

**Neighborhood Leadership Gathering
Talking about Trees
February 26, 2019**



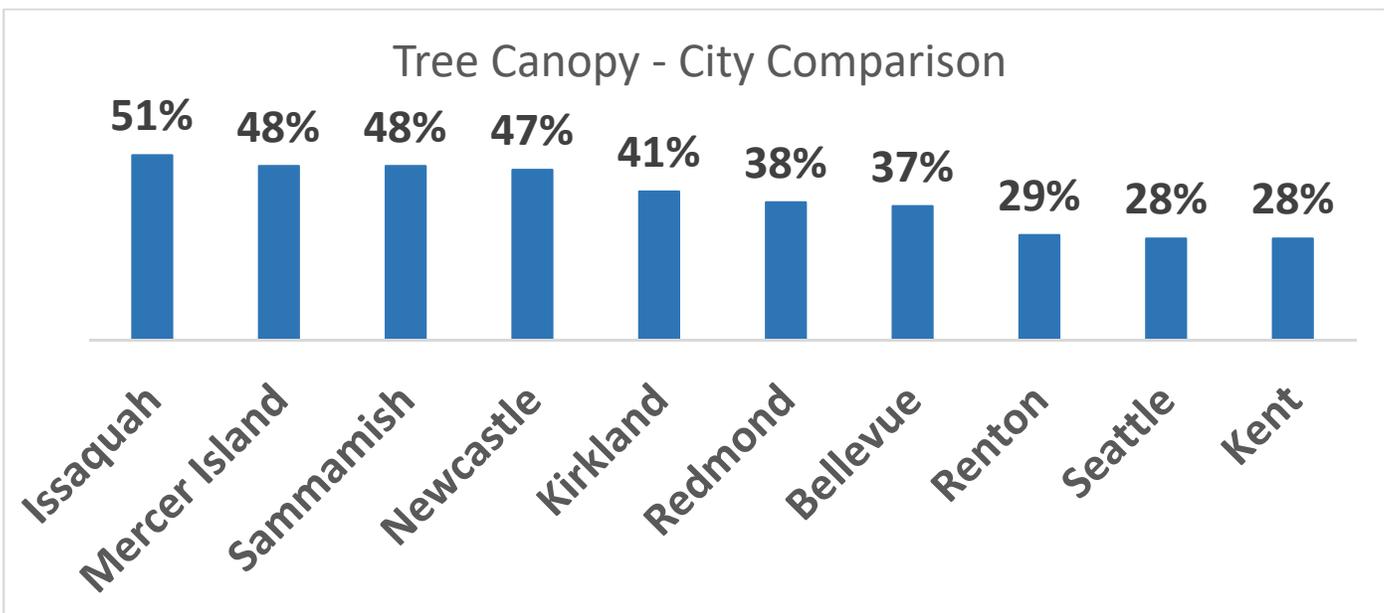
Meeting Minutes

On February 26, 2019, the Neighborhood Outreach team in partnership with the Environmental Stewardship Initiative, hosted the Neighborhood Leadership Gathering on “Talking about Trees”. Mayor John Chelminiak provided the welcoming remarks and Councilmembers Jennifer Robertson and Janice Zahn were in attendance. Over 80 neighborhood leaders from across Bellevue participated to learn and share how to preserve and grow Bellevue’s tree canopy. This event was the launch of the engagement process for the update to the city’s Environmental Stewardship Initiative Strategic Plan.

Mark Heilman, Neighborhood Outreach Manager, introduced himself and the Neighborhood Outreach Team. A short video, “Talking about Trees”, provided a brief vignette on the value of Bellevue’s trees in our community. The evening also included a panel presentation by Jennifer Ewing, Environmental Stewardship Program Manager, Matthews Jackson, Neighborhood Development Planning Manager, and Geoff Bradley, Natural Resource Manager. The presentation provided information about Bellevue’s Tree Canopy Assessment and overall trends, trees in our parks, and trees and growth and development. Following these short talks, there was a facilitated discussion of tree-related issues. Residents were asked for their ideas on how the city can partner with the community to preserve and grow Bellevue’s urban tree canopy.

The panel presentation began with the 2017 Urban Tree Canopy Assessment. Key findings include:

- Bellevue has a 37% citywide tree canopy.
- 40% impervious surfaces citywide.
- Bellevue parks have a significant canopy cover of 65% overall.
- The majority of the city’s tree canopy is in suburban residential areas, with 65% of all canopy. Suburban residential also accounts for the greatest potential for growth of canopy.
- Achieving the 40% canopy goal will take time – approximately 670 acres of additional tree canopy is needed to achieve this goal.



The presentation also provided an overview of city codes and regulations that apply to tree removals. More detailed information can be found at <https://development.bellevuewa.gov/zoning-and-land-use/zoning-requirements/trees>

The Natural Resource division is responsible for managing park natural areas including forests, wetlands, streams and lakes. Natural Resource Division cares over 280,000 trees, protecting steep slopes, shade streams, control stormwater, provide homes for wildlife, filter air and water, buffer land uses, and provide ecological connectivity.

Geoff Bradley shared that “All forests are not created equal. Bellevue open space are not pristine ecosystems, rather lands that have been impacted by human intervention since settlement. The urban forests we inherited are largely composed of canopies of declining short-lived tree species and invasive understories.” Bellevue’s Forest Management programs seeks to:

- 1) improve the overall forest condition
- 2) accelerate succession
- 3) ensure a healthy and sustainable future canopy

The presentation emphasized that stewardship of Bellevue’s tree canopy will require community partnership. In 2018, over 18,000 residents participated in Natural Resource environmental education classes. In addition, over 1,800 volunteers contributed over 7,500 hours helping restore Bellevue’s natural environment.

In 2019, the city is updating Bellevue’s Environmental Stewardship Initiative Strategic Plan. Focus areas of the plan will include; climate change and air quality, mobility and land use, green building, energy and water, materials management and waste, ecosystems, open spaces and stormwater, and trees. More information on Environmental Stewardship Initiative Strategic Plan Update can be found at www.bellevuewa.gov/environment.

Additional resources can be found at www.bellevuewa.gov/trees.

The complete presentation can also be found online at the Classes/Events tab for Neighborhood Leadership Gatherings at <https://bellevuewa.gov/city-government/departments/community-development/neighborhoods>.

Key Themes

The Leadership Gathering facilitated table discussions on “how do we preserve and grow our tree canopy?” Ideas generated from table discussions included a range of topics from:

- Increasing community education on the value of trees, city regulations
- Additional resources (arborists, vegetation plans, etc.) for residents
- Tree giveaways
- Addressing climate change
- Increased fines or penalties for unpermitted tree cutting
- Better enforcement of current city codes
- Better use of public right of way for tree planting
- Improving partnerships with PSE, Sound Transit, Bellevue Schools on tree planting and preservation
- Strengthening policies and codes to preserve tree canopy

The complete list of submitted written comments captures the range of community input (p.3-14).

Written Comments Received

How do we preserve and grow our tree canopy?

General Comments

- Find out how we can stop the bleeding, what are we doing wrong now?
- Listen to the citizens – in every meeting I participate the feedback is the same, trees move people, look at the amount of participation in the meeting. We love our trees, make a plan to protect them.
- To reach the goal of 670 acres to reach the 40% canopy goal, we don't have more land to plant trees, we need to protect what we have.
- Trees are an ecosystem, if my neighbor removes 5 trees, the chances of my trees survival decreases, the stress is more.
- The statistics are not improving, the math with the existing code and the long term goal is not adding. If we have a vision, create the strategy and the process to meet the goal.
- Use discretion and not force of implementation of eminent domain – riding over individual rights for the sake of development is anti-social and contrary to community.
- Change the culture – trees = benefit
- Less Trees = Increased Noise = Increased Blood Pressure
Less trees = less air quality and greater pollution = increase asthma rates
Decrease trees = change in climate -> Look at health impacts!
- Realize that this is a state-regulated vs. City of Bellevue issue. We must lobby and be a part of the lobby effort to get the changes soon!
- The 40% goal seems unachievable.

- Develop a meaningful climate action plan!
- Implement a climate action plan in Bellevue that has specific goals.
- Bellevue needs to develop a policy to address climate warming – and green house gases in the city to keep our forest healthy. Make sure canopy is healthy and sustainable.
- Global warming issues!
- Arborist has told our neighbor that global warming is having an impact on the trees – higher winds during storms, changing growth pattern – making them top heavy. Is the City studying this and if so, will the city provide assistance in evaluating and maintaining the health of our existing trees? To protect our tree canopy.

- Trees are hazardous – they blow down, they destroy houses, they bill people, they are a fire hazard, think CA fires, need to cut down DEAD trees. Some areas have laminated root rot which arborist are not able to detect for any reasonable price. People should have the right to remove dangerous trees (e.g. >18" and near a house).
- What is the plan for forest fire mitigation/prevention?

- Is there a way of coming up with a “scoring” system for homeowners that is based on some factor of # of trees, canopy space, etc? This can be used as a pride or potentially selling factor for the house. For example, a house with a score of 75 would have tangible ways of how it helps the environment better than a house with a score of 25.

Written Comments Received

How do we preserve and grow our tree canopy?

General Comments (cont.)

- Archive “signature” trees on lots

- Increase tree canopy as a priority in city projects.
- City-owned lots/parks should lead here. Downtown Park is a flagship and has low tree canopy. Lead by example!
- Buy property in Park deficient areas and use a portion for tree cover
- City can help reduce spread of invasive species laurel, ivy and holly.
- Connect to sister cities in Japan – expand Shinrin Roku concept throughout the city. The health, values and well being are huge.

- Have greenbelt issue I would like to work with City to achieve a win. Maples have grown far above average canopy and wiped out our view. Low canopy replacement for these 3 trees would fix. Not sure there is ever any maintenance on green belt except for private neighbors!
- Think seriously about encouraging specific neighborhoods to trade (give up_ views as a priority for canopy as a priority. The city can’t have both as a priority.

- CAP and Trade
- Don’t allow people to cut a Douglas fir and allow them to replace it with a cherry tree that has a lifespan of 15 years. Maybe same canopy – but a total difference long term.
- Someone needs to do late night reviews of all sprinkler/irrigation to reduce broken-heads and wacky misdirected sprinklers. Wasted water!
- Annex Issaquah. Stop the development of Cougar Mountain.

Written Comments Received

How do we preserve and grow our tree canopy?

Neighborhood/Community Outreach and Education

- Educate the residents as to the value of trees.
- Education about the value – economic value – of trees
- Educate residents about the benefits of tree canopy.
- Emphasis value of trees and how much trees are worth – how it enhances property values.
- Basic education about why trees are important. Put this in 5 languages. Bellevue is minority-majority, and many are not living in home. They should understand that they can't just cut all the trees down.
- Education for those who come from tree-less places. Trees are good for the health of the community, suggest trees to plant, and how much you can lower blood pressure!
- Educate residents on the importance/benefits of keeping trees so that they don't cut them down in the first place.
- Educate realtors to NOT advise sellers to cut trees to sell their homes.
- Reign in advice from real estate people that say trees reduce selling price.
- Educate landscape folks that ultra-clean yards do not support bird and wildlife
- Bring tree education to the people who need it. Right now, only those interested in trees read the reports, brochures, etc. I go on the walks. The ones who need to know won't use those resources. We need to partner with schools, businesses, sports teams, etc. We can share the information with the people who don't know and wouldn't look for it on their own.
- Public education – media
- When a house changes ownership or when a new home construction takes place, it should be mandatory that the new owners make themselves familiar with the code requirements either in a class or via study material, and sign their names that they have done so. The majority of new homeowners are not aware what the city requires or they don't care. Meanwhile, trees are cut left and right and there appear no follow up. No fines are assessed but the offenders are allowed to apply for a permit retroactively. PUT SOME TEETH in the code.

- Could a Bellevue staff educate homeowners about plantings that can “live” with fir trees and create a landscape option that is not bark or ivy?
- Provide tree consultation for residents to encourage planting of the right trees in the right location.
- What specifically does COB consider a tree vs. shrub – ex. Arborcto? Residents need to know, need guidance!
- Packet for new residents re: bullet points for tree preservation codes and cost of violations.
- Provide specific tree list for specific neighborhood residents to plant.

- Create “tree teams” specific to individual neighborhoods to make suggested planting to residents.
- Arborists can help to advise homeowners, devise gardens and trees for their home.
- More arborists and more availability!

Written Comments Received

How do we preserve and grow our tree canopy?

Neighborhood/Community Outreach and Education (cont.)

- Hire more arborists to do community education.

- Have our HOA hold educational meetings about planting trees and code requirements
- Have Bellevue Botanical Garden hold classes on what to plant and how to prune trees.
- Education and outreach at public events (Strawberry festival, 4th of July, etc.) and to elementary and middle schools.
- City should hold block gatherings to assess what can be done.
- Hold smaller neighborhood gatherings – visit model gardens and assess options.
- Host/Sponsor Fall Neighborhood Planting parties

- Create a neighborhood program to remove rat infested ivy and replace with trees and planting in the neighborhoods.
- Snohomish County used to have a tree/shrub sale annual native plants and tiny tree starts. Provide resources to help people choose appropriate trees, shrubs, things like slope anchoring, shade tolerance, won't block views, etc.

- City-wide campaign with badges, awards, etc. for adding to the canopy. Have it measured visually online, so people can look and see how much the green is growing. Make it a civic-pride thing.
- In terms of a city-wide campaign, you could make achieving the canopy a point of civic pride. We have been doing something like that with salmon and streams. We could do the same with trees. We could have school classes go plant trees, just like we have them take care of salmon eggs and release them. We can have signs by the green belts like we do by the streams. We can designate important trees with plaques as specially protected. In Phoenix, they've made it a point of pride to protect the saqueros cacti.

Written Comments Received

How do we preserve and grow our tree canopy?

Incentivize Tree Preservation & Tree Planting

- City should offer 2-3 trees for each household.
- Give trees to homeowners. Don't rely on homeowners to carry all of the cost for building the canopy.
- See idea for free trees to homeowners
- Arbor day tree give-a-ways!
- Tree/seedling/sapling give-a-way and planting team/planting days could rally mass neighborhood efforts
- Offer trees at a discount for homeowners.
- Arbor Day celebrations and tree planting parties
- Have a tree planting day for Bellevue.

- We need home-owners effort to keep tree canopy. Yes. How about incentive to reduce property tax for homeowners to keep healthy trees on their property. Pruning trees and cutting rotten trees cost a fortune for homeowners. Adequate compensation will encourage every homeowner to treasure their trees for years to come (think of tree canopy like solar system).
- Tax rebate for tree quantity on homeowner lots.
- Incentives in the form of property tax deduction for canopy retention – similar to sewage/drainage reductions for ponds and wetlands. Incentives > Enforcement

- Provide financial incentives for increasing the tree cover
- Offer incentives to transform parking lots to gardens (like Mercer Island gardens on freeway overpasses).

- Plant the BN buffer more heavily (Burlington Northern) w/ trees
- Make sure WSDOT replants trees along I-405 after they add new toll lanes to 405.
- Implement positive incentives for retaining trees

- Plant first – at 2 years later.
- Encourage replacement of equivalent number of trees for those eliminated by streams.
- Emphasize planting of native evergreens to help replace vast quantity of trees that have been removed following storm damage.
- Promote evergreen replacement
- Have people plant the right trees with an understanding of the impact on others. This would help stewardship and not set neighbors against neighbors.
- Give residents ideas on planting new trees that do get - tree planting service.
- Incorporate height as factor so view oriented neighborhoods can be aggressive about planting low canopy growth – win-win! Also, not clear how much shrub planting counts in canopy development. Can adopt shrubs in business parks, etc. as a part of growth.
- Many shrubs in our area vulnerable to wind when new planting might do more good and provide protection.

Written Comments Received

How do we preserve and grow our tree canopy?

City Streetscape

- Narrow the roads in residential areas – put in trees in center of cul-de-sacs/along roads.
- Plant trees on overly wide streets with “blisters”
- Narrow some of our residential streets and/or add planting strips.
- Build not just on roads, but pedestrian corridors! “City in a Park!”
- COB has easements they don’t use – just let residents manage – many are in asphalt. Why doesn’t COB plant trees in those areas?
- The current opportunity is to increase tree canopy in Sound Transit corridor – especially Bel-Red area, West to East and North of Bel-Red. What is being planned? How much will this add to the canopy?
- Improve right-of-way and main arterial plantings
- Better care of trees and canopy in medians.
- City needs to provide funding for street and urban trees on city projects and along streets.
- The City (virtually every city) has 20-40% under its control in public street right of way. A major portion of that acreage is “wasted” – not used, or needed in many cases, for vehicular travel or parking, sidewalks, etc. This wasted land can be used for street trees, storm water cleaning. Linear parks.
- More roundabouts with tree plantings.

Written Comments Received

How do we preserve and grow our tree canopy?

Code Enforcement

- The time to act is now while we have trees, create the code and enforce it. This is a time sensitive issue.
- Enforce rules about taking down trees.
- Code enforcement is needed
- We need to enforce the regulations we have. My neighbors know they will face no consequences for cutting down their old growth trees. I would call City Hall, but what good does that do if there are no fees?
- Enforce with serious penalties wanton removal of trees.
- More code enforcement
- Enforce of code compliance and make the developers and contractors pay for building.
- ENFORCE CODES!
- Enforce the codes on developers
- Enforce the codes already in place!
- Enforce policy – financially
- Compliance to enforce
- Only option is to work with residents and actively enforce policy. Request a permit for every tree. You do not need to block but enforce!!
- Involve HOA and neighborhood orgs to manage and enforce codes.
- Figure out a way to effectively penalize violators of land use code. Today, trees may be removed because the fine is “cheap” compared to value bought when a developer can build an additional or larger home/building.
- Have strong, enforceable incentives to encourage people to NOT cut trees. Collect the fines when people ignore the codes and cut trees at will.

- By drafting pertinent regulations preventing arbitrary residential tree removal and having teeth for enforcement.
- Property tax charge to support tree canopy development and enforcement

- I think that I heard a policy that enforcement, relating to excessive tree cutting, is not happening while the city waits for “just the right case”. This is perceived as a tolerance policy and sends the wrong message. That’s why we have people driving 45 mph in a 35 mph zone!

- Hotline to report cutting down trees
- Better enforcement by development services – include Neighborhood “hotline”

Written Comments Received

How do we preserve and grow our tree canopy?

Recommendations for Land Use Codes

- We need a tree ordinance
- Now is the time to write a pre-statement about lots that go into change mode that does not allow the owner or developer to cut trees down before the 30% rule goes into effect.
- Be serious about tree policy. It requires defense and active protection against deforestation. Other cities require a permit for every tree, it makes the owner think twice about cutting a tree.
- More tree protection policies
- More regulations for tree-cutting.
- Review and analyze what policies/practices caused our decline of canopy.
- Need more zoning and stiffer penalties for removing trees.
- Many goals conflict – increase density (ex. DADU) = fewer trees, big buildings like Boys and Girls Club replaces many trees natural woods. Require trees on large developments – there are very few in the new developments in Bel/Red/Crossroads.
- Tree canopy is a goal. Maybe biomass should be the measure. The goal should have elements, economic elements, as depicted by www.ltreetools.org
- This analysis – carbon sequester, storm water run-off; air pollution, carbon dioxide storage, etc. can price out tree benefits. This economic benefit/penalty can/should be incorporated into permitting/development.
- Place a higher economic value on the stormwater mitigation, beauty, and climate impact of trees
- Programs/Strategy to increase tree canopy actions across multiple land use types.
- Mitigation measures are vague – no details on size of replacement trees, just the replacement ratio. If replacement trees are deciduous then they sequester CO₂ only 2/3 or ¾ of the year.
- Should be longevity requirement

- Make a requirement to have permit displayed at the road for any tree removal. This should be done ASAP.
- Place permits
- Code Compliance needs to include the permit visible and a reduced # of trees to be allowed to be removed.
- Require anyone with a tree removal permit to post it at front of lot.
- A simple change could be that permits always be posted in front – on the street- when trees are being removed.

- Totally review codes and permit processes and tighten up rules and enforcement. Eg. Picture before and after. \$50,000 bond.
- Require contractors to submit a photo of the property before they begin clearing/construction, submit with their permit application – then have arborist reviewer tell contractor how many trees they are required to plant to restore canopy.

Written Comments Received

How do we preserve and grow our tree canopy?

Recommendations for Land Use Codes (cont.)

- Establish fees for values of trees (heights, diameters) as they contribute to property value and use them as fines.
- Re-Assess the fines
- Increase tree removal penalties
- Charge for tree permits (a significant amount) to make it one of the things to consider
- Put a price on tree cutting.
- Bigger penalties for code violations
- Make the financial penalty for removing trees w/out a permit high enough that it actually hits people in their pocketbooks and hurts – make them think twice!

- Remove the clause “fee-in-lieu” in the tree retention/replacement policy

- Update the code. 5 trees is a lot to allow for removal if 63% of the canopy relies on home owners.
- Lower # trees cut without permit (less than 10’ feet)
- Reduce # or over 10’ foot trees can’t cut down
- Require permit for tree removal of any tree 40’ feet or higher.
- New development mostly happens in undeveloped surfaces where trees are cut down. Any near tree cut needs to be permitted.

- Extend R-1 zoning in Bridle Trails to other residential areas.
- Allow neighborhoods to create their own R-1 zones. When we approached the city they just say wait.
- Do not allow ADU’s in Bellevue! Do NOT allow or encourage DADU’s – building these will likely require homeowners to remove trees to build.

- Have property owners self report tree canopy on their property every ten years and at time of sale.
- Eliminate the exemption for tree cutting for single-family home, short plats and major expansion.
- Regulate size of new houses as a % of lot size to prevent clearing the lot.
- Maximize percentage that can be developed on one property.

- Question density of city buildings
- My question is – why were the condos and apartments in downtown Bellevue allowed to build up to the sidewalks? What about public areas and area for planting green in from of this “ugly” buildings? It is claustrophobic and leaves no room for trees.
- Put Parks Code into Land Use Code as “Parks Zone”
- Roof garden policies? (environment, not just trees)
- Require licensing for arborist.

Written Comments Received

How do we preserve and grow our tree canopy?

Comments concerning Development

- Better coordination with developers and incentives for developers
- Why not require planting of replace trees for those cut down during development or when done by landowner (no development) – Bridle Trees
- Require developers to preserve 50% of old big trees and plant more than what they took out.
- Require developers to retain 40% of trees. They need to help us meet this goal.
- Slow the developers down.
- Require more trees be planted by contractors (change required percentage).
- The need for parking lots are likely to decline over the next 5-10 years due to automotive automation. Don't give land to developers to build on – require substantial reverting back to green spaces!
- Developers must plant trees in other areas
- New developments cut hundreds of mature trees and replace them with a small green area with grasses and shrubs
- The cost of trees next to where a house is! Developers have a profit motive and with million dollar homes, a fine of hundreds of dollars is inadequate!! Prevent illegal activities before or after the build.
- In my neighborhood, the economics and system are biased toward developers. I would like to see changes in zoning and legislation. I and my neighbors are being sued by a developer and a law firm to pressure us into changing the covenants for our neighborhood, to encourage and facilitate “Development for the economic benefit of the neighborhood”. We neighbors have absolutely no recourse to fight the lawsuit. You (the City) are set up to support development and I would like to see more strong zoning restrictions and protections for neighborhoods. We have no protections.
- Protect us from irresponsible developers.
- Developers are getting away with clear cuts of dozens of trees with no consequences. A tax or cost per tree is required if you want to get to 40% or at least stay close to the 37%.
- City oversight on developers cutting down trees and replacing a % of those with similar trees with similar longevity.
- Biggest problem is not the individual resident. It is the developer and corporations that are permitted by the city that have to meet minimum criteria 30% retention and replacement. You can't replace a 60' foot evergreen with a 4' foot shrub!!
- Development of residential property and allowing edge to edge development is detrimental; we need to have zoning that better limits development – and limits the impermeable surface that is added to a lot.
- Encourage smaller developments – discourage mega homes

Written Comments Received

How do we preserve and grow our tree canopy?

Utilities

- Involve PSE to preserve or replace trees. Also Sound transit property.
- Partner with PSE and other major contractors
- Seattle Power partnership to avoid clear cutting in easements under their power lines (ex. Wood)
- City needs to regulate or take back public control of PSE.
- Pay PSE rate \$900K for 300 trees.
- Prevent PSE from damaging living trees
- Stop cutting old growth evergreens that are healthy trees – just because PSE says they need to be cut!
- Negotiate with PSE re: tree removal and especially the need for the new transmission lines
- PSE replant
- Impose a similar requirement on PSE and Bellevue Schools as you do on single-family homeowners or developers/builders.

- Plan to address tree management with PSE @ next franchise agreement in 10 year.
- We need to revise PSE's franchise agreement. It does not provide enough protection for our tree canopy. More distribution lines must be placed underground. The City does not have sufficient leverage.

- Require new distribution lines to be buried
- Bury utility and power lines.
- Underground utilities to give more overhead canopy development, require utilities to phase this in.
- Bury communication and power lines (those with less than a certain voltage)
- Bury more power lines so fewer trees need to be topped or cut down.
- Communicate with PSE about how they “top” trees.
- PSE – been tree ***** - no topping
- Don't allow PSE to cut 100's of mature trees. It takes a seedling decades to be a good size tree.

- Engage PSE to incentivize technological solutions that address their concerns around peak energy usage and reliability. For example, incentivize home batteries that can feed electricity to the grid during peak demand or smart grid technologies. This helps our tree canopy by obviating the need for transmission line projects that remove many trees.
- Do not build a transmission line (Energize Eastside) that requires the removal of ~3000 trees.
- Environmental health impacts of decreasing trees (less 300 trees) along 148th – was this ever considered?

- PSE's 148th project will destroy innumerable established trees unnecessarily., as there are alternative to new transmission lines. They were rejected by PSE for whatever reason. Given that we want to increase our canopy by 3% - this is a problem. I'm not looking to assign blame. However, this type of outcome is simply not acceptable. This cannot be allowed to happen.

Written Comments Received

How do we preserve and grow our tree canopy?

Community Partnerships

- CAC's
- Appoint Citizen Advisory Committee
- Form community action committee to discuss preserving canopy
- CAC
- CAC – need a group of citizens to lead this effort
- Citizen Advisory Council
- We need a Community Action Committee of neighborhood representatives to advise and carry out changes.
- How a citizen advisory committee to build a foundation.

- Engage Audubon Society talks at neighborhood sessions.
- Possible community partners: Seattle Tree Fruit Society; City Fruit; Tilth; Washington Native Plant Society of King County; Orchard Gardens@HCLC
- Seattle Tree Fruit Society is an organization in Seattle that helps homeowners care for fruit trees and take care of trees in parks in Seattle – excellent model.
- Work with Forterra – who may get more corporate support for tree programs.
- Has anyone talked to KCD about their current work on trees? To Matt's comment, that volume is more important than height – look at what KCD is doing! Call Brandi – she is in charge of this area at KCD
- Seattle Tilth
- Partner with school district to encourage district to plant trees
- Partner with neighborhood gardens and encourage P-Patches and neighborhood gardening.
- Dirt Corp. LLC