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Collector: Email Invitation 3 (Email)
Started: Wednesday, August 23, 2023 5:30:54 PM
Last Modified: Wednesday, August 23, 2023 5:50:21 PM
Time Spent: 00:19:27
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Q1

Please share your information below:

Name	Ron Davis
District	Seattle City Council District 4
City	Seattle
Position	Seattle City Council Position 4

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:.
On some level, it's just personal. I grew up in the NW, and trees are a core part of the fabric of our culture and our quality of life. I picked my neighborhood in part because it is full of wonderful, mature trees. I love them. But, of course, the matter is deeper than mere preference. Heading into the mid-21st century, climate change and climate justice are more important than ever. Climate change disproportionately affects the working class and people of color, and I aim to prevent that from happening in Seattle as conditions worsen. Trees cool and clean the air, and their roots draw in excessive moisture. In other words, they are key bulwarks in making the community more resilient to climate change. Of course, they are a core pillar of the beautification process, and I support measures focused on preserving mature trees from needless destruction, actively protecting trees struggling because of age, climate, or disease, and planting trees to aggressively expand our tree canopy. I'm the only person running that has plans to actually invest money in doing so rather than cutting the budget.

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::

We need to keep as many trees as possible, and we need more housing. I'd actually go a step further—I'm less interested in just requiring them to consider it—I'm interested in setting the incentives so the smartest thing for them to do is to protect the trees. The only way to both do that and ensure that the housing supply keeps up is to change the rules that force the relationship to be zero-sum. We should use more stringent lot coverage limits (including green space requirements) and flexible footprint location (with height bonuses for footprints that are further constrained because of protected trees) to make it feasible to both protect mature trees and build all the housing we need.

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?

This is a bit of an extension of my previous point, but I'll get more granular here. I think the key is to make sure it is both profitable to build more housing and equally or more profitable to do so while firmly requiring the protection of mature trees. I believe the way to do this is as follows.

Set more reasonable lot coverage requirements (50% or 70%, not 85%+).

Eliminate setback requirements so buildings can fulfill their lot coverage allotment without bulldozing trees.

Set firm protections for those trees.

Where the firm protections for those trees don't allow a builder to get their full lot coverage requirement/FAR, offer height bonuses.

Building up is usually more expensive, so the height bonus will probably have to exceed the FAR lost.

For example, if you have a 50% lot coverage maximum on a 5,000-square-foot lot and a FAR of 2, you're nominally allowed to build 10,000 square feet. But say the site has mature trees that prevent the 50% from being used, and only 40% can be used. I'd be inclined to offer extra height to make up 1.5x the square footage lost. This would not only protect trees and address the additional cost of building up, but it would mean we site more housing next to mature trees, which is something our communities need.

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:
I don't know the exact place this should be housed, but I agree that it would be better to have it housed outside this department (we could use the current Department of Sustainability, for example). I think both should unite legislatively on the land use committee—so we have a coherent policy—but I think building in the both/and approach requires separation on the administrative/departmental side.

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 this core asset—our canopy—while expediting the development process. I believe the government should encourage streamlining, and having more data is a good thing as it enables us to analyze what works and what doesn't without conjecture.

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. 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. I'm the only candidate who has suggested ways to expand our canopy that supports a budgetary plan that would make this possible. It will require both getting the development protections right, investing in preserving the life of trees in parks (and on private property where there is consent), and significantly expanding the canopy along the right of way all over the city. It will cost millions of dollars per year, and I am the only candidate in this race who isn't pursuing a policy of nine-figure budget cuts.

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. 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 complete 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::
As mentioned above, I think lot coverage maximums are the way to go. Implicit in this is that we should have green space minimums (100% minus the lot coverage maximum). It's important to me for all the reasons articulated above—it will encourage a building form that is more compatible with housing affordability AND climate resilience/climate justice.

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: In governance, there are very few, if any, times where one size fits all is the most effective response to a problem. I support tailoring our response to canopy loss to the specific environment where the problem is. We need to work as if we are the members of the community we say we are and treat each issue as if it is personally affecting us.

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: This issue is important to me because I believe elected officials should follow through on their promises and because, as mentioned above, having an inventory of our natural capital enables us to make informed decisions regarding how we use it. Funding this study is not only a good idea but a necessary one.

Q12

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

Oh, this is a tough call, and I'm going to fail to pick just one –sorry!

I love a really mature Japanese Maple, shimmering in the summer, gnarled and exposed in the winter, as well as some other varieties of Red Maples (particularly when their leaves turn almost blood red in the fall), and the Big Leaf Maples near my house in their supernova of color right before they let go. It is breathtaking. Like the Japanese Maple, I love the visual aria put on by Cherry Trees, despite their gnarled underbellies. I love a Western Red Cedar, a Sequoia, or a Redwood for their majesty, and one of my favorite places in Seattle is 17th Ave NE, under the Horse Chestnut Alley of Trees. I've also got a thing for birches when they yellow in the fall, with a little breeze and their rapidly shimmering leaves-my front yard had a few of those as a kid. And a Weeping Willow by a lazy river–makes me feel like I want to write a novel.

My favorite thing to do in nature is by far to walk/hike, with outdoor running or sitting and admiring tied for second. I'm someone who enjoys moving and also enjoys a constant stream of visual discovery. Whether it's hiking or snowshoeing in the Cascades or just up and down a Pacific Beach—that's one of my favorite ways to experience nature. And I so appreciate that I can do some of that right here! My main walk/runs are: 1. Down 17th under the Horse Chestnut Trees, across campus under the Cherry Trees, Northeast along the Burke Gilman Trail, and back through Ravenna Park home (2. or a longer version farther Northeast on the Burke), and 3. West on Ravenna Boulevard to Green Lake around and back.

Q13

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

I think you will not find a candidate anywhere in this city who is pro-growth and has also given the depth of thought to this matter that I have. And I am certain you will find that I'm the only one in my race who takes the imperative for housing supply AND tree protection seriously and who is willing actually to put money where my mouth is.

For what it's worth—I also think as a well-known “urbanist” - I could be a great evangelist and coalition builder for a big tent that takes seriously the need for trees and housing. The two have been pitted against one another for too long, and unfortunately, our policies reflects that.
