

# Tree PAC questionnaire

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Polls show that two-thirds of Seattle voters are concerned about tree loss as housing density increases and believe that Seattle needs to do BOTH: build new housing AND do a better job of protecting its trees. In May 2023, the City Council passed, and Mayor Harrell signed CB 120534 (Ordinance 126821). However, true protection of our mature trees during development is MISSING from the tree ordinance, and...it should be added!

Seattle's new tree ordinance helps us plant more trees but misses the mark by allowing developers to remove all from Midrise, Seattle Mixed, and Commercial Zones Living close to trees dramatically improves everyone's health. Lower rates of asthma, cardiovascular disease and cancer, improved pregnancy outcomes, better mental/emotional health and improved cognitive function are all correlated with living near trees. As a candidate, Seattle constituents want to know where you stand on retaining and enhancing our urban forest canopy. Please respond to the following questions. Thank you.

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**

**No**

**Please share why this is, or is not, important to you:**

It's clear to me that the recently passed Tree Protection Ordinance was rushed—didn't even engage the Urban Forestry Commission. While it was an improvement in so far as it creates a fund for planting trees, it is far from perfect and so will need amendments.

Trees are incredibly important to me because they help with climate mitigation (reducing heat stress and related medical emergencies by providing shade and water retention, reducing land degradation, and cleaning our air). Heat waves have become more and more frequent. We cannot continue deprioritizing trees. It is especially clear that historically redlined neighborhoods have been forced to become some of the hottest, and therefore deadliest, places in our city via decimated tree canopy. This is unacceptable.

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 [at] the edge of lots.**

**Yes**

**No**

**Please share why this is, or is not, important to you:**

Clearing a lot can certainly make the development process easier but preserving a large tree can make the end product much more attractive. Significant trees offer shade and help maintain the value of a property. There are likely circumstances where preserving a tree just won't work, but designers should be encouraged to at least consider alternatives.

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?**

It's important to note that the majority of tree loss is in our City parks. Additionally, major institutions and commercial/mixed use development together also contributed to significant canopy loss. There are many ways the City can create more housing AND protect our trees, including addressing canopy loss in other kinds of development and increasing canopy on public lands.

The entire Pacific Northwest is at the epicenter of receiving more and more climate refugees as the crisis rages on. So we can't ignore that we need climate mitigation while we provide more places for people to live.

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**

**No**

**Please share why this is, or is not, important to you:**

Maybe. I agree that we should streamline how the City manages our efforts to protect our tree canopy. I don't know that we need a new department when we face a budget deficit.

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**

**No**

**Please share why this is, or is not, important to you:**

City workers should have the tools they need to provide good service to our communities. I'd be willing to learn more about the changes needed and advocate for a more streamlined system.

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**

**No**

**Please share why this is, or is not, important to you:**

I've been a proponent of the Seattle Green New Deal before it was even implemented, helped implement it, and secured progressive funds for it. That said, some of the funding sits unused without designations from the mayor. I fully support taking serious action to catch up on our Climate Action goals. It will take all of us advocating with the executive branch and our state delegation to advance the choices needed to end environmental racism.

Many of Seattle's trees - especially on public lands - are reaching the end of their lifespans. 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. We need to plan carefully to plant native trees on public land and to support private property owners in planting the right kind of trees, even knowing that immature trees may not provide shade for decades. That's what it means to plan for the 7th generation. **Do you support requiring developers, as part of their landscape plan, to remove all invasives on the lot undergoing development?**

Yes

No

**Please share why this is, or is not, important to you:**

My answer here is maybe. A huge part of a healthy environment (and, subsequently, climate resilience and mitigation) is going back to supporting our natural environment—and, tangentially, supporting traditional Indigenous knowledge and care of our land. I want to be sure that encouraging better lot management regarding invasive species would not simultaneously limit the ability of affordable housing projects to pencil.

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

No

**Please share why this is, or is not, important to you:**

I like that the 1-4 family zone has a doubled rate of retention because these places tend to have more room for trees while having the highest opportunity to retain mature trees. We all know mature trees do a far better job cleaning our air and withstanding change than saplings.

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

No

**Please share why this is, or is not, important to you:**

My answer is maybe. I am eager to understand the best path forward for both achieving our tree canopy goals AND ensuring that our housing partners can build the 100,000 homes we need for our existing neighbors. I also think it will be critical for us to look at reducing our roadways, increasing home zones, or converting some of our 4000 miles of asphalt roads and 500,000 parking spots that are contributing significantly to our urban heat islands.

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

No

**Please share why this is, or is not, important to you:**

Before funding yet another study, I'd prefer to see if we can revisit the results and take action on what we've already learned. I understand the desire to put a monetary cost to trees for the sake of convincing business interests, or showing a deficit for Seattle, but the fact of the matter is, we have plenty of data to know what to do already.

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

I love Quaking Aspens. As a child I have fond memories of laying under these trees and watching the leaves move in the wind.

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

Overall, I'm interested in addressing climate change by looking at complementary measures in addition to preserving and planting more trees. For example, requiring some degree of green roofs, increasing our use of permeable pavement in City and/or private sector projects, stormwater

management, salmon and orca protections, Indigenous stewardship, sustainability, clean energy, restoration, and other green building priorities.