



**Council President Richard Conlin**

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***City Council to Mayor: Cut the Red Tape, Save Older Trees***

*Resolution to be introduced Friday will call for strong, consistent rules to protect Urban Forest*

**SEATTLE** – On Monday, May 18, 2009 the City Auditor presented a report to Council on Seattle’s management of trees. The report calls the urban forest, “a vital part of the City’s infrastructure” and recommends better management of urban trees as a valuable resource. Seattle has specific goals to increase the urban tree canopy from 18% to 30% by 2040.

“We know that in addition to fighting climate change, a healthy and expanding tree canopy provides financial benefits to the city in managing drainage, filtering our air, and boosting property values by making neighborhoods greener,” said Council President Richard Conlin, Chair of the Environment, Emergency Management, and Utilities Committee, which will take up the report at its Friday meeting. “Seattle’s rhetoric on protecting the urban forest is strong, but the Auditor’s report concludes that Seattle is not doing enough to help our urban forest to grow, or to create an environment where developers choose to build in a way that maintains the character of our neighborhoods.”

In a draft Resolution that includes endorsing the City Auditor’s recommendations, **Council President Conlin** has identified three major steps the City should take to improve the management of Seattle’s trees.

First, do a better job of providing incentives to landowners. Instead of removing trees to make development less expensive, the City should be helping developers actively trying to build in a way that maintains mature trees – which is in the property owners’ best interest. Right now the City does not provide that incentive.

Second, improve coordination and management of the City’s trees. Currently, the “Urban Forest Coalition,” set up by the Mayor and led by the Office of Sustainability and Environment, consists solely of staff from Parks, SDOT, City Light, SPU, and other city departments. The City Auditor found that the City lacks a stable and effective management framework. In addition to citing specific intra and inter-organizational conflicts, the audit points out that in the near future, the Office of Sustainability will have even fewer resources to conduct much needed educational outreach due to budget constraints.

One way to remedy this would be to establish a **Citizen Tree Commission**. In addition to providing better coordination, this would help involve community members and experts on urban forestry. A proposal by Councilmember Nick Licata to create a Commission will also be discussed at the Friday meeting.

Third, following the example of Boston and other cities, and as recommended by the Auditor, complete a **tree inventory** for all City-managed trees. Community organizations argue that the scope of an inventory should be citywide and include trees on private land in order to complete our understanding of what it is that must be protected, partly because Seattle's greatest loss of trees has come on private lands. In response to the concerns about trees on private land, Council passed interim regulations in February.

Forest advocates point out that you can't plant your way out of this crisis because saplings have a much lower leaf area index than mature trees, and that retaining older trees is a much more efficient means of growing the urban tree canopy. Current city actions seem to focus on planting younger trees instead. The interim regulations were intended to expire when a more comprehensive package is ready for legislative action. However, that timeline has changed several times, and the resolution asks the Mayor to get this package to the Council in the near future.

The Environment, Emergency Management, and Utility Committee will follow the May 22 discussion with a panel of regional urban forest experts on June 9, and Conlin hopes to move the resolution to the Council by the end of June.

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