

Sehome Hill Arboretum Board of Governors Meeting Minutes

November 21, 2023

1. Meeting called to order at 1:00 pm. John Tuxill, Kendra Bradford, Jenna Kelling, Joan Drinkwin, Janet Ott, Steve Janiszewski, Wayne Galloway III and Steve Hollenhorst present.

2. Land Acknowledgement:

a. John T. read the Board's land acknowledgment.

3. Agenda Updates:

a. John T. added two agenda items: an update on the House of Healing Longhouse Project, and an introductory welcome to Remic Enswailer, new Parks Stewardship Supervisor. Steve J. provided an introduction for Remic, who will be responsible for the Parks Volunteers and Ambassadors programs. He also has a background in managing community college natural areas.

4. Minutes from October meeting were adopted with a motion from Steve H, seconded by Steve J.

5. Existing Business:

• Board members

- a. John T. relayed that so far there have been no applications received for Grace W.'s expiring board position. According to his review of the bylaws, emeriti faculty would be eligible for service, which may present opportunities for filling the seat. John T. indicated he would coordinate with Steve H. on identifying possible candidates.
- b. The Board thanked Janet O. for her long record of dedicated service on the Board, as this is Janet's final meeting of her expiring term. Nicole O. and Steve J. will follow up on recruitment for this Board position, which is a City appointment.

• Bellingham Urban Forestry Management Plan

- a. City Habitat and Restoration Manager Analiese Burns provided an update on the development of the Bellingham Urban Forestry Management Plan, outlining Phases 1 (Assessment of Urban Forest Conditions), 2 (Community Outreach and Values) and 3 (Plan Development). Phase 1 was completed in 2021 and Phase 2 in 2022, and Phase 3 is currently underway. A draft Plan is expected to be released in early 2024, followed by another round of community engagement to elicit feedback on the Plan. The Phase 1 assessment included measuring tree canopy coverage, connectivity of forest areas for wildlife habitat and movement, and fuel loading in forest areas as an indicator of fire risk. Bellingham has 40% tree canopy cover within City limits, which compares favorably with other cities in our region. Over half of Bellingham's canopy cover is on private land,

with most of the remainder in City parks and open space and University land. Bellingham also has a relatively high Tree Equity Score regionally, which relates canopy cover and population size. In gathering community input in Phase 2, over 1,600 individual responses were received. 80% of respondents envisioned increasing tree canopy cover in the City; however, nearly all of the potential for increase is on private rather than public land. Over half of all respondents ranked urban forests as among their top 3 priorities from a list of community amenities. Phase 3 plan development includes review of existing regulations and municipal codes, and drafting a vision statement and goals for Bellingham's urban forest. Goals include: A) Protect and expand the urban forest in alignment with community values; B) Protect and restore priority habitat area and movement corridors for wildlife; C) Manage the urban forest to support healthy and safe trees; D) Adapt the urban forest for climate change resilience; E) Collaborate with diverse stakeholders in urban forest management; and F) Monitor performance and adapt strategies. Strategies and actions for each goal are currently under development while also considering other community priorities. Quantifying the benefits of Bellingham's urban forest, including ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration and stormwater runoff retention, suggests a valuation of the forest at approximately \$49 million. Challenges for urban forest management include land values, inequitable tree canopy distribution, and climate change. One immediate step that is needed is an Exceptional Tree Protection Ordinance to protect highly valued individual trees. Development of such an ordinance is planned for 2024.

- b. Steve H. asked whether the City has an urban forester. Steve J. replied that there are two City arborists, but no urban forester. All agreed such a position would be valuable for the City to have, including for the Arboretum. John T. asked whether concern over fire risk was evident in community feedback elicited in Phase 2, as it is a known concern for property owners bordering the Arboretum. Analiese replied not really, but the fuel load analysis did include the Arboretum, and that analysis could help indicate special actions that need to be taken for managing fire risk at the Arboretum. The Arboretum has a medium level of fuel loading risk, which is consistent with most urban forest areas in the City (only two sites have a high risk citywide).

- **House of Healing project update**

- a. Kendra Bradford shared results of the most recent Longhouse Steering Committee meeting. The lease agreement between the City and WWU for use of the preferred Longhouse site has yet to be finalized. The latest Longhouse site plan has the access road to the Longhouse being shortened and a smaller paved footprint. The existing footpath connector at the site will be retained as a relocated path along the north edge of the site, but with a green buffer for the Longhouse building. The size of the Longhouse itself and the entire site remains the same, but there is discussion about whether activities might expand at the site at some point in the future. Joan D. expressed concern about the Longhouse proposal setting a precedent for WWU expanding into the Arboretum, and resulting incompatibility with the purpose of the Arboretum as open space and an urban natural area. Steve H. reiterated that it is not the University's position to have any additional buildings at the Longhouse site or in the

Arboretum in general. Joan D. asked whether the Longhouse garden areas would involve native plant species. Kendra said that was her understanding, but that it was possible that some non-native medicinal species could end up being planted. John T. concurred, but added that most non-native medicinal plants would not be invasive or likely to escape from the gardens into the surrounding forest. Kendra mentioned that the new WWU lead on the Longhouse Project will be Chris Mead.

- **WWU Arboretum website update**

- a. John T. shared that he had reviewed several sections of the draft WWU Arboretum website (geology, plants, and birds) and provided feedback to David Engebretsen, jr. The style of the website has been updated to conform to the same accessible formatting used by WWU for its own website. Kendra B. suggested that Board members take responsibility individually for reviewing website sections. John T. will continue to serve as a liason for Board members' review and comment of website sections, forwarding material to David E. as progress is made.

- **New kiosks**

- a. Wayne G. hopes to have progress on new kiosk installation to report by January. Stay tuned.

6. New Business:

- **Proposal to add geocaches**

- a. John T. reported that City Parks received a proposal from WWU student Dylan Pugh, on behalf of the Mental Health Advocacy Group on campus, requesting permission to install four geocache boxes in the Arboretum. John T. invited Dylan to attend today's meeting and present the proposal to the Board. Since Dylan did not attend, this agenda item was tabled.

- **Approval of 2024 meeting dates**

- a. John T. presented the following 2024 monthly meeting dates for the Board's approval: 1/18, 2/15, 3/21, 4/18, 5/16, 9/19, 10/17, 11/21. Steve H. made a motion to accept these dates, seconded by Joan D. The motion passed unanimously.

- **Board review of SHABOG management documents (Master Plan, Bylaws)**

- a. Tabled until next Board meeting.

- **Public comment period**

- a. Joan D. raised the idea of having a public comment period be part of each Board meeting agenda, before old and new business updates. At the recommendation fo Board members, John T. agreed to put this as an item for discussion and formalization at the next meeting.

Joan D. made a motion to adjourn with Steve H. seconding. Meeting was adjourned at 5:26 p.m.