

4.4 TREE MANAGEMENT POLICY 2021

(Author: LS)

Responsible Director: Ossie Martinz

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Tree Management Policy has been developed for Council adoption following consultation and engagement with a range of key stakeholders.

The consultation has indicated support for the policy and identification of areas for continued improvement from the community such as tree planting, retention of trees for habitat and supporting residents who have limited capacity in maintaining high periods of leaf fall.

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

PURPOSE

- Provide an update on the development of the policy which has been informed by the results of the recently completed community consultation.
- To seek Council endorsement of the Tree Management Policy 2021

KEY CONSIDERATIONS/ISSUES

- Following Council's endorsement of the draft Tree Management Policy, the policy has undergone consultation with the community. The community feedback has been reviewed and considered carefully including in situations where a specific tree has been identified, a follow up inspection and response has been provided directly to the customer.
- The consultation results (Refer to Attachment 1) indicate that the community overall agrees with the policy including guiding principles, tree protection, planting and the risk based approach to guide its approach and decision making relating to the removal and ongoing maintenance of trees.
- The consultation has identified aspects the community would like Council to give more attention. These areas include; increased tree planting, support for residents who have limitations cleaning up leaf litter, retention of more 'habitat' trees and careful selection of new trees within the community to minimise future conflicts e.g. power lines. These aspects will form part of the work that is done post policy adoption to deliver on the objectives of Council and the Policy.

- 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. The RMP identifies that Council will apply a risk based approach to determining the use of the most appropriate control to minimise the likelihood of significant consequences for the community and the streetscape.

Council has invested in conducting an annual inspection of its street trees to identify non-compliant vegetation and act appropriately. This may lead to pruning, removal and the use of a range of traffic controls such as signage or road markings to guide road users where Council has deemed it appropriate to maintain vegetation on or within the clearance space due to the importance of the vegetation. All inspections and actions will be recorded in Council's asset management system followed by the appropriate community consultation to inform of the recommended management approach.

- A number of topics within the Policy were identified as requiring further explanation. Examples include; Useful Life Expectancy (ULE), Amenity Evaluation and infrastructure clearances. It is proposed that as part of the upgrade of Council's website that new and improved content be developed with a dedicated section for Trees. These pages will provide more detail including examples to support the community to learn more about each aspect. This was in part trialled as part of the consultation effort with educational videos created to provide further insight into the inner workings of Council's tree management.
- The consultation also identified that the community would like to see a 'Significant Tree Register' developed to provide recognition of the most 'significant' trees Council has on its land. It is planned to commence this project in August 2021.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The 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.

The community consultation has identified that an increase in both street and reserve tree planting is supported. In response officers will prepare a

budget nomination for Council to consider as part of the 2022/23 budget cycle.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

The Tree Management Policy 2021 will form a clear agreement with the Monash community on the principles, objectives, regulations, legislation and work practices that will be used to guide the day to day management of trees.

It is recommended Council endorse the Tree Management Policy (Attachment 2).

4.5 TREE MANAGEMENT POLICY 2021

(Author: LS)

Responsible Director: Ossie Martinz

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1. Note the results of the community consultation and recommended changes to the draft Policy.*
- 2. Endorse the Tree Management Policy 2021 (Attachment 2).*

INTRODUCTION

In December 2020 Council endorsed the request to seek community submissions on the Draft Tree Management Policy during March 2021. The consultation has resulted in positive level of engagement and has seen a range of feedback provided which has ranged from individual tree concerns to the impact on climate and everything in between. Trees matters spark healthy debate and the consultation has shown this, as for every response that has supported trees and their role, there has been a balancing view to identify the risk and concern they can create.

The Policy aims to form a clear understanding with the community on how Council will manage its trees on a day to day basis. The guiding principles recognise the importance of balancing competing priorities and their impact on the community.

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

Community Consultation

The following provides a summary of the consultation event and its key findings. Please refer to Attachment 1 for further detail.

- Community consultation was conducted via Council's engagement platform Shape. This event ran from the 3/2/2021 until the 14/3/2021.
- The consultation included a series of questions and ranking tasks to gauge the community feedback on the key aspects of the Policy.
- During this event hard copy surveys were also distributed by request along with a number of email and direct phone responses to discuss individual situations and the Policy more broadly.
- This engagement event resulted in the Shape website receiving 742 views, 619 visits, 422 visitors and 120 different contributors.
- The website also included a series of information pages relating to a number of the key activities Council undertakes to maintain its trees e.g. planting, pruning and tree removal.
- This type of information will be further developed and included within an updated website in due course that aims to provide more insight for the community into the day to day activities which will build understanding and knowledge within the community on an historical high priority area.

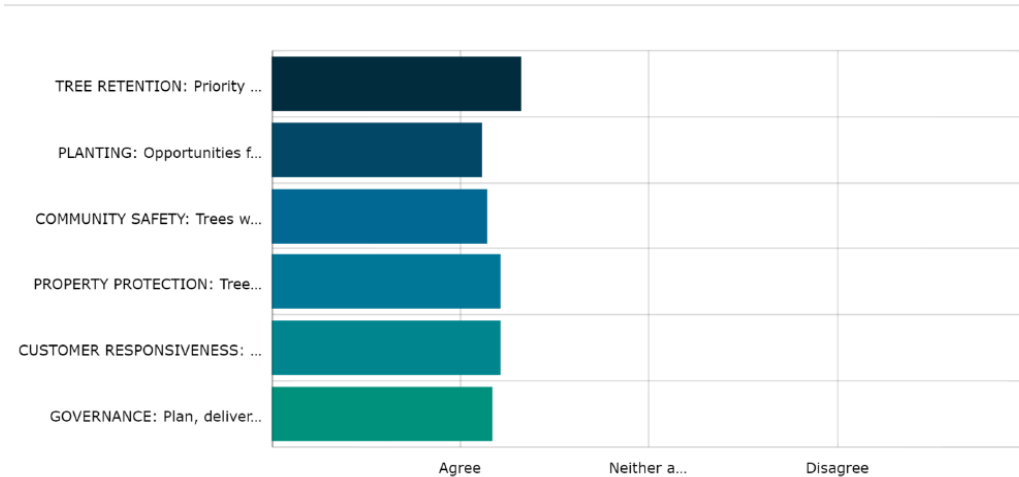
Consultation Results Summary

Section 1: Guiding Principles

Overall there was a healthy level of agreement for all of the proposed guiding principles.

1. To what extent do you agree with the guiding principles Council proposes to use to manage its trees on a day to day basis?

Matrix | Skipped: 11 | Answered: 121 (91.7%)



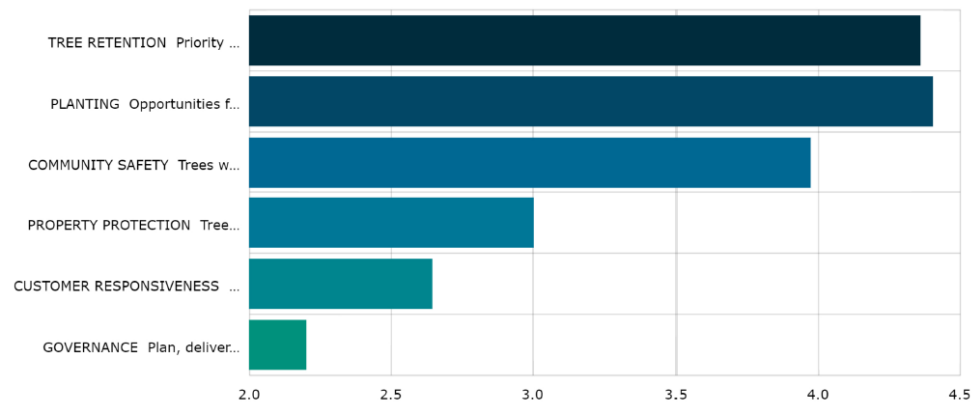
The community was also asked if you disagree with any of the principles, please explain why? The key themes of the responses related to the following;

- Concerns that trees are retained at the expense of community safety and property protection e.g. trees that are too large.
- Council should focus on planting native species only rather than exotic species.
- Council should not plant eucalyptus trees due to concerns with branches falling.
- Impact of leaf litter on residents with limited capacity to keep up with maintenance.

While the community response indicated overall agreement, the community was also asked to rank the principles in order of importance. Planting (4.40) was ranked most important closely followed by Retention (4.36), Community Safety (3.97), Property Protection (3.00), Customer Responsiveness (2.64) and Governance (2.20).

The Policy recognises that Council's day to day tree management must consider all of the principles equally in all day to day activities.

3. Rank the guiding principles in order of importance from highest to lowest? (drag each across to the right)
 Ranking | Skipped: 13 | Answered: 119 (90.2%)



The community was asked are there any changes and/or additional principles you would like us to consider. The key themes of the responses related to the following;

- Increase canopy cover target
- Improve protections against tree removals on private property.
- Considered selection of trees to ensure positive impact on climate while also minimising risk to community and property.

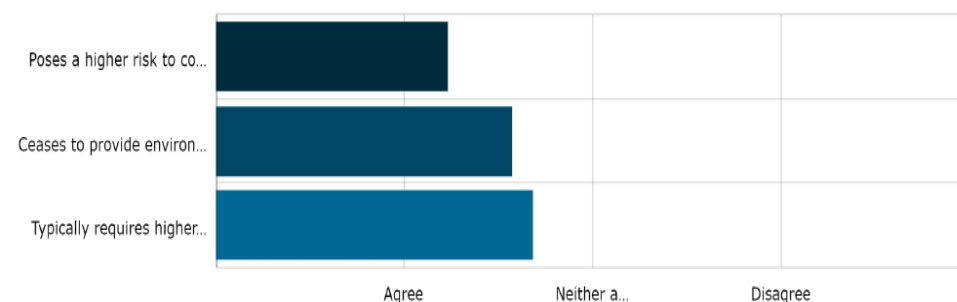
Section 2: Removal of Trees

The community was asked to indicate their support for removal of trees under the following circumstances:

- Poses a higher risk to community due to likelihood of failure;
- Ceases to provide environmental and health and wellbeing benefits expected from a healthy tree; and
- Typically requires higher levels of reactive maintenance.

The results indicate the community agrees with the policy position which allows Council’s arborist to balance the competing principles in their assessments and where appropriate recommend removal with the understanding replacement planting will be considered and delivered in due course.

5. To what extent do you support the policy position on removal of dying trees?
 Matrix | Skipped: 10 | Answered: 122 (92.4%)



The community was asked if you disagree with the policy on removal of dying trees, please explain why?

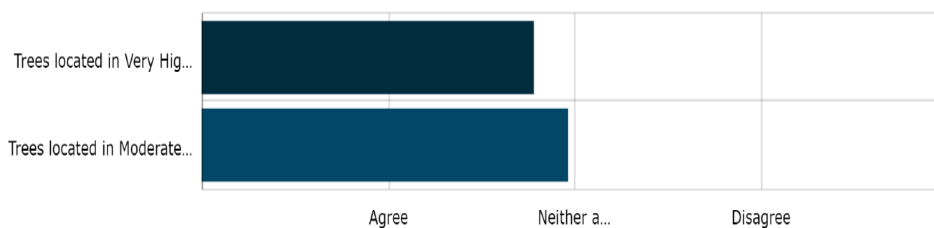
The key themes of the responses related to the following:

- Dying trees can be retained when they pose a low risk to community.
- Consultation is important in this decision making process.
- Dying trees should be considered as 'habitat' opportunities and treated accordingly.

The community was asked to what extent you support the policy position on tree removal according to life expectancy. The community response indicated that while there was support for this approach to remove trees within 5 and 3 years of their useful life expectancy there was also a cohort who were both neutral and disagreed with the approach which is consistent with the result from the ranking of the guiding principles with Retention being ranked highly by the community.

7. To what extent do you support the policy position on tree removal according to life expectancy?

Matrix | Skipped: 11 | Answered: 121 (91.7%)



The community was asked if you disagree with policy on tree removal according to life expectancy, please explain why?

The key themes of the responses related to the following:

- Dead trees still have value in the environment.
- Community safety is a priority.
- Maintain trees rather than remove.
- Useful Life Expectancy is difficult to understand.

Section 3: General Feedback

The community was asked to tell us what you like most about the Policy? The key themes of the responses related to the following:

- Recognises the value of trees;
- Policy will help community and council work better together;
- Community safety as guiding principle; and
- Community has been engaged in development of policy.

The community was asked to tell us what you would like to see improved?
The key themes of the responses related to the following:

- Increase in planting of trees to meet targets;
- Improve selection of trees to provide better, safer areas;
- Strengthen controls relating to tree removal on private property; and
- Clarify Council's approach to road clearance.

Recommended Changes to Draft Policy

The following changes are recommended to be endorsed by Council.

It is recommended to change the wording of section 4.8 to the following to clarify Council's approach to meeting its obligations under its Road Management Plan.

Council's Road Management Plan (RMP) sets out a series of clearances for vegetation to be maintained in order to minimise risks to road users, community and environment.

Council will inspect its trees to identify and implement appropriate controls to meet its obligations for road clearance. It may be appropriate due to the value of the tree/s that controls other than pruning and removal are used to achieve its objectives of minimising the risk while being able to maintain a thriving urban forest to benefit the community.

Other controls Council may use to minimise risk are:

- Installation of reflective plates on low structural branches above the roadway.
- Install white lines to direct traffic away from kerb.
- Install warning signs in streets known to have low clearance.

It is recommended to change the wording of 8.1 Tree Valuation to the following to improve the structure of the sentence:

"A valuation may be undertaken by a qualified arborist (Certificate Level 5) to assess the value of the tree/s as part of the development plans and planning applications, and to set a value for compensation, where it is agreed the best overall outcome is the removal of the tree/s."

It is recommended that Clause 10.2 be removed from the Policy as it was included in error and the clauses are not relevant to the management of Council's trees.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Council will form a clear understanding with the community relating to its day to day management of its trees 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 site 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.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

The community consultation has identified that an increase in both street and reserve tree planting is supported. In response officers will prepare a budget nomination for Council to consider as part of the 2022/23 budget cycle.

HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS

This report is in line with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities ACT 2006 and does not raise any specific considerations.

CONCLUSION

The Tree Management Policy 2021 will form a clear agreement with the Monash community on the principles, objectives, regulations, legislation and work practices that will be used to guide the day to day management of trees.

It is recommended Council endorse the Tree Management Policy (Attachment 2).

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Summary of Key Findings and Community Consultation Report

Attachment 2- Tree Management Policy 2021