EQUITY IN THE URBAN FOREST: A SUSTAINABLE MODEL FOR GREEN REGIONAL GROWTH

Introduction

The City of Tacoma has identified development of urban forests and urban green infrastructure as key issues, and has set a goal to achieve 40% canopy cover across Tacoma by 2040. The City identified the Tacoma Mall neighborhood as a particularly important area for achieving these goals due to its lack of green space, poor health outcomes, and socioeconomic status. In response to this, the students of SEFS 571: Resource Policy and Administration partnered with the City of Tacoma to develop a primer on green infrastructure and livability, a presentation summarizing their activities and findings, and a package of communication tools and media.

The UW LCY team visited the Tacoma Mall neighborhood to explore potential green spaces as outlined in the 2040 Vision Plan, cultural resources, and livability. To gain further neighborhood perspectives related to this, students conducted telephone interviews with neighborhood stakeholders and reviewed relevant news articles and public comments on the proposed subarea plan.

The students found that the Tacoma Mall neighborhood lacks basic resources such as schools, parks, green spaces, and walkable streets, which, along with safety and street maintenance issues, are sources of concern for residents. While residents generally support green infrastructure proposals, they also worry about bearing the costs of green development, and communicated that meeting basic needs takes precedent in their lives.

Based on our discovery process, the UW LCY team makes the following recommendations to the City of Tacoma:

1. Improve communication about the benefits of green infrastructure, especially those benefits most relevant to business and property owners. Use resources provide by the UW LCY student team, including the report, media and communication tools, and the neighborhood master contact list.
2. Recognize the goals of local residents: increased quality of life and basic community space and resources.
3. Use the provided Social Marketing Process to guide outreach efforts. Focus community engagement efforts on exciting neighborhood events and achievements related to green infrastructure, and not on their technical benefits.
4. Use the provided Contact Master Plan for reaching key community stakeholders.
5. Implement demonstration projects. These demonstration projects might include planting of street trees, construction of street-side phytoremediation swales, greening of the Madison School and of the connection to community garden, and enhancement of existing oak groves.

The UW LCY team additionally conducted a literature review to document the ways urban green infrastructure might benefit key neighborhood constituencies: residents, business owners, and property owners.