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COMPLETE

Collector: Email Invitation 3 (Email)
Started: Friday, July 14, 2023 12:21:16 PM
Last Modified: Friday, July 14, 2023 12:23:59 PM
Time Spent: 00:02:43
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Q1

Please share your information below:

Name	ChrisTiana ObeySumner
District	5
City	Seattle
Position	5

Q2

As a City of Seattle Council Member, will you commit to prioritizing amending Seattle's Tree Protection Ordinance to include maximizing the retention of existing healthy trees, especially large ones, and planting more trees, as part of a climate resiliency plan for low income and economic justice communities to respond to environmental inequities?

Yes,
Please share why this is, or is not, important to you: Climate change has disproportionately affected the black community and other marginalized communities. Environmental inequities already exist in the city and I believe it is our duty to ensure this problem doesn't worsen. Keeping track of development to ensure environmental injustice never happens should be a priority of the city council as this wave of development continues.

Q3

Seattle's new tree ordinance would allow the removal of all trees when lots are developed without considering alternative site design and building options to save trees. Would you support an amendment to the Tree Protection Ordinance requiring developers to consider alternative site designs to protect more trees? Many trees are the edge of lots.

Yes,
Please share why this is, or is not, important to you: I am of indigenous descent and I am fiercely opposed to the removal of trees. The world is a better place when we're in tune with nature, not working against it. I support the planting of indigenous trees and helping foster our local environment.

Q4

As Seattle's population increases, so does the pressure for increased housing. Significant tree loss occurs in Seattle when lots are clear-cut for development. Advocates for more tree protection believe with better planning and regulations, we can both increase housing and save more existing trees. Trees create healthy communities. Can you think of additional ways Seattle can succeed at saving more of its exceptional and significant trees while building new housing?

I would focus on incentivizing retaining as many trees as possible during the development process and ensuring developers are held to the standards city hall sets out. These could range from tax breaks to expedited permits. We could create tree replacement programs that would exist as a stopgap solution. Planting a tree for each one being taken down would help decrease the rate at which trees are being cut down. In general, the city's public policy should be pushing tree preservation and ensuring regulatory enforcement is strict.

Q5

The Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) currently oversees tree protection on private property. SDCI is mainly funded by money from development permits but gets no money for tree protection. This creates a potential conflict of interest. Additionally, SDCI has no Urban Forestry Division or Urban Foresters. Trees and our urban forest need a city department to represent them that does not have conflicting priorities. San Francisco has a Department of the Environment with responsibilities for a diversity of issues, including the urban forest and climate. Would you support moving tree and urban forest protection and oversight to a new independent Department of the Environment and Climate that includes an Urban Forestry Division to specifically coordinate and prioritize tree and urban forest protection?

Yes,

Please share why this is, or is not, important to you::
An urban forestry division is a good idea because it would enable us to increase the canopy across Seattle while keeping our existing canopy healthy

Q6

Portland, Oregon requires that a comprehensive Tree Inventory and Tree Plan be done at the beginning of their development permit process. Developers enter the inventory and information into an Excel spreadsheet which can easily be added to a city database. This allows developers to plan around trees from the start of the development process and not a later add on, complicating an already moving process. This will also help Seattle more quickly track tree loss and replacement during development. The current tracking is requiring SDCI staff to remove data from a site plan which is both time consuming and frequently incomplete because all the information is not on the site plan. It also eats up employee time and the SDCI budget. Do you support amending the current Tree Ordinance to add this requirement?

Yes,

Please share why this is, or is not, important to you::
A tree registry is a great idea because it allows us to keep an accurate count of our green space. This would enable the government and community to keep developers honest regarding their compliance with development regulations.

Q7

Seattle, in 2007, set a 30 - year goal to reach a tree canopy of 30% by 2037. Yet there has been no specific plan developed by the city detailing how we can reach this goal. The recent record temperatures in Seattle and the Northwest confirmed the deadly impacts of urban heat island effects on human life, especially in areas where there is low tree canopy. Mapping has shown these areas to be mostly previously redlined areas and low- income areas. Seattle needs a detailed plan in place to plant in areas needing more trees to address environmental equity. Will you support developing a tree planting plan and prioritizing this goal by moving the 30% canopy goal to 2030 as is being done with other climate mitigation timeline goals in Seattle?

Yes,

Please share why this is, or is not, important to you:: As I mentioned earlier, climate justice largely affects the working class and people of color. Additionally, shade and coverage would provide a safer environment for the unhoused population while we work to get these people off the street. We need to prioritize shade and coverage in order to help people at all times of the year. The urban heat island is a serious issue and it'll only worsen as Seattle densifies unless we prioritize smart, sustainable development.

Q8

Many trees in Seattle die as the result of invasive species like English ivy, killing them with their climbing vines. On steep slopes this greatly threatens slope stability and increases the risk of landslides. A good time to remove invasives is during development. The current landscaping plan requires that invasives be removed only where a replacement tree is being planted. Do you support requiring developers, as part of their landscape plan, to remove all invasives on the lot undergoing development?

Yes,

Please share why this is, or is not, important to you:: Getting rid of invasive species is a time-consuming and expensive process. Having corporations aid in solving ecological issues is a smart method of ensuring everyone pitches in. Finding ways to spread responsibility and increase the overall rate of removal of invasive species is a good thing. This measure would help ensure the sustainability of new development.

Q9

Portland, Oregon in 2020 complied with an Oregon State law to require approval of building 4 plexes in their single-family zone. Last November, responding to continued canopy loss, they amended their building code to require a dedicated 20% Tree Retention and Planting area in multifamily zones and a 40% dedicated Tree Retention and Planting area in their 1-4 family zone as a planning alternative to save trees. Would you support a similar provision to help Seattle protect its tree canopy for climate resiliency and tree equity across the city?

Yes,

Please share why this is, or is not, important to you:: I completely support retaining as many trees as possible, and ensuring that happens as a result of the policies set by the city council. However, I would want to ensure that this policy would not inhibit development. There is a delicate balance between densification and maintaining the natural character of the neighborhood.

Q10

The new Tree Protection Ordinance guarantees developers a 100% allowable development area in Midrise, Seattle Mixed and Commercial zones and an 85% allowable development area in the Lowrise zones. Seattle's multifamily zones currently have a 23% canopy cover and Seattle mixed zone has a 12% canopy cover according to the Seattle 2021 Canopy Report. Would you support maintaining the present building code which allows the city to work with developers to try to save trees in these zones instead of a one size fits all guarantee that will result in significant canopy loss in these zones?

Yes,

Please share why this is, or is not, important to you: Throughout my work, I have found that a one size fits all approach is rarely the best one. We need to base our response on the characteristics of the issue at hand. Seattle is already losing its natural resources due to climate change and we need to work to ensure we're preserving them wherever it makes sense to.

Q11

The Seattle City Council approved funds to scope a study of Seattle's Natural Capital but never followed through. Would you support funding a Natural Capital Study for Seattle to monetize the economic value of Seattle's trees and urban forest?

Yes,

Please share why this is, or is not, important to you: I believe we should be cataloging our natural capital in this city but our trees don't need to be monetized. We have an abundance of natural wealth in this city and we need to cherish it.

Q12

Share your favorite type of tree and how you like to spend time in nature?

My favorite type of tree is Silver Birch. I like to simply sit and meditate in nature and take in the feeling of being at home. I like observing the leaves and the interconnectedness of everything from insects to root patterns. I grew up in a family where trees were sacred, and believed to hold wisdom as "Standing Elders." As an indigenous person, I look for advice and guidance from trees and I also speak to them from time to time.

Q13

Is there anything else you would like to share about why tree protection is important (or not) to you?

My identity as a Black and indigenous multiply-disabled person makes me rely on trees and the climate around me for support on multiple levels: spiritually, mentally, and physically. I believe that we need to reintroduce indigenous plants and trees back into our city, and prioritize the voices of indigenous leaders as we navigate tree protection.