

SEHOME HILL ARBORETUM

To: Bellingham City Council
Western Washington University Board of Trustees

From: Sehome Hill Arboretum Board of Governors (SHABOG)

Date: March 16, 2022

Subject: 2021 SHABOG Annual Report

The Board of Governors of the Sehome Hill Arboretum respectfully submits the following **2021 Sehome Hill Arboretum Annual Report**, in compliance with the Inter-Local Agreement between the City of Bellingham and Western Washington University.

	MEMBER	DATE APPOINTED	TERM EXPIRES	APPOINTED BY
	John Furman (WWU Facilities)		Continuous	WWU
	Steve Janiszewski (City Parks & Rec Operations Manager) (Vice Chair)		Continuous	City
	John Tuxill (Chair)	03/28/2016	04/17/2022	WWU
	Janet Ott	12/18/2017	12/18/2023	City
	James Detke	01/25/2021	6/30/2023	WWU
	Grace Wang	11/13/2018	11/13/2021	WWU
	Joan Drinkwin	02/01/2018	02/09/2024	At large
	Kendra Bradford	05/09/2019	05/09/2022	City

Short History

The Arboretum was established in 1974 through an “Inter-Local Cooperation Agreement” between the City of Bellingham and Western Washington State College. There have been several iterations of the agreement over the years, with the most recent version signed in 2016, and due to expire in 2025. This shared stewardship model is grounded in the core intent that the Arboretum is to be preserved in a natural state to the greatest extent possible, devoted to educational, aesthetic, low impact recreation, and research activities. Past and future development determined to be consistent with those activities is required to be compatible with sound ecological principles.

2021 Activities Report

Board Members & Meeting Schedule

Board membership was stable in 2021, with one board member whose term expired in February (Joan Drinkwin) being reappointed for a second term. Another board member whose term expired in November (Grace Wang) agreed to continue serving for a one-year additional term. James Detke joined the Board at the start of the year and has served as Secretary since February. The COVID-19 pandemic meant the Board continued to meet in a virtual webinar Zoom format during 2021, in keeping with City policy for public advisory boards. The November 2021 Board meeting was cancelled due to the historic flooding that occurred in the City.

WWU Longhouse Proposal

In the first half of 2021 the Board continued working to gather information and evaluate the proposal by WWU for a campus Longhouse (House of Healing) to be sited in Sehome Hill Arboretum. The specific location under consideration is a cleared, levelled, grassy field to the right (eastern) side of the main entrance road just past the access gate. This site is designated as a picnic area in the 2002 Master Plan, but has never been developed. The Board met multiple times with University and City staff to discuss the status of the Longhouse proposal and clarify the Board's role in the administrative steps that would need to be followed if the project were to move forward. By midsummer, it was clear that the University's efforts to secure funding for the Longhouse would be successful. At the Board's September meeting, following presentations by WWU President Sabah Randhawa, WWU Executive Director of American Indian/Alaska Native and First Nations Relations Laural Ballew, and Bellingham Mayor Seth Fleetwood, the Board drafted and unanimously approved a revision to the Inter-Local Agreement that states:

The City authorizes Western to design and construct a Longhouse on City-owned property within the Arboretum at the general location shown in Exhibit-B. Western shall assume all responsibility for maintenance, repair, and management of the Longhouse. Western assumes full liability for any claims that arise out of it, and both parties agree that a Longhouse management and operation plan further describing the long-term management and operation of the Longhouse, which shall be agreed upon by both parties, may be implemented at a future date.

In October, Board member Kendra Bradford joined the Longhouse Steering Committee as a liaison for SHABOG to remain directly involved in the planning of this important project, which is expected to continue throughout 2022.

Arboretum Information Repository (CEDAR)

Board members Joan Drinkwin and Kendra Bradford worked with the CEDAR network at WWU Libraries to create an electronic information repository for reports, photos, and other documents related to Sehome Arboretum, including research projects that the Arboretum has hosted. The Arboretum's CEDAR page will also be accessible from the City's Arboretum website.

Trail Maintenance

In February, the Washington Trails Association (WTA) held work parties to clear hazardous trees, improve water drainage, and remove social trails near the Allen Avenue entrance and along the Elderberry Trail. These were the first trail maintenance work parties to take place in the Arboretum since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Board expresses its great appreciation to Arlen Bogaards (WTA Director) and the dedicated volunteers who helped with this ongoing effort to maintain and, where appropriate, upgrade the Arboretum's trail network.

Invasive Species Management

During 2021 five volunteer work parties to remove English ivy, Holly, and other invasive plants were held in the Arboretum in collaboration with City Parks (led by Amy Brown) and the WWU organization LEAD. Over 70 volunteers took part in the parties, which focused on an area just past the main entrance gate to the Arboretum, inside the forest. The Board expresses its great appreciation to Amy Brown, LEAD, and the many volunteers who helped on this effort.

Rock Falls and Tree Falls

The historic tunnel adjacent to the upper parking lot remained closed for 2021 due to potentially hazardous unstable rock conditions in the tunnel's interior. A steel grate installed at each opening prevents public access. No further rockfalls have occurred in the tunnel since 2020, and steps to stabilize the rock surface are expected to be carried out in 2022 under supervision of a geotechnical crew. The stabilization would allow for reopening of the tunnel and full public access to the tunnel for a limited period of time.

Management of potentially hazardous dead and dying trees along the edge of the Arboretum adjacent to campus continues to be a major concern for WWU Facilities. In a forest stand immediately adjacent to the Fairhaven College Dorms, multiple trees that were blown down in a windstorm and/or required pre-emptive removal as hazards necessitated the closure and re-route of a trail section for much of the spring and summer months.

Urban Forest Management Plan and Arboretum Forest Health

In February and October the Board heard presentations by Analiese Burns (City of Bellingham Habitat and Restoration Manager) about the development of the City's Urban Forest Management Plan. The goal of the plan is to create an inter-departmental effort to assess, understand, preserve, and expand the City's forests. Current canopy cover and canopy change assessment is a major part of the plan that relates to the Arboretum. The City has completed phase one of the plan (data gathering, resource inventory, and mapping), and found that most of the Arboretum is classified as either Short or Tall Young Forest, with smaller areas of Mature Forest. The Arboretum Board looks forward to working with Analiese and the City to improve our current understanding of the Arboretum's ecological status and health as an urban forest.

Goals of the Board

1. Eradicate invasive species. Numerous student groups and interested citizens sporadically approach the Board with proposals to remove invasive species in certain locations. The Board welcomes and encourages these proposals!
2. Continue working with the Washington Trails Association to improve and maintain trails within the Arboretum.
3. Encourage collaborative stewardship with community and campus organizations interested in preserving and maintaining the Arboretum, enhancing user awareness, and other issues.
4. Raise the profile of the Arboretum through public service announcements and articles.
5. Review, and if necessary, amend by-laws and policies.

Meeting Minutes

The minutes for calendar year 2021 meetings are attached. The Arboretum by-laws prescribe that the minutes and reports be kept on file by the City Clerk and the WWU President's Office.