

ITEM 8.4	ADOPTION OF URBAN FOREST POLICY
REPORTING MANAGER	GROUP MANAGER PARKS RESERVES & FORESHORES
TRIM FILE REF	2015/326329
ATTACHMENTS	1 Draft Urban Forest Policy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

To present the draft Urban Forest Policy to Council for adoption.

SUMMARY

An urban forest is defined as the totality of trees and shrubs on all public and private land in and around urban areas (including bushland, parkland, gardens and street trees) and is measured as a canopy cover percentage of the total Warringah local government area. Urban forestry is the planned, systematic and integrated management of urban trees.

The Warringah community is fortunate in having a unique living environment characterised by its bush and beach. The urban forest is an integral part of this landscape. The Warringah local government area is ranked third highest amongst urban council areas in NSW for tree canopy coverage, which is a very good result. However, Council faces an issue over the next decade as street trees and private trees planted during the creation of subdivisions from the 1950s to 1980s begin to reach the end of their lives. This aging will accelerate the number of tree removals as public authorities and private land holders seek to mitigate risk of branch and tree failures. Currently the best practice approach to dealing with these issues is the urban forestry approach.

To this end Council developed a draft Urban Forest Policy to make a clear statement that Council values its urban forest and intends to utilise an urban forestry approach to its management. Council engaged the community on the draft Urban Forest Policy earlier in 2015, the results of which are summarised in the body of this report.

The next step will be to develop an Urban Forest Strategy which will include actions and tools to achieve the objectives of the Policy. This document will be developed in 2016 – 2017.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The preparation of the Urban Forest Strategy has been budgeted for in 2016 – 2017.

POLICY IMPACT

To implement the Urban Forest Policy a strategy will be developed in 2016 - 2017.

RECOMMENDATION OF DEPUTY GENERAL MANAGER ENVIRONMENT

That Council adopt the Urban Forest Policy.

REPORT

BACKGROUND

An urban forest is defined as the totality of trees and shrubs on all public and private land in and around urban areas (including bushland, parkland, gardens and street trees) and is measured as a canopy cover percentage of the total Warringah local government area. Urban forestry is the planned, systematic and integrated management of urban trees.

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Urban forestry is the planned, systematic and integrated approach to managing the urban forest. The principles of urban forestry can be broadly broken down into the following:

- Planned Management – An urban forest strategic plan is fundamental to achieving the optimal development and quality of the urban forest.
- Systematic Management – Adequate resources are invested and these are managed effectively and efficiently.
- Integrated Management – All relevant stakeholders must work in an integrated manner to achieve the best outcomes for urban areas.

The benefits of this approach is that rather than looking at trees as individual trees with no economic value and managing trees on a reactive basis, Council will manage the trees as a network of assets consistent with the management of other Council assets which will allow for better decision making, reduction in reactive maintenance costs and better environmental, social and design outcomes.

A healthy urban forest is vital for a sustainable natural environment and healthy communities. The Local Government and Shires Association of NSW states in their Urban Forest Policy (2003) that urban forests provide “scientifically proven and quantified benefits including energy conservation, reduction of atmospheric contaminants, enhanced property values, reduction in storm water run-off and increases in social well-being”. In addition in 2015 the ‘European Centre for Environment and Human Health’ University of Exeter Medical School highlighted that “there is a growing body of evidence that suggests that time spent in natural environments can improve physical and mental health”.

Risks to Council’s Urban Forest

The future of Warringah’s urban forest is particularly precarious at present due to a variety of factors including:

- Ageing tree resource, resulting from bulk planting of like species of trees during the establishment of subdivisions in the latter part of the last century. This means that a large percentage of the urban forest is declining at a similar rate. This will lead to an increase in tree removals over the next decade.
- Infrastructure managers are seeking to remove trees to mitigate risks to infrastructure and reduce exposure to insurance claims.
- Minimal efforts to accommodate trees in the built environment.

- Urban consolidation impacting on existing trees and reducing available space for tree planting.
- New South Wales Rural Fire Service 10/50 Vegetation Clearing Code of Practice for the State will in all likelihood lead to the removal of more private trees than previously.

Consequences of allowing the trend to continue

The loss of urban forest may:

- Increase the risk of slope destabilisation (environmental consequence).
- Increase urban heat island impacts (environmental consequence).
- Reduce carbon sequestration (environmental consequence).
- Decrease stormwater absorption (environmental consequence).
- Decrease habitat corridors (environmental consequence).
- Increase heating and cooling costs (economic consequence).
- Reduce property values due to decreased aesthetic appeal (economic consequence).
- Reduce the ability to absorb air pollution leading to potential health issues (social impact).
- Impact on well-being (social impact).

The increasing deficit between removals and plantings will also increase the time and the cost to restore canopy levels to pre-existing levels.

Other risks

Besides the consequences listed above, there are a number of risks associated with not taking a more systematic asset management approach. These include but are not limited to:

- Increased number of tree failures if the canopy is allowed to decline without intervention.
- Increased costs in reactive management of trees if systematic renewal of urban forest is not undertaken resulting in higher risks to private and public infrastructure and greater costs.
- Increased risk of failure and increased costs of maintenance and renewal of public infrastructure if an integrated approach to tree management is not adopted.

How will the Draft Urban Forest Policy arrest and reverse this decline?

The draft policy states that Council will set a sustainable target for canopy coverage through the development of the Urban Forest Strategy. It proposes to do this through adopting the urban forestry approach to managing trees in Warringham.

Council can facilitate this through incorporating urban forestry principles in relevant planning documentation, developing good policy and procedures, and taking an asset management approach to tree management. These practices, and actions to facilitate them, will be incorporated in an Urban Forest Strategy if this policy is adopted.

This approach will provide infrastructure managers, strategic planners and Council with the tools to be able to maintain the urban forest whilst mitigating risk to infrastructure and facilitating more sustainable development.

Implementing the Draft Urban Forest Policy

The following are considered key actions that will lead to the successful implementation of the Urban Forest Policy, if adopted:

- Implement cultural change throughout the organisation to integrate the management of trees into asset management and planning rather than viewing it as separate activity. This is exemplified through the table below:

Where we have been Traditional Urban Tree Management	Where we need to be.... Modern Urban Forestry Model
Trees as ornaments	Trees viewed as critical infrastructure
Focus on individual trees	Focus on overall canopy cover and forest
Trees treated with low priority	Trees have equal priority to other urban infrastructure such as roads and services
Trees have no monetary or economic value	Economic value of forest recognised and valued
Focus on smaller and ornamental species	Focus on larger longer lived canopy trees
Individual tree maintenance	Overall forest management
Aesthetic based design only	Ecological based design
Legal boundaries determine tree management	Urban forest seen as a continuous resource regardless of ownership boundaries

- Work on ways to influence private development and landholders to recognise the value of trees for the reasons outlined above.
- Develop an Urban Forest Strategy which includes:
 - Identifying key challenges and issues that need to be addressed including:
 - Competition for space
 - Climate change
 - Urban heat island effect
 - Pests and diseases
 - Aging tree population
 - Community expectations
 - Risk management
 - More detailed canopy analysis to better understand where we need to focus planting strategies.
 - Detailed analysis into land use and ownership to better understand who can assist with implementation.
 - Assessing usage of current green spaces to identify planting opportunities

- e) Development of an implementation action plan to address challenges and:
- a. Increase canopy cover
 - b. Improve urban forest diversity
 - c. Increase community knowledge and engagement
 - d. Introduce frequent monitoring and reporting on proactive asset management regimes such as planting and canopy monitoring

CONSULTATION

The draft Urban Forest Policy (Policy) was on public exhibition from 12 February 2015 until 12 March 2015. In this time the draft Policy was displayed on Your Say Warringah and in hard copy form at each library and Council's Customer Service Centre. The following activities were conducted to make people aware of the policy:

- Advertisement in Warringah Update on 14 and 28 February and 7 March 2015
- Notification to subscribers to Council Community Engagement Register
- Prominent placing on Council's Community Engagement webpage

Two Community drop-in sessions were held on 26 February 2015, which six people attended and another on 3 March 2015 which 10 people attended.

The activity on Your Say Warringah included:

- 220 site visits
- 406 unique page views (that means people clicked around the site 406 times – i.e. people looked at more than one page)
- 63 document downloads and
- Seven online submissions in addition to four submissions received via traditional mail.

A number of issues were raised in the 11 submissions that were received. These are summarised in the table below:

Issue	Number of submissions addressing this issue	Response
Support for draft Policy	11	Supported noted
Policy does not do enough to support native tree and shrub plantings	2	It is implicit within the principles that endemic species of trees are very important to health of urban forest. However the Policy is broad and seeks to promote a wide variety of trees that are appropriate for developed urban spaces as well. No change to Policy.
Increase education around the issues raised in the Policy	4	Increasing education will be a key plank in achieving the goals set in the Policy. Specific education programmes will be developed further through the development of the Urban Forest Strategy. An easy win will be promoting

Issue	Number of submissions addressing this issue	Response
		council's programme to replace street trees, if the local residents will help establish the new trees. An additional principle has been added to the Policy to reflect this important point.
It is unclear what land in the LGA the Policy applies to	2	The Policy has been amended to include making it clear what areas of the LGA the Policy applies to.
Rural Bushfire Service 10/50 code will make it impossible to achieve the goals in the Policy	2	The RFS 10/50 code has allowed for private trees to be removed within 10 metres a domestic residence. There have been many removals on private land under the 10/50 code of practice however the percentage of removals under this code are immaterial when considering the canopy coverage for the entire Local Government Area. No change to Policy.
Risk has not be adequately addressed in regard to Council plantings in streets	1	Council has modified its practices in regards to species selection for street trees. These changes in practice will be codified in the Urban Forest Strategy. It is also inherent in the management of trees as assets that species selection, location, adjacent infrastructure etc. is all considered in managing the risk of any new plantings. No change to Policy.
Weed management	2	Weed management is an important function of Council however it is not within the scope of the Urban Forest Policy. No change to Policy.
Managing decline of private trees	3	Managing the decline of private tree canopy is one of Council's biggest challenges. These trees account for over half the total canopy. As part of the Urban Forest Strategy actions will be developed to encourage trees to be protected or integrated into developments and in worst case scenarios, offset planting elsewhere in the Local Government Area. No change to Policy.
Concern of timeframe for restoration of canopy	1	The timeframe specified in the Policy reflects that even if all trees that are removed were replaced immediately there is a lag in time before the new tree matures to a point where its canopy has the same extent as the removed tree.

Internal Consultation

Concurrently with the public exhibition of the draft Urban Forest Policy staff from Roads, Traffic and Waste, Natural Environment, Strategic Planning, Buildings, Property and Spatial Information and

Development Assessment and Compliance were consulted. This consultation process has resulted in a number of amendments, which include:

- Rewording the canopy target principle from setting a specific target to “set a sustainable canopy coverage target through the development of the Urban Forest Strategy.” This reflects concerns about the practicality of the previous target
- Providing more emphasis on the urban forest’s crucial role in providing habitat corridors
- Including a principle that enables Council to compel private developers to offset any public tree lost as a result of their development.

Urban Forest Strategy

Council will commence the development of the Urban Forest Strategy in July 2016 with the aim to complete the Strategy by June 2017. The principles of the policy will be used to commence changes to current practices for the management of trees immediately.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The preparation of the Urban Forest Strategy has been budgeted for in 2016 – 2017.

POLICY IMPACT

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