

4.1 DRAFT TREE MANAGEMENT POLICY

(Author:LS)

Responsible Director: Ossie Martinz

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A draft Tree Management Policy has been developed for Council consideration.

The Policy aims to form a clear understanding and agreement with the community on how Council will manage its trees located on Council managed land.

Officers seek Council approval to publicly exhibit the draft Policy and invite community submissions.

PURPOSE

- Provide an update on the development of the Policy.
- Seek Council approval to publicly exhibit and invite community submissions for review before presenting a final Policy to Council for consideration.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS/ISSUES

- Development of a Tree Management Policy was recommended by the Tree Management internal audit endorsed by the Audit and Risk Committee to further strengthen Council's management of the trees and the community's understanding of its obligations.
- Policy clearly defines Council's responsibility for the management of trees on its land. Policy provides a set of principles, relevant legislation and operational guidance to assist manage public expectations and concerns relating to trees.
- The Policy recommends amending current tree removal criteria from two (2) years useful life expectancy to a range of three to five (3-5) useful life expectancy to support the earlier intervention when a tree has been assessed as being in the final useful years of its life and the option to remove the risk and commence the renewal process is available.

The increase from two (2) years to a range of three to five (3-5) years is proposed due to the following rationale when a tree is dying or in decline:

- poses a higher risk to community due to likelihood of failure;
 - ceases to provide both environmental and health and well-being expected from a healthy tree; and
 - typically requires higher levels of reactive maintenance.
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- The range will be applied based on the risk zone the tree is located.
- For trees located in very high to high risk locations a tree will be approved for removal within five (5) years of its useful life expectancy, while in Moderate to Low risk areas a tree can be approved for removal within three (3) years of its useful life expectancy.
- Council's trees exist in the community alongside other vital assets such as roads, footpaths, driveways, telecommunications and power lines which at times come into conflict with each other. This Policy provides clarity on Council's obligations however also recognises that in many cases there are numerous competing priorities which Council has to consider and make decisions to minimise the impacts.
- In line with the new Council term and Local Government Act requirements Council's Road Management Plan (RMP) will be updated including community consultation. Any significant impacts from the RMP will be reflected in the final Tree Management Policy.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The draft Policy has been developed in line with the current operational and capital resources. It is expected that the implementation of the Policy will optimise the use of Council resources allocated to the management of trees.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

Officers seek approval to publicly exhibit the draft policy and invite community feedback. All community submissions will be reviewed and appropriate feedback will be integrated into a final Policy to be presented for Council consideration.

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RECOMMENDATION

That Council approve the draft Tree Management Policy (Attachment 1) for public exhibition and invite community submissions for review before finalising the Policy for Council consideration and endorsement.

INTRODUCTION

To provide an update on the development of a new Tree Management Policy and seek Council approval to publicly exhibit the draft Policy and invite community submissions for review before presenting a final Policy for Council consideration. The policy aims to form a clear understanding with the community on how Council will manage its trees on a day to day basis.

BACKGROUND

Tree protection and preservation are central tenets in Monash's vision of "an innovative and environmentally sustainable garden city: resilient, diverse and thriving" (Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2016-2026), as canopy provides intrinsic community and ecological value to Council. Monash City Council has an abundance of established trees within Council reserves, streets and private residences, all of which are essential to the surrounding environment and habitat. The importance of these trees therefore, in relation to the environment, community and sustainability, indicates the need for robust tree management policy which supports the protection of existing trees and promotes new tree planting.

In 2018, Council adopted the Monash Urban Landscape and Canopy Vegetation Strategy, including the resolution to increase tree canopy cover to 30% by 2040. Monash 2021 Strategy has a primary focus area of a 'green and naturally rich city'.

In 2019 Council's Audit and Risk Committee initiated as part of its annual program an audit of its tree management practices. The audit identified a series of recommendations including the development of a policy aimed at further strengthening Council's day to day management of its highly valued trees.

The Policy provides guidance and direction on the continued maintenance, management and protection of trees located on Council managed land, including streets, roads, reserves and other public open space.

The Policy also provides clarity on Council's tree management practices to enable efficient, effective and consistent communication and active response with the community on tree matters.

DISCUSSION

The draft Policy has been developed in consultation with key internal stakeholders such as Risk and Insurance, Engineering, City Design and City Planning along with an extensive benchmarking exercise against a number of local, interstate and international authorities to develop an informed position on the key areas of the Policy.

The Policy aims to be very clear in its scope and focus on Council managed trees and the activities of Council in its day to day management of them to benefit the community.

The objectives of the Policy include:

- To recognise the importance of the tree canopy throughout the City
- To recognise the importance of street trees, bushland and indigenous trees and the ecological and economic role they play in the City
- To increase and enhance the extent of tree canopy throughout the City through planting of appropriately selected trees in streets, public spaces and bushland areas
- To provide workable assessment criteria for the management of trees on Council land e.g. tree removal, pruning and planting
- To meet all legislative requirements and standards relating to the management of Council trees.

The Policy includes the following key principles which aim to guide the day to day decision making and actions carried out by Council and its officers on tree matters.

TREE RETENTION

Trees are a high value asset not easily replaced therefore protecting and retaining trees is a key principle.

PLANTING

Opportunities for additional tree planting on reserves will be identified proactively and actioned on an ongoing basis to assist in achieving the goal of 30% canopy cover by 2040.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Trees will be managed so that any risks to the public are minimised to the greatest extent possible.

PROPERTY PROTECTION

Trees will be managed so that any risks to property damaged now, and in the future, are minimised.

CUSTOMER RESPONSIVENESS

Residents and other customers concern with trees will be responded to promptly and with empathy, with the goal of resolving with the best possible outcome for tree retention and customer satisfaction.

GOVERNANCE

Plan, deliver, monitor and report on all tree maintenance activities to ensure compliance with all relevant legislation, regulations, policies and plans.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Council will form a clear understanding with the community relating to its day to day management of its urban forest with a particular focus on canopy trees. The Policy will guide all decision making and consultation with the community on tree matters.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This Policy will play an important role in building understanding and trust within the community in relation to how trees are managed.

Monash residents highly value their green, leafy environment, in fact many new arrivals cite the green character as one of the reasons they moved to Monash.

The Policy will enable our diverse community to better understand how we manage our trees, and create unity in understanding of their value. This is especially important as many of our residents who have settled from other countries aren't used to living alongside trees and have limited knowledge about them.

By providing a clear Policy on how we manage trees, each member of the community is treated equally through a consistent response and action from Council on tree issues.

The health and wellbeing benefits of a healthy urban forest are well documented. Trees provide cooler and cleaner air, soak up heavy rains, reduce erosion, provide windbreaks, and help reduce carbon emissions. Suburbs with a healthy canopy experience lower temperatures on high heat days, helping to protect the most vulnerable in our community from high heat events. Cleaner air supports those with respiratory issues. Climate change impacts include more heat events and flooding, a healthy, robust tree population helps to mitigate these effects which benefits every member of our community.

A number of Council's strategic documents identify community engagement and education as key actions aimed at building understanding and capacity to contribute to the local environment.

This Policy identifies through Council's 'Green Shoots' framework further opportunities to strengthen the capacity within the community to be well informed and participate in the management of its urban forest.

Green Shoots offers multiple entry points for every member of our diverse community to engage with trees and nature and be part of the rich learnings that arise from every interaction with our natural world.

Trees play a pivotal role in the ecosystem health of our local environment and it's crucial that our community understands their value. Our residents have the opportunity for their lives to be enriched through their experiences and increased knowledge of trees and the positive contribution they make to our urban environment.

CONSULTATION

Community consultation on this Policy is considered a valuable tool to ensure the Policy is considered by a wide range of community stakeholders and tested to ensure it finds the right balance with community expectations for Council to deliver its day to day tree management operations.

The consultation will also be an opportunity for Council to provide the community with an insight into the day to day operations that are carried out to maintain Council's tree's in a safe and healthy condition while adhering to regulations. This may include examples of; tree pruning, tree removal, planting and inspections as well as showcasing some public trees that residents have identified as being highly valued by them.

A community consultation period between January and March will be facilitated via Councils engagement platform Shape. This platform will provide key information and background on each of the principles and aspects within the Policy and demonstrate how the community and Council values trees. The platform will provide a survey with a range of questions for community members to share their views.

The consultation will be an opportunity for the community to learn more about trees and any feedback will guide future tree education programs. Once the Policy has been adopted by Council, we can more proactively educate and engage the community of our trees, focussing on the rich benefits they provide to the community and how Council and the community can work together to increase and take care of our canopy. A future tree education program will also address common questions and issues related to urban trees.

A report will be generated at the conclusion to summarise the community feedback and will be provided as an attachment to the Council report seeking endorsement.

It is expected that this consultation will result in individual tree matters being raised. All enquiries of this nature will be registered and responded to in line with Council's customer service guarantee.

CONCLUSION

The Tree Management Policy will form a clear agreement with the Monash community on the principles, objectives, regulations, legislation and arboricultural work practices that will be used to guide the day to day management of trees.

It is recommended Council approve the draft Tree Management Policy (Attachment 1) for public exhibition and invite community submissions for review before finalising the Policy for Council consideration and endorsement.