

Item 2.

Public Exhibition - Greening Sydney Strategy

File No: X025479

Summary

This report recommends that Council endorse the draft Greening Sydney Strategy to be placed on public exhibition for community comment. The draft Greening Sydney Strategy (the Strategy) sets the directions, targets, and actions for all aspects of greening within the City of Sydney.

The Strategy aims for a greener Sydney that will help improve our health and wellbeing, reduce urban heat impacts, and bring nature into the city. The commitment to green living focuses on providing all of the community with equitable access to quality green spaces.

The Strategy recognises the importance of trees and other vegetation for the numerous environmental, social and economic benefits they provide to the community. It also acknowledges the potential to support diverse ecosystems in an urban environment and the important benefits biodiversity can bring.

The previous Greening Sydney Plan was unanimously adopted in May 2012 and has underpinned the City's greening program. This has led to significant greening achievements including a 24 per cent increase in canopy cover since 2008, a 13 per cent increase in parks and green spaces since 2009, a 180 per cent increase in the expansion and restoration of native bushland since 2014 and the establishment of 20 community gardens

The recommended new Strategy for public exhibition supports further work on greening the City. This update reflects changes over that time, documents our achievements and incorporates the latest research and data that supports the future strategic direction.

The Strategy outlines six directions, and 20 supporting actions that will contribute to a cool, calm and resilient city:

- Direction 1 – Turn grey to green
- Direction 2 – Greening for all
- Direction 3 – Cool and calm spaces
- Direction 4 – Greener buildings
- Direction 5 – Nature in the city
- Direction 6 - Greening together

The Strategy is to be delivered by the City in partnership with residents, local businesses, developers and volunteer groups. This will be achieved through services and projects delivered by the City, support provided to resident and community groups and new policies which will facilitate greening on private property by numerous stakeholders.

This report recommends that Council endorse the draft Greening Sydney Strategy for public exhibition. Following the exhibition period, all public comments will be considered, and the Strategy will be presented to Council, with any required changes, for adoption.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve the draft Greening Sydney Strategy (the Strategy), as shown at Attachment A to the subject report, for public exhibition; and
- (B) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to undertake minor editorial amendments prior to the exhibition of the draft Greening Sydney Strategy.

Attachments

Attachment A. Draft Greening Sydney Strategy

Background

1. Green infrastructure plays a vital role for the future of Sydney. It is a city's natural life support system, essential for all functions. It provides multiple social, environmental and economic benefits. Our society relies on these benefits every day, making green infrastructure essential infrastructure.
2. Cities around the world, including the City of Sydney, are embracing tree canopy and urban greening as a solution to address the climate and health challenges that our cities are facing. There is growing research and community recognition that trees and greening are essential infrastructure.
3. Community health, climate change and urban heat, and biodiversity and nature have been identified as the key risks to our city. Green infrastructure mitigates these risks. Whether it is for managing heat or mental health issues, happiness, physical activity or reduced incidence of disease and illness, an increase in our canopy cover, green space, and nature provides multiple benefits to the community.
4. As Sydney's density increases and the climate changes, increased and equitably accessible greening is essential to the liveability and efficient functioning of the city.
5. The Sustainable Sydney 2030 strategy commits the City to becoming green, global and connected. Our target was to increase our overall canopy cover to 23 per cent by 2030 and to 27 per cent by 2050 (from the 2008 baseline of 15.5 per cent).
6. This Strategy builds on the progress made over the last eight years and keeps us moving toward this target. The City is one of only a few councils in Australia that has consistently increased canopy cover, and is the only capital city to do so.
7. The Strategy also responds to the community's expressed need for more greening across the city, especially greener buildings. In the Sustainable Sydney 2050 community survey, 85 per cent of respondents said they want buildings covered with plants and that incorporate nature into their design. In addition, 77 per cent of respondents want a green city with parks, trees and nature.
8. Further, the recent survey undertaken as part of the City's Recovery Plan indicated an increase in the community's need for greening to be prioritised. Greening, and the health benefits it brings, is now well understood, recognised and highly valued across the community.
9. This Strategy updates and will supersede the City's Greening Sydney Plan, adopted by Council in May 2012.

Greening Sydney Strategy 2020-2030

10. The Strategy outlines the benefits, opportunities and obstacles to greening in our city and how we plan to implement and provide a cool, calm, beautiful and resilient place to live, work and visit.
11. The Strategy outlines six directions, and 20 supporting actions, to make Sydney greener:
 - (a) Direction 1 – Turn grey to green. Our target is to increase overall green cover to 40 per cent across the local area, including a minimum of 27 per cent tree canopy by 2050.

- (b) Direction 2 – Greening for all. In a just and fair city, it is vital that we distribute quality greening fairly across the city so that everyone shares the benefits provided by greening.
 - (c) Direction 3 – Cool and calm spaces. Addresses the two key issues facing most of the city’s residents relating to high urban heat and impacts to physical and mental health.
 - (d) Direction 4 – Greener buildings. Outlines three actions to ensure properties, which represents the largest proportion of land use across the local government area, provide their share of the greening and canopy cover required. This includes the development of a new Green Factor Score, which evaluates and quantifies the amount and quality of urban greening that a project provides.
 - (e) Direction 5 – Nature in the city. Outlines actions on how we will recognise and support Indigenous knowledge, and design and implement our greening strategies to maximise habitat potential and nature in the city.
 - (f) Direction 6 - Greening together. The community is one of the greatest resources for greening Sydney. The Strategy outlines how we will continue to provide, and increase, opportunities for active participation in greening activities. It includes the development of a new Greening Sydney Fund, where the City uses compensation received from the removal of our tree assets (during development works) towards a community grants program.
12. The Strategy includes a number of actions under each of the strategic directions, designed to collectively create the conditions to progress towards the vision and targets. The City will prioritise greening initiatives to address any inequities, to provide the greatest benefit, and to assist our most vulnerable communities.
13. The Strategy has been developed by City staff, with input from all divisions that have an opportunity to influence or physically green the City’s urban environment. Cross divisional teams will implement and promote the Strategy to ensure the City’s greening efforts and activities make Sydney a truly green City by 2050.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030

14. Sustainable Sydney 2030 is a vision for the sustainable development of the City to 2030 and beyond. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the City, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This report is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
- (a) Direction 1 - A Globally Competitive and Innovative City - Globally competitive cities are attractive places to live and are easy to get around in, to help businesses attract mobile global talent, and to increase opportunities for direct face-to-face connections. Sydney has consistently performed strongly in global rankings over the past decade. A challenge for the future is providing sufficient high quality greening to manage heat and health impacts.

- (b) Direction 2 provides a road map for the City to become A Leading Environmental Performer - the Strategy builds on the existing canopy cover targets (23 per cent by 2030, and 27 per cent by 2050) and includes a new greening target. The new target is to increase overall green cover to 40 per cent across the local area, including a minimum of 27 per cent tree canopy by 2050. The City is currently on track to meet these targets, with consistent increases in canopy cover since 2008 rising from 15.5 per cent to 19.2 per cent in 2020.
- (c) Direction 4 - A City for Walking and Cycling - the Strategy supports this Direction by ensuring the City's network of streets and open spaces are shaded to provide thermal comfort, and support active transport all year round.
- (d) Direction 5 - A Lively and Engaging City Centre - successful cities are alive and inviting during both day and night. They offer art, design, culture and entertainment, attractive public spaces and workplaces, great shopping experiences and easy access. A greener city is part of creating a better environment, that is visually appealing and encouraging exploration of the city and its diverse retail and entertainment offerings. Research has found that greener places result in higher commercial returns, as people spend more time, and money, in green spaces.
- (e) Direction 6 - Vibrant Local Communities and Economies - recognises and seeks to build on the City's diverse communities, lifestyles, interests and needs. The Strategy supports this through the ongoing recognition and support for our community and volunteer programs, such as community gardens and the City Farm. The Strategy also recommends an action to review how these programs are offered to ensure the City is able to meet the increased demand from the community wanting to connect with nature, and each other.
- (f) Direction 8 - Housing for a Diverse Population - reviewing how the city prioritises space for vehicles, instead of greening, can make housing more affordable for the 39 per cent of City of Sydney households that are car free. A greener city, combined with active and public transport, enables more households to become car free, making them able to redirect around an extra fifth of their income to rent or mortgage repayments.
- (g) Direction 9 - Sustainable Development, Renewal and Design - responds to sustainability and environmental imperatives facing our cities. How well a dense area functions depends on the availability and efficiency of a range of infrastructure, including green infrastructure. The Strategy aims to better capture the potential of laneways, streets and parks in public life and improve design excellence in buildings and properties overall. Greater dedication of space for greening and community uses improves the amenity, liveability, and health of the city.
- (h) Direction 10 - Implementation through Effective Governance and Partnerships - by taking an evidence-based approach to strategy development and actions, the City shows leadership and is able to influence other councils and agencies to be more successful at achieving access, health and environmental outcomes.

Organisational Impact

15. In developing the Strategy, consultation was undertaken with relevant City staff. Actions and projects are being proposed in the budgets and business plans of responsible units..
16. Implementing the Strategy will require a multi-disciplinary approach to ensure each portfolio (streets, parks, and properties), delivers their allocated share of the greening and canopy targets.
17. The time frame for implementing the majority of the Strategy will largely occur over a 10-year period and be completed by 2031. The inroad tree planting program will be delivered over a 20-year period and be completed by 2041.

Social / Cultural / Community

18. The Strategy will have significant benefits for the community, including providing significant physical and mental health benefits. Compelling research proves that:
 - (a) in neighbourhoods with a tree canopy of 30 per cent or more, adults had a lower likelihood of developing:
 - (i) psychological distress (by 31 per cent);
 - (ii) diabetes by (31 per cent);
 - (iii) cardiovascular disease (by 21 per cent);
 - (iv) cardio hypertension (by 21 per cent); and
 - (v) rating their general health as fair or poor over six years (by 33 per cent); and
 - (b) connecting with nature for as little as a couple of hours can reduce blood pressure, lower stress, improve cardio vascular and metabolic health, improve concentration, memory and attentiveness, lift feelings of depression, improve pain thresholds, improve feelings of energy, boost immune systems by increasing the count of the body's natural killer cells, increase anti-cancer protein production and help people lose weight.
19. The Strategy also provides opportunities for building social capital through community empowerment projects, such as community gardens, LandCare groups, planting days and specific projects, such as the City Farm.

Environmental

20. The United Nations describes climate change as the defining issue of our time. In June 2019, the City of Sydney declared that climate change poses a serious risk to the people of Sydney and should be treated as a national emergency. Our city must adapt to the changing climate and increase its resilience to the likely impacts.

21. Heatwaves are Australia's deadliest natural hazard. They now arrive earlier, are hotter, and last longer. Urban temperature extremes can present us with life-or-death situations. Urban heat mitigation through greening can significantly reduce human heat related morbidity and mortality. Research has found that:
 - (a) Individual trees can make a valuable difference to air temperatures, by as much as 10°C.
 - (b) At the local scale, temperatures at ground level also vary significantly. One study showed the difference was 10°C cooler in the street that had 30 percent canopy cover, compared to a street with just 10 percent canopy cover.
 - (c) At the precinct scale, groups of trees that combine to provide greater than 40 per cent canopy cover at the scale of a city block have been found to reduce local ambient air temperature by more than 1.3°C.
22. The Strategy outlines the opportunities to accelerate our action in the areas of canopy cover, greening and biodiversity. These actions help us in cooling local streets, reducing heat absorption, reducing energy needs, improving storm water quality, reducing storm water runoff, reducing dust and air pollution, sequestering carbon, and improving the diversity of the City's urban ecology.
23. The Strategy's responses to urban ecology – greening to provide habitat and enhance biodiversity in our urban area - will be critical in addressing research that has found Australia's urban areas contain disproportionately more threatened species than non-urban areas. Recent research shows that 30 per cent of Australia's threatened species (370 species) come from within our cities and towns. This reinforces the significance of planning and managing our landscapes to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

Economic

24. The Strategy will deliver economic benefits to the city. Research in other cities has shown that green urban environments increase property values, improve commercial activity in retail centres and are an attraction for employers to recruit and retain quality staff.
25. Greening, in particular canopy cover, is the most cost-efficient method of addressing urban heat. As greening also provides a multitude of environmental, social and economic benefits, every dollar invested provides a higher return.

Financial Implications

26. The draft Strategy includes actions that have capital and operational funding implications. A number of these actions are already incorporated into the City's approved Long Term Financial Plan.
27. However, the delivery of all of the City's actions in the Strategy require substantial additional capital works and operational expenditure funds to be allocated within future iterations of the 10-year Long Term Financial Plan, subject to Council approval. Additional funding will also be required outside the current 10-year financial planning horizon.

Relevant Legislation

28. Local Government Act 1993.
29. Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979.
30. State Environment Planning Policy (SEPP) Vegetation in Non-Rural Areas 2017.
31. Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012.
32. Sydney Development Control Plan 2012.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

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| 33. Start of public exhibition | April 2021 |
| 34. End of public exhibition | May 2021 |
| 35. Final Strategy submitted to Council for endorsement | mid-2021 |

Options

36. An option is to deliver the full Strategy planting program within 10 years. This would require additional capital funding of \$3.5M per annum, to be brought forward, potentially impacting the delivery of other City programs in the Long Term Financial Plan.
37. An option is to reduce the canopy and greening targets and minimise the extent of programs outlined in the Strategy. This option is not recommended, as the City's targets (i.e. 27 per cent canopy cover) are slightly under the level that research has found to be most beneficial (i.e. 30 per cent canopy cover). Further reductions in targets will impact on community health and wellbeing, and on providing a cooler city.
38. Not proceeding with the Strategy impacts the city in the short, medium and long term. This includes detrimental impacts regarding urban heat mitigation and community health and wellbeing.

Public Consultation

39. Following endorsement by Council, the draft Strategy will be placed on public exhibition for four weeks.
40. Public exhibition will be undertaken through the Sydney Your Say web page and advertised via the City's communication channels.
41. Notice of the exhibition will be published on the City's website.

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