

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE DIVISION REPORTS

ITEM 10.1	URBAN TREE CANOPY PLAN
REPORTING MANAGER	EXECUTIVE MANAGER PARKS AND RECREATION
TRIM FILE REF	2018/264441
ATTACHMENTS	1 ⇒ Northern Beaches Council Draft Urban Tree Canopy Plan 2018 (Included In Attachments Booklet)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

To seek approval to publically exhibit the draft Urban Tree Canopy Plan and identify how the community can participate in actions to increase the urban forest within the Northern Beaches.

SUMMARY

On 27 March 2018 Council resolved that:

- A. *Staff bring forward an Urban Forest Strategy to improve the tree canopy, habitat and create healthy and diverse landscaping in our streets and parks that contribute to the health and wellbeing of all that enjoy our area*
- B. *Staff provide a report at the same time as to how we can encourage the community to participate in actions to increase the urban forest within the Northern Beaches LGA.*

The trees of the Northern Beaches are integral to the character, heritage and natural beauty of the area. Our community is passionate about the environment and there is a strong desire to protect and enhance the natural and built elements.

A Draft Urban Tree Canopy Plan (refer Attachment 1) has been developed to provide a strategic framework for the management of our urban trees and canopy cover.

Four strategic objectives have been developed to provide a comprehensive and cohesive approach to protecting and sustaining our urban trees:

1. Protecting existing urban trees
2. Maintaining the existing urban tree canopy cover
3. Improving tree diversity and health
4. Motivate, inspire and support the community to protect and enhance our urban trees.

Each strategic objective contains a series of management principles which underpin our management practices and guide the way in which we will work and behave to meet the objectives. During the exhibition period we will be seeking feedback from the community on the proposed strategic directions and actions within the draft Plan.

As a result of the draft Plan, it's envisaged the Northern Beaches will be greener, with an increased canopy cover and more trees in towns, villages, streets and on private property. Highlights include:

- At least 100,000 trees planted Council owned public space under a pro-active tree planting program for streets and public reserves
- Protecting iconic trees with an 'Iconic Tree Register'

- A minimum of two (2) advanced trees will be planted as an offset for any mature tree that has to be removed
- A series of tools and programs to encourage more trees on private land
- Aiming to be the top Council in Sydney for canopy cover on Council managed lands by 2038.

RECOMMENDATION OF GENERAL MANAGER ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

That:

- A. Council place the Draft Urban Tree Canopy Plan on public exhibition for 28 days.
 - B. Council note the actions in the Draft Plan that address community participation in enhancing the urban forest.
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REPORT

BACKGROUND

On 27 March 2018 Council resolved that:

- A. *Staff bring forward an Urban Forest Strategy to improve the tree canopy, habitat and create healthy and diverse landscaping in our streets and parks that contribute to the health and wellbeing of all that enjoy our area.*
- B. *Staff provide a report at the same time as to how we can encourage the community to participate in actions to increase the urban forest within the Northern Beaches LGA.*

The trees of the Northern Beaches are integral to the character, heritage and natural beauty of our area. As indicated in the community survey in 2017, our community is passionate about the environment and there is a strong desire to protect and enhance the natural and built environment.

The urban tree canopy refers to trees on public and private land in an urban area. Canopy refers to the extent of an individual tree's crown (including branches and leaves) or the combined canopy area of trees. The urban tree canopy is recognised as a primary component of the ecosystem in the same way that roads, car parks, footpaths, buildings and other structures form part of the complex built environment.

There is an abundance of research which demonstrates the urban tree canopy as having significant benefits to the local community.

Trees can provide health benefits ranging from the reduction of people's exposure to the sun, providing shade which helps to cool the environment, as well as reducing heat related illnesses and encouraging outdoor activity to improve mental health.

Trees also assist to minimise air pollution by filtering particulate matter out of the atmosphere, reducing stormwater and nutrient run off into waterways and providing shade which cools the environment by reducing heat storage.

The economic benefits of trees are that they provide an energy saving in buildings through shading of walls and roofs and more attractive commercial and retail centres.

Trees are a living organism where management is a complex process with lots of things to consider and many challenges to face. Implementing considered lifecycle management practices and development of risk management strategies and approaches is essential.

The size, resilience, age and diversity of trees in our urban tree canopy needs to be managed and well planned, as trees take a number of years to mature. Larger trees provide greater benefits than smaller trees so it makes sense to manage and protect our existing larger established tree population to prevent canopy loss where possible, and provide a diversity of species suitable to each area. Older trees that may come to the end of their life expectancy need to have planned replacements by way of succession planting and any loss of tree cover offset by additional compensatory planting.

It is essential that we understand the current environment and recognise what the challenges are ahead, such as the impacts of new developments, climate on trees, illegal removal of trees and vandalism, pests and diseases, competing land use, encouraging residents to plant and maintain large trees and the communities' expectation and resistance to change.

The State Government conducted the Light Detection and Ranging(LIDAR) survey in the Northern area of the LGA in 2011 and the Southern area of the LGA in 2013 and found that the canopy cover for the Northern Beaches Council area is 64.2% (inclusive of National Parks). This is very significant in comparison to other metropolitan Councils' canopy cover percentages which are much less.

The canopy coverage for the Council managed lands in 2011/2013 (community centres, playgrounds, sports fields, parks and bushland reserves) on the Northern Beaches Council area was 56%.

There is a need for us to provide updated information on canopy cover. However, it is likely the percentage of canopy cover is now lower particularly on privately owned land and road reserves. Loss of canopy would primarily be due to new residential, commercial and road infrastructure development that has taken place since 2013. It is noted that there may be some impacts in 2014 due to the changes in the Rural Fire Act 1997, as well as the two severe storms in April 2015 and June 2016, both of which resulted in considerable tree damage and loss.

The Draft Urban Tree Canopy Plan provides a strategic framework for the management of our urban trees and their canopy cover, and has a series of key priority actions that aim to encourage a thriving urban canopy cover. Four (4) strategic directions have been developed to provide a comprehensive and cohesive approach to protecting and sustaining the future of our urban trees they include:

- Protecting existing urban trees
- Maintaining the existing urban tree canopy cover
- Improving tree diversity and health
- Motivate, inspire and support the community to protect and enhance our urban trees.

The strategic objectives contain a series of management principles which underpin our management practices and guide the way in which we will work and behave to meet the objectives. A series of key actions have been developed to enable Council to deliver on these commitments.

Direction 1: Protecting existing urban trees

As trees take many years to grow, it makes sense to protect the trees that are healthy and in good condition. To ensure that we protect our urban trees the draft Plan proposes the development of a Northern Beaches 'Iconic Tree Register'.

Another key action to strengthen protection of trees is to renew and develop appropriate controls relating to trees in the new integrated Local Environment Plan and Development Control Plans.

Direction 2: Maintaining the existing urban tree canopy cover

The existing canopy coverage in the Northern Beaches area is considered high compared to other Sydney Councils, however our canopy cover is under threat from increased urbanisation and development. The loss of canopy cover is happening on both public and private land.

The draft Plan proposes to:

- Develop a program to measure, assess and report
- Develop a proactive program of tree planting and new tree maintenance for public open spaces
- Develop an annual tree planting plan including planting and management guidelines
- Develop tree replacement and compensatory/ offset principles across Council programs with a minimum of two (2) advanced trees
- A minimum of 5000 trees planted each year on Council owned public space.
- Consider new and emerging greening technologies and innovations.

This action will aim to make us the top Council in Sydney for canopy cover on Council managed lands by 2038.

Direction 3: Improving tree diversity and health

The urban trees in the Northern Beaches are not immune to the threat of disease, pests and climate change. The planting of a greater variety of trees protects our urban tree environment from significant and potential loss of a species.

We will provide proactive tree health and maintenance programs and increase the species diversity as appropriate and apply best practice tree assessment management by implementing 4 key actions:

- Develop and implement Urban Tree Diversity Guidelines to assist in tree planting on public land across the local government area
- Determine what tree species have an undesirable impact on Northern Beaches' environment and should be considered problematic or labelled as weeds
- Develop an assessment process which can be used to identify those trees that are not growing to maturity, offer little aesthetic value or fail to maintain acceptable health which could be considered for replacement
- Develop a process or tool to identify and monitor high risk vandalism areas.

Direction 4: Motivate, inspire and support the community to protect and enhance our urban trees

Urban tree canopy health and management is not only reliant on technical expertise but it is also dependent on social engagement by the community. The draft Plan acknowledges the importance of engaging with and educating our community for the successful protection and enhancement of the Northern Beaches urban tree environment.

The draft Plan provides a series of programs and tools that support the community in planting and maintaining trees, providing better information about trees and encourage the community to be directly involved in enhancing and protection of the urban canopy they include:

- Creating an online tree information page on the Northern Beaches Council's website
- Develop a 'adopt a new tree program'
- Continue to develop and expand the annual community planting program and related activities
- Consider programs that incentivise the community to plant, replace and maintain.

The priority key actions in the draft Plan will be implemented over a 5 Year period to address the current challenges, priorities and gaps as identified in this draft Plan.

It is intended that after consultation the final document will be presented to Council for adoption and immediate implementation.

CONSULTATION

The community will have the opportunity to comment on the draft Urban Tree Canopy Plan, through a 28 Day exhibition period via Councils 'Your Say' page.

A series of drop in information sessions will be held throughout the exhibition period at various locations across the Northern Beaches.

TIMING

The Draft Urban Tree Canopy Plan is planned to be placed on public exhibition for 28 days during October 2018.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Implementation of the proposed Urban Tree Canopy Plan is planned to commence following adoption and will be funded within Councils current operational budget allocation.

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Urban tree canopy provides a significant benefit to the economic, environmental, health and social outcomes of the local community.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

The environmental benefit of a healthy urban tree canopy is well known. Implementation of the draft Plan will result in an improved urban forest.

GOVERNANCE AND RISK CONSIDERATIONS

There are no governance and risk implications associated with this project.