

Public Exhibition – Tree Management and Donation Policy

File No: X085711

Summary

This report recommends that Council approve for public exhibition the draft Tree Management and Donation Policy. The draft Tree Management and Donation Policy (the Policy) sets the policy principles for all aspects of tree management within the City of Sydney.

The Policy aims for a greener Sydney that will help improve our health and wellbeing and reduce urban heat. The Policy also recognises the importance of trees and other vegetation for the numerous environmental, social and economic benefits they provide to the community.

The previous Tree Management Policy was unanimously adopted by Council in February 2013 and has a 10-year review period. The Tree Donation Policy was unanimously adopted by Council in May 2016 and has a five-year review period.

The recommended new draft Policy for public exhibition combines these two policies. It supports further work on greening the city following the adoption of the City's Greening Sydney Strategy in July 2021, and the current Urban Forest Strategy review. This update also reflects changes over that time, and incorporates the latest practices required to deliver the strategic directions.

The draft Policy outlines the City's policy principles for managing trees across seven key areas:

- Tree Management and Protection;
- Tree Species Selection and Planting;
- Tree Removal;
- Public Tree Asset Management;
- Community Consultation and Engagement;
- Tree Donation; and
- Trees as essential infrastructure.

This report recommends that Council approve for public exhibition the draft Tree Management and Donation Policy. Following the exhibition period all public comments will be considered and the Policy will be presented to Council, with any required changes, for adoption.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve for public exhibition the draft Tree Management and Donation Policy (the Policy), as shown at Attachment A to the subject report, for public exhibition ; and
- (B) Council note that the Tree Management and Donation Policy including any recommended changes, will be reported to Council for adoption following the exhibition period; and
- (C) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to undertake minor editorial amendments for clarity or correction of drafting errors prior to the exhibition of the draft Tree Management and Donation Policy.

Attachments

Attachment A. Draft Tree Management and Donation Policy

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. There is growing research and community recognition that green infrastructure is essential infrastructure.
2. Community health, climate change and urban heat, and biodiversity and nature have been identified as the key risks to our city. Green infrastructure, which includes trees, 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.
3. There are approximately 88,500 trees currently located within the City of Sydney Local Government Area (LGA). This includes the City's 34,500 street trees, 14,000 park trees, as well as an estimated 40,000 private trees. Collectively, these tree canopies cover 19.8 per cent of the LGA. The City is one of only a few councils in Australia that has consistently increased canopy cover over the past decade.
4. The Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision strategy commits the City to becoming green, global and connected. Our target is 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).
5. The Greening Sydney Strategy 2020-2030 builds on the progress made over the last nine years and keeps us moving toward this target. The Greening Sydney Strategy, adopted by Council in July 2021, has an overall target to increase green cover to 40 per cent across the local area, including a minimum of 27 per cent tree canopy by 2050.
6. The City has the following suite of tree management policies, plans and procedures to manage the urban forest:
 - (a) Tree Management Policy – provides the strategic framework for the management of trees in the City of Sydney's urban forest.
 - (b) Urban Forest Strategy – provides the strategic context and management for the urban forest, including specific canopy cover, species and age diversity targets.
 - (c) Tree Management Controls – identifies the land and trees protected under the statutory planning instruments (SEPP, LEP and DCP). There are severe penalties (up to \$1.1M) if these provisions are breached.
 - (d) Street Tree Master Plan – provides a guide to the provision and planting of street trees throughout the City of Sydney.
 - (e) Register of Significant Trees – identifies and recognises the significant trees in the City of Sydney and guides their management to ensure their protection for future generations.
 - (f) Tree Donation Policy – assists organisations and the community to donate trees to be planted in the City of Sydney's public domain.

- (g) Park Tree Management Plans (for our iconic parks) – provide proactive and effective management strategies for the maintenance and conservation of the parks' tree populations and long-term strategies for tree removal and replacement.
7. Regular reviews of each policy, plan and procedure are carried out, with major reviews undertaken on a five or ten yearly basis. This process identifies opportunities for improvement, with high levels of community involvement, to ensure the City's ongoing success in tree and urban forest management.
 8. This report provides information on the review of the existing Tree Management Policy and Tree Donation Policy, which have been combined and renamed to the Tree Management and Donation Policy. This Policy will supersede the current policies.

Tree Management Policy (current)

9. The current Policy's purpose is to:
 - (a) establish the City's commitment and future strategic direction for tree planting;
 - (b) protection, management and maintenance of its urban forest;
 - (c) address tree management and maintenance issues; and
 - (d) provide a framework for decision making, documentation and standardised processes to ensure consistency in tree management.
10. A review of the Policy found that minor changes were required to update the principles and policy statements, and to include new policies, plans and procedures. The main proposed amendments are to include two new sections for:
 - (a) Tree donation - to incorporate the policy principles in this Policy, streamlining the number of tree management policies in place.
 - (b) Trees as essential infrastructure – to incorporate how trees will be considered as long-term assets, similar to utilities and the built form.
11. The Policy is considered the 'umbrella document' in the City's suite of tree management policies. It supports and complements all other plans and strategies, providing specific policy statements on how individual trees will be managed. The Urban Forest Strategy, also under review, focuses more on the collective canopy and strategic management of all trees.

Tree Donation Policy (current)

12. The City first adopted a Tree Donation Policy in 2010, in response to many enquiries received about donating trees, often to commemorate an event, place or person. The Policy's purpose continues to be the provision of clear guidance to City staff and the community to assist all parties through the donation process.
13. Since the Policy's initial adoption in 2010, 43 trees and two bench seats have been donated.
14. A review of the Policy found that it could be incorporated into the City's Tree Management Policy, as it had similar wording relating to tree species selection, tree stock and quality requirements, planting guidelines and maintenance work.

15. The main proposed amendment to the Policy is to remove the donation category fees from the Policy and to include them within the City's Fees and Charges. This change will streamline the financial management of any donations to occur in accordance with the City's Fees and Charges and related delegations.
16. The tree and seat donation fee amounts are largely being retained, and are recommended as follows:
 - (a) \$1,000 per tree planted from 100 – 400 litre containers. These trees will be approximately two to four metres in height at planting.
 - (b) \$5,000 per tree planted in high profile locations that will be planted from 600 litre (or greater) containers. These trees will be approximately five metres (or more) in height at planting.
 - (c) \$3,000 per park seat, noting that the seat style and materials are specified in the City's Park Technical Manual.
 - (d) General donations will be accepted as a contribution to the City's tree planting programs, throughout the LGA.
17. The donation categories are considered appropriate as they cover the City's costs to supply the trees / seats and are still affordable for most sectors of the community. The costs compare favourably with other institutions who have charged a minimum rate of \$10,000 or more.

Tree Management and Donation Policy (draft)

18. The Policy outlines the City's policy principles for managing trees across seven key areas:
 - (a) Tree Management and Protection – best practice tree management and tree protection will be given high priority in all aspects of the City's activities.
 - (b) Tree Species Selection and Planting – with the underlying principle of planting "the right tree in the right location".
 - (c) Tree Removal - tree removal is a last resort option; however public safety always takes priority.
 - (d) Public Tree Asset Management - specialised care and management for our trees, as they are growing in a harsh urban environment.
 - (e) Community Consultation and Engagement - encourage consultation and communication about tree management and the urban forest.
 - (f) Tree Donation – provide guidance to the community and City staff on the tree donation process.
 - (g) Trees as essential infrastructure – outlines how trees will be considered as long-term assets, similar to utilities and the built form, ensuring tree removal is not an expedient option in our city, and planting locations are maximised.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

19. Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision renews the communities' vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2050. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the city, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This plan is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
- (a) Direction 2 - A leading environmental performer - the Policy supports the target to increase green cover to 40 per cent across the local area, including a minimum of 27 per cent tree canopy by 2050. Further, the policy principles clearly support best practice tree management, which is essential to deliver healthy trees and the greening and canopy targets.
 - (b) Direction 3 - Public places for all - the Policy will support improved and healthier public spaces, increasing the amenity, thermal comfort and attractive, providing more opportunities for social interaction and inclusion.
 - (c) Direction 4 - Design excellence and sustainable development - the Policy supports trees as essential infrastructure, with a forest that is fully integrated within the urban landscape. The coordinated design of nature-based solutions that prioritise trees and urban canopy cover will optimise the connections between grey, blue and green infrastructure, and promote resilience and benefits for all society. The dedication of space for tree canopy and community uses improves the amenity, liveability, and health of the city.
 - (d) Direction 5 - A city for walking, cycling and public transport - the Policy 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.
 - (e) Direction 6 - An equitable and inclusive city - the Policy supports the provision of equitable community access to canopy cover, based on geographic location and also for future generations.
 - (f) Direction 7 - Resilient and diverse communities - the Policy supports engagement with the community in the sustainable management of trees. We will engage with our communities to highlight their role as custodians, to inform them of any emerging risks and involve them in the actions required to mitigate those risks.

Organisational Impact

20. In developing the Policy, consultation was undertaken with relevant City staff. The policy principles and actions will be implemented primarily by the City's Tree Management Team and related tree maintenance service providers and consultants.
21. The review of the Policy has identified that minimal changes are required in the management of the City's trees. Basically, it will be 'business as usual' for the City's Tree Management Team in implementing the Policy.
22. Collectively, Council and the community will need to continue working in a collaborative manner to ensure the specified Policy principles and canopy targets are achieved.

23. This Policy will be implemented and scheduled for review in 10 years' time, to coincide with the next Urban Forest Strategy review in 2032.

Social / Cultural / Community

24. The Policy 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:
 - (i) developing psychological distress (by 31 per cent);
 - (ii) developing diabetes by (31 per cent);
 - (iii) developing cardiovascular disease (by 21 per cent);
 - (iv) developing cardio hypertension (by 21 per cent); and
 - (v) rating their general health as fair or poor over six years (by 33 per cent).
 - (b) connecting with nature for as little as a couple of hours can reduce blood pressure, lower stress, improve cardiovascular 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.
25. The Policy also provides opportunities for building social capital through community involvement such as the tree donations planting events.

Environmental

26. 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.
27. 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.

28. The Policy supports the City's actions to accelerate an increase canopy cover, greening and biodiversity. The focus on achieving the most from each tree, through best practice tree management and considering trees as essential infrastructure, will 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.

Economic

29. The Policy 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.
30. 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.
31. Best practice tree management, such as reducing unnecessary damage to trees, improving their health and structure, and increasing their longevity, is vital to increasing canopy cover and the benefits it provides over time.

Financial Implications

32. The implementation of the Policy is funded from within the City's operational and capital budgets and forward estimates that form part of the City's Long-Term Financial Plan. Note that individual capital projects will include funding for tree planting, where appropriate, and approval will be sought as part of total project budgets.

Relevant Legislation

33. Local Government Act 1993.
34. Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979.
35. State Environment Planning Policy (SEPP) Vegetation in Non-Rural Areas 2017.
36. Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012.
37. Sydney Development Control Plan 2012.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

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|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 38. Start of public exhibition | Mid December 2022 |
| 39. End of public exhibition | Early 2023 |
| 40. Final Policy submitted to Council for endorsement | Mid 2023 |

Options

41. An option is to not combine the two policies and have separate Tree Management Policy and Tree Donation Policy. This option is not recommended, as the policies are similar and are ideally implemented as one.

Public Consultation

42. Following endorsement by Council, the draft Policy will be placed on public exhibition for eight weeks.
43. Public exhibition will be undertaken through the Sydney Your Say web page and advertised via the City's communication channels.
44. Notice of the exhibition will be published on the City's website.

VERONICA LEE

Director City Services

Karen Sweeney, Urban Forest Manager