



INFORMATIONAL MEMORANDUM

TO: Community Services & Safety Committee
FROM: Rachel Bianchi, Deputy City Administrator
CC: Mayor Allan Ekberg
DATE: April 21, 2020
SUBJECT: Seattle City Light Pole Yard

ISSUE

The Community Services and Safety Committee requested an update on the Seattle City Light (SCL) pole yard located in the Allentown neighborhood.

BACKGROUND

In the summer of 2015, it came to the attention of City staff that SCL was storing poles on right of way the agency owns adjacent to the Duwamish Hill Preserve in the Allentown neighborhood. The City received complaints from homeowners in the area regarding the smell. City staff met with SCL staff in September and October of 2015 and was told that the storage was necessary due to a multi-year pole replacement project, and that the storage area was moved from another location in Tukwila, which was adjacent to the North Wind's Weir. They relocated because they were looking to partner with a restoration company to set up a mitigation banking site at the old location. However, as of this writing no permits have been submitted for such a project.

At that time, SCL staff indicated that the odor was not much of an issue and that they would look at ways to mitigate the smell, including potential for increased plantings, masking agents and potentially covering the poles. City staff asked that they store a minimum amount of poles on the property – effectively moving to on-demand sourcing – but that idea was rejected by SCL staff due to the pole replacement project.

It is important to note that SCL has moved away from using creosote, and pentachlorophenol (PCP), as preservatives. SCL has specific environmental goals and discontinuing these preservatives is a part of this effort. The odor associated with the poles is actually diesel and not creosote; the diesel is used as a vehicle to deliver the preservatives into the poles and eventually the diesel odor evaporates (though not during the duration that the poles are stored in the yard).

As a result of this, the City contacted the Puget Sound Clean Air Authority (PSCAA), which is the regulator for odor- and air-related issues in the region. PSCAA and the City partnered to install an air quality monitor at Duwamish Park. While the air quality monitor cannot address odor, the PSCAA wanted to be able to determine whether there were adverse impacts to air quality in the neighborhood. They have since released a report on those findings, which can be found here:

<https://psccleanair.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3505/AllentownReportFinal?bidId=> The report indicates that the fine air particles and black carbon levels in Allentown are similar and slightly less than the overall Duwamish River Valley. The report does not address the SCL pole yard. Since 2015, when complaints have come into the City they have been referred to the PSCAA. The Tukwila Municipal Code is silent on odor-related issues. City staff refer other odor-related complaints to the PSCAA as well.

In 2017, SCL entered into an agreement with Tukwila Parks and Recreation to plant a vegetation buffer along the fence separating the two parties. This was the first attempt at odor mitigation and it was acknowledged that it would take several years for the vegetation to grow sufficiently to mitigate the odor.

SCL worked with the Duwamish Valley Youth Corps to establish the vegetation buffer. SCL has recently indicated they would like to continue the program.

Recently, Code Enforcement staff met with SCL's Environmental Manager/Real Estate Director, Bill Deveraux, who was also the same staff member involved in the 2015 discussions. He shared that they are currently testing a new wood preservative to further reduce environmental and human impacts and in January of this year issued a new "material standard" for its use. At this time, it is too early to understand whether the new preservative will reduce the odor issue in the neighborhood.

The City lacks any enforcement tool regarding the odor issue associated with the pole yard. As stated above, the pole yard is on SCL property and the TMC is silent on odor issues. SCL has indicated they will not move the pole yard as it is the best location to serve their pole replacement program.

RECOMMENDATION

Information only.