, urban foresters)

Thursday, September 28th, 2012 at 6:30pm in the Rose Hill Room, Kirkland City Hall

Focus Group Comments:

Question: What opportunities/threats do you see in regards to maintenance of trees in the City of Kirkland?

- Concerned about the loss of large trees being replaced with small trees that have less function
- It takes time for replacement trees to provide the value of mature trees that have been lost
- Kirkland has a tough tree code compared to other jurisdictions, which is good for trees
- The tree ordinance is based on tree diameter, but canopy loss may be a better metric
- The site conditions affects ability of trees to survive and function, so should influence design & selection of tree
- Large trees that are removed should be replaced with native species
- A tree's contribution to site should influence preservation prioritization, not necessarily strict size requirements (staff should review Bellevue's system)

Question: What are the opportunities/threats around urban forest management on public lands in Kirkland?

- Adjacent landowners are responsible for trees in the right-of-way (ROW), but it is unclear how (legal speak)
- Plan needs to clarify this responsibility
- Many residents are not aware of the existing ordinance – need to educate on ROW responsibilities
- The right tree/right place should be driving factor for ROW & public utility trees
- We need a long-term vision with trees selection and the effect of forthcoming needs of utilities above and below ground
- Was glad to see both above ground and below ground utilities addressed in the plan
- There is a need to develop a strategy for communicating the ordinance and regulations
- How do residents know who to hire/trust for tree care
- Can the city provide an assessment of street trees
- There is a need for consistency of hazard/risk assessments which could be addressed by the city doing all of the hazard/risk assessments

Question: What are the opportunities/threats around urban forest management on private lands in Kirkland?

- Many developers are unaware that they need a tree plan
- There is a need to educate developers that a tree plan is needed & should be planned for early on
- There should be upfront reporting - during short platting, and retention requirements should be known beforehand
- It's unclear/confusing as to what needs to be reported in the arborist's UF plans
- We (arborists/urban foresters) expect that we will be able to call a planner and receive interpretation of the code, rather than reading/interpreting the code on their own
- Plan should convey that this expected level of service leads to a resource need (staff) that should be recognized
- Municipality should be flexible in their site-specific requirements: arborists should work with parties to develop a reasonable plan based on desired function, rather than driven completely by ordinance
- Expect redevelopment in the annexation area, which will lead to canopy loss – how to balance strong preservation elsewhere?
- The city needs to consider health of the current canopy and plan for succession of the forest

Question: What are the strengths/weaknesses in the draft management plan?

- Consider having a focus group/review session with other municipalities – regarding the urban forestry management plan
- There is a need to facilitate outreach and engage community around the plan
- Strengthen the Executive Summary and realize that some people won't and don't want to read beyond that point
- A factoid/summary sheet should be created that highlights the essential pieces; distribute this to residents
- Use language that the general public can understand
- Make the goals and recommendations clear and obvious

- Consider training sessions for arborists on the codes/permitting process
 - workshops are more engaging & effective
 - walk through of the what & how of codes
 - take attendance and create a resource for arborist recommendation
 - incentivizes arborists to attend
 - creates knowledge & trust

Developers and Builders

Friday, September 28th, 2012 at 12:30pm in the Peter Kirk Room, Kirkland City Hall

Focus Group Comments:

General Comments/Questions about the plan:

- Now that the goal for canopy has been met, is there intent to increase?
- Is there a plan to divide the city into areas (by zoning type, neighborhood, or watershed) with specific canopy goals?

Question: What are the opportunities/threats around urban forest management on private lands in Kirkland?

- Options for replacement and relocation of trees are needed for flexibility
- Property rights and public good are often in conflict around urban forestry issues
- Regulation for retention and/or replacement could be based on size/merit or location
- Views are not included in code as a reason to remove a tree
- Trees of high retention value in setbacks present challenges, including creating a potential hazard tree
- Regarding views, safety, number of lots, I should be able to move things around to maximize the parcel.
- Small lots is where development is going, so need codes that recognize that a 3600 square foot lot is the new normal
- Codes should allow replacement of significant trees using a calculation value
- Is there a size of tree that is more appropriate for the urban forest?
- Private and public rights should be able to find a win-win solution regarding trees on private parcels
- Using master landscape plans on individual lots would give more control to the process
- The city should take into account the trees' likelihood of survival, based on location
- How does the 40% goal resolve down at the lot level
- Development as an opportunity to balance slowing loss and providing for future growth of canopy
- Regulations that require changing plans or reducing views have large budget implications.
- Losing a lot or having to change a plan is not an inexpensive option
- Outreach and education is important, but other times there are just dead ends in the code and even carefully planned projects that carefully review regulations and requirements well in advance cannot go forward
- Should have classes of tree retention based on value

- Mitigation banking or funding benefits off—site may provide options (tree fund or in-lieu fee)
- A third option is needed (1=all trees cut, 2= all trees retained)
- There could be value of bringing arborists and developers/builders together to look for options
- Health, location and species should factor into tree value
- The code needs to take topography into consideration, especially in sloped side yards
- Despite outreach and education, dead-ends still exist and need solutions
- City needs to make sure it avoids unintended consequences with codes that violate the spirit of the regulation
- Lack of equity in that regulations for homeowners on an existing parcel vs. developer on a new development or remodel allow for different levels of tree removal
- Public comment is not balanced in terms of development.
- It is important to make sure that public trees are adequately maintained
- Resources needed to care for existing trees—can this be compensate?
- Liability of potential hazard trees is expressed by clients<<<should this liability be passed to city in cases of required retention
- Compensation possible for other community good or stewardship ---value of canopy and forest health providing opportunities for enhancement.
- The City could step up around pre-treatment and maintenance of trees
- It is the City responsibility to maintain these trees

Question: What are the strengths/weaknesses in the draft management plan?

- The final report should read as an unbiased document---much of the current draft reads like propaganda and the studies' cited are not always fully honest
- It is good to have documented information about city's tree resources, personnel needed etc. in the plan draft
- New city processes (such as this plan) need the budget and staffing to vet them and make they will work in the way intended
- Inclusion of solar potential, rain gardens etc. and also cost of trees would provide good perspective in the plan
- All regulations need to be as objective as possible with respect to city staff implementing and enforcing so that the answers are clear and don't depend on who is staffing the counter
- The report should contain more information about canopy studies conducted and expected future development will impact canopy including things like complete streets and other development that will potentially increase canopy