



NBC Draft Tree Canopy Plan - Joint Submission

**North Harbour Community Group
Balgowlah Residents' Group
Baringa Bush Residents' Group (Seaforth)
Manly Community Forum
North Balgowlah Community Network
Clontarf Community Forum**

1. Introduction

The Draft Tree Canopy Plan is comprehensive. It acknowledges and identifies many of the issues of concern for residents in relation to the challenges facing the amalgamated council in improving both the quantity and quality of the tree canopy cover across the Northern Beaches LGA.

However, the Draft Plan is limited in its focus on trees within the urban environment. Community groups believe the council should be developing an Urban Forest Strategy, which encompasses all vegetation and habitat and the functions and species they support, not only trees greater than 3m in height. Within a broader Urban Forest Strategy, the tree canopy plays a vital role in creating and maintaining a healthy urban forest environment.

We support the council adopting the Draft Tree Canopy Plan subject to consideration of our recommendation that councillors accept that the creation of an overarching Urban Forest Strategy should be a high priority for the near future.

This wholistic approach is especially important across the Northern Beaches LGA, given the quality and extent of the urban forest/bush assets within the LGA; including in the many areas that lie outside the protections of national parks/reserves that, nonetheless, support endangered flora and fauna and local biodiversity alongside development.

In relation to trees on council-owned land (primarily street and park trees) we understand and appreciate why they are currently managed by the Parks & Recreation Department, under the umbrella of the Transport & Infrastructure Division. However, given the wider importance of the tree canopy as an integral part of an urban forest environment, we believe the management of street and park trees is better aligned with the Environment & Sustainability Division. We understand this would require a change to the council's organisation structure – and we ask this be seriously considered.

The objectives of our submission are to:

- Motivate the council to elevate the importance of the Tree Canopy Plan within the Council's Strategic Plan and reposition the management of council-owned trees within the Environment Portfolio (Environment & Sustainability Division) – in alignment with major capital city councils throughout Australia,
- Ensure the Tree Canopy Plan is part of a wider Urban Forest Strategy or equivalent, including the conversion of some grassed areas in parks into biodiverse, water efficient, low maintenance micro-forests,
- Motive the council to increase the contribution of council-owned trees to the overall tree canopy cover across the northern beaches LGA to compensate for the steady loss of trees on privately-owned land due to development/removal.

2. Need to develop an Urban Forest Strategy for the Northern Beaches

Urban forestry now encapsulates the science and art of managing trees, forests, and natural ecosystems in and around urban communities to maximise the physiological, sociological, economic, environmental and aesthetic benefits trees provide to society (Schwab 2008)ⁱ.

The urban forest comprises all types of trees and other vegetation, including soil and water, and all the biodiversity these support. It has a broader definition than 'street trees and parks' traditionally used by councils.

It includes vegetation in streets, parks, plazas, campuses, river and creek embankments, verges, wet lands, green walls, roofs and balconies, sports grounds and cycleways etc.

Urban and community forestry has transcended its original niche function in public policy as an aesthetic amenity to soften the urban landscape. It is increasingly perceived as a solution to many more pressing urban environmental problems and even as a tool for community and social development.

Environmental benefits are also being quantified more accurately and more often in economic terms... Increasingly communities are realising that green infrastructure is an economical long-term investment that reduces the need for much greater expenditures in grey infrastructure. JC Schwab (Ed.), 2009. Planning the Urban Forest ⁱⁱ

Some 46% of Australia's nationally listed threatened animals and 25% of threatened plants and are found in urban areas. The Northern Beaches LGA is an urban hotspot for such threatened species and biodiversityⁱⁱⁱ. The extent and quality of LGA's urban forest environment promises to deliver multiple long term benefits; as long as it is effectively integrated into a wholistic vision of sustainable development.

3. Rationale for the Repositioning the Management of Public Trees within the Environment Portfolio

The goal of Northern Beaches Council's environment portfolio in the Environment & Sustainability Division is to enhance and protect the natural and built environment from the risks and impacts of global and local pressures – including pressure from climate change.

Recognition is growing of the importance of trees as assets providing many benefits to the community and the environment, such as:

- Economic benefits - reduction in energy costs, improved air quality, positive effect on house prices, increased return for local businesses

- Cultural benefits - defining the character of the area through themed plantings.
- Social and aesthetic benefits – increased usage of footpaths, cycleways , public spaces positively correlated with social capital and feeling of peace. Research has shown that higher urban tree canopy cover is associated with improved mental and physical health outcomes^{iv}.
- Environmental benefits – reductions in ambient temperatures of public areas, removal of air pollution, storage and sequestration of carbon, reduced energy use due to the natural shading effect of trees, reduction in water run-off and contribution to biodiversity, mitigation of climate change.

To achieve the outcomes set out in NBC’s Tree Canopy Plan considerable expertise will be required across environment, biodiversity, climate change and sustainability, soil science, water management, and data analytics.

Current responsibility for street and park trees sits under *Transport and Civil Infrastructure* → *Capital Works* → *Parks and Recreation*.

However, street and park trees are an integral part of the urban environment/biodiversity. The continued separation of street and park trees from bushland/environment will, in our view, risk impeding the realisation of many of the Council’s stated goals, including those within the Tree Canopy Plan.

Under the current Community Strategic Plan, the Environment & Sustainability Division is responsible for the protection and enhancement of local biodiversity bushland, increased resilience to natural hazards and climate change, and for ensuring the community is well supported in protecting and enhancing the environment to ensure its safe and sustainable use (SP Towards 2040). These areas of expertise and experience will be required to implement the Tree Canopy Plan, and to realise its benefits.

The mindset/paradigm of Transport and Civil infrastructure area is also very different to environment and sustainability. The current separation of Bushland Trees from Public Trees is historical. It frustrates the desired wholistic management of trees as part of the natural environment.

Within Environment and Sustainability, tree canopy management would align with all 3 goals of *the Strategic Plan: Toward 2040* and would be supported by staff with relevant qualifications and worldviews.

4. How are other major Councils managing trees to meet multiple environmental, economic and social goals?

Evidence from major city councils around Australia – Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth – show all have tree management as a subset of the environment and, sometimes, the planning portfolio:

- Sydney City Council’s structure is: Environment → urban forest strategy → tree management policy → street tree plans → significant tree register.
- Brisbane City Council’s structure is: Planning and sustainability → development assessment → parks and sustainability and economic development
- In Melbourne City Council the tree canopy sits under the environment portfolio. *“Stakeholders engagement: The urban forest sits within a wider context of ‘green governance’ and green infrastructure. Green governance shapes the plans and decisions that influence the development of urban forestry. A multitude of institutions, organizations and stakeholders are involved in shaping and making policy and management decisions that affect urban forests”.*

Many councils have accepted that managing trees now requires a broad range of expertise and technical skills - data analytics, soil science, water quality, biodiversity, ecology, policy alignment, landscaping etc. Likewise, a broader range of stakeholders impact the development and implementation of the tree canopy plan, complementing councils’ existing arborist technicians and contractors.

5. The Role of Micro-forests in the Tree Canopy

Street and park trees are primarily surrounded by mown grass. This model is biodiversity-poor, and its maintenance is energy, water and chemical-intensive. As not all native animals can survive without ground and mid-layer canopy cover, populations of some species expand in urban areas (e.g. ibises) and other crash (e.g. wrens, finches, pardalotes)

Micro-forests - and ground and mid-layer vegetation - are the missing pieces of the puzzle for effectively increasing biodiversity and joining up wildlife corridors on urban public land. This means vegetation under 3m must be considered with the tree canopy.

Micro forests favourably impact ambient temperatures, improve localised flora and fauna biodiversity and can be readily developed with community input and effort. Micro-forests help fill in the low-mid canopy, are more biodiverse, fix more carbon, are cooler and require less maintenance than grassed areas. Their successful integration into traditional grassed parks is being demonstrated in many council areas, such as in Canberra and Wollongong.

6. Ensure Trees have a Measurable Economic Value

Formal tree valuation empowers councils to prioritise environmental, economic, and community considerations, facilitating sustainable urban development and enhancing the overall quality of life for residents.

By formally valuing tree assets, councils can better assess the economic benefits derived from trees under its management. This enables councils to establish clear guidelines and policies for the protection, maintenance, and removal of trees under its control. This ensures responsible tree management practices and prevents haphazard or unnecessary tree removals, preserving the urban canopy and its associated benefits for future generations.

Many councils across Australia have introduced methodologies for developing the Economic Value of trees under the council's management including: City of Melbourne, City of Sydney, City of Adelaide, Brisbane City Council, City of Fremantle

Tree Valuation Methodologies usually include: a point-based systems to assign \$-values to trees. The points are converted into a monetary value. Points are based on various factors, such as: species, size, age, condition, cultural or aesthetic significance, environmental benefits, Climate-resilience of the tree, the level of risk posed by the tree.

7. Incentivise Owners of Private Land to Maintain and Increase Tree Canopy on their Properties

The Draft Tree Canopy Plan acknowledges that the tree canopy on privately-owned land is falling – and this trend can be expected to continue due to urban densification. However, we believe the council should explore incentive options to encourage private owners to retain canopy trees on their property and to plant more of them. While the Draft Tree Canopy Plan mentions the need for these incentives, there is no discussion of the funding options for any incentives.

Here are some examples of incentives we are aware of:

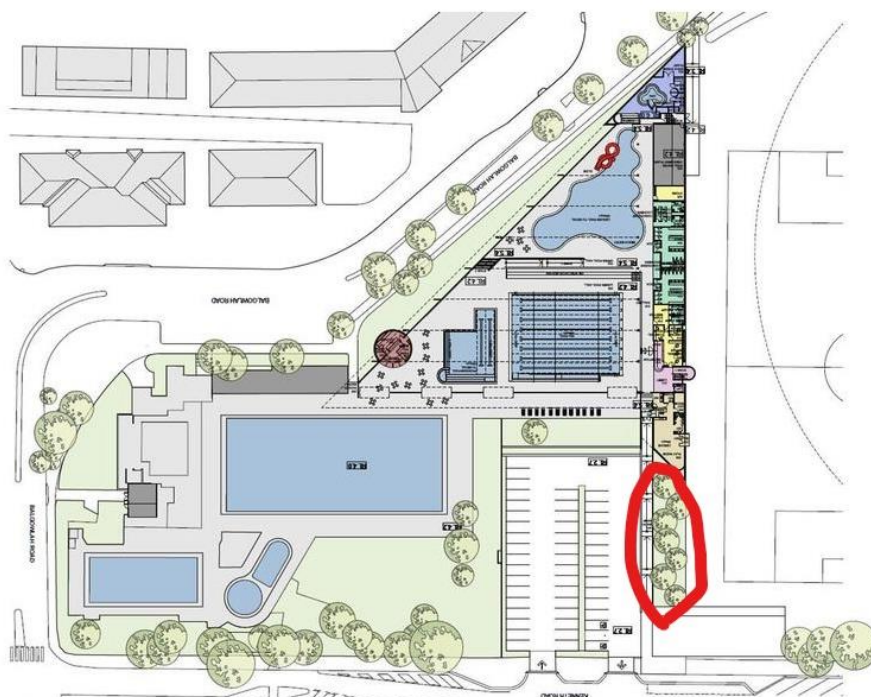
- Tree planting grants: Councils may provide grants to private landowners to cover part or all of the costs associated with purchasing and planting trees on their property.
- Subsidies or discounts on tree seedlings: Some councils offer subsidies or discounts on tree seedlings or saplings, making them more affordable for private landowners.
- Tree planting workshops or education programs: Councils may organize workshops or educational programs to provide guidance and resources to private landowners interested in planting trees. These programs can include information on tree selection, planting techniques, and maintenance.
- Fast-track permit processes: To facilitate tree planting on private land, some councils may streamline the permit process, making it quicker and more convenient for landowners to obtain the necessary approvals.
- Recognition or certification programs: Councils may have programs in place to recognise and reward private landowners who demonstrate a commitment to tree planting and conservation. This could include certificates, awards, or public recognition for their efforts.

- Adelaide’s urban offset scheme is designed to support the planning initiative reflected in the desired outcome for the Urban Tree Canopy. This promotes development that preserves and enhances the urban tree canopy through the planting of new trees and the retention of existing trees by providing that an applicant for development approval may, in appropriate cases, elect to make a contribution to a fund instead of planting the trees required by the code.
- In Melbourne, if a tree on private land is on the ‘Exceptional Tree Register’ it must be preserved by law. According to a study by Treelogic, tree planting in the private realm is most effective via registering significant or exceptional trees^v. Projects such as the Urban Forest Visual have led to community engagement, in Melbourne and beyond. The strategy document itself encourages citizens to investigate ‘how you can participate in the decision-making process for some of City of Melbourne's current and future initiatives’^{vi}.

8. Removal of Trees, Lack of Tree Planting and poor Compliance Monitoring

We believe this to be a systemic problem for the council – and it needs to be addressed. Several examples follow:

Andrew Boy Charlton Redevelopment: Prior to the 2013 redevelopment of the Andrew Boy Charlton Pool, local residents and regular swimmers held demonstrations over the removal of many mature trees within the new building’s footprint, particularly the many large flowering *Melaleuca quinquenervia*. Replacement trees were promised. However, council has planted no trees along the hot, westerly aspect of the development – despite being on the publicly exhibited plan (below) - and the small trees within the car park are gradually dying off.



Original plan (left)



Andrew Boy Charlton Pool today: Without trees filtering the hot western sun, the large concrete ramp providing access to the pool acts as a heat sink. Likewise, the car park is comparably hot.



The Importance of Council Leadership on Street Trees:



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Planting of street trees in Fromelles Ave in the 1950s (pg. 8) continues to benefit residents today. However, there have been no similar initiatives for recent infill development nearby, with few or no street trees and much hard landscaping, causing increases in ambient temperatures. See Ainslee Place, Seaforth (left),

Clear felling of private land for development – few or no trees replanted, no restriction enforced:



Erosion caused by bulldozing of steep waterfront forested land at 65 Rignold St, Seaforth. (left)


Below: Block within creekfront wildlife corridor clear felled for secondary dwelling at 35 Serpentine St, North Balgowlah.

Location People Events Documents Show All

Related Applications: Security BD2022/01919
Notification of Commencement NOC2022/1243

Location 35 Serpentine Crescent NORTH BALGOWLAH NSW 2093

Map



Map

Click to view enlarged map

Other Applications

Principal Certifier NOC2022/1243
Construction of a secondary dwelling - CDC22/2623 (Submitted: 17/11/2022)
Complying Development Certificate CDC2022/0989
Construction of a secondary dwelling - CDC22/2623 (Submitted: 26/09/2022)
Principal Certifying Authority FOC2018/1068
Final OC by Private Certifier (Submitted: 20/08/2018)



Clear destruction of public trees that impede views on Forty Baskets foreshore:

There has been a sustained denuding of trees and scrubs along the foreshore at Forty Baskets between the beach and the entry to the National Park. This has been reported by several residents. The matter was raised twice at the quarterly Manly Ward Councillors meeting and it was agreed that temporary vandalism signage would be erected and the area at be revegetated. No action has been taken by Council to enforce existing regulations relating to vandalism, nor has replanting occur. Destruction at Forty Baskets, with no consequences or promised signage (below and pg 11.)





9. Recommendations from our Community Groups

Recommendation 1: That Council acknowledge the LGA’s tree canopy is part an wider Urban Forest Strategy or Plan.

Recommendation 2: That Council transfer of responsibility for managing all public trees on Council land to the Environment & Sustainability Division.

Recommendation 3: That Council formally adopt a methodology for valuing public trees as economic assets. This includes the introduction of an asset management system – to record details of the tree, age, size, species, maintenance history, reinspection reminders.

Recommendation 4: That Council explore and review options to map every public tree – or group of public trees. If Council could map every tree then it could target those streets/parks etc where the street tree cover is below 10 % or 20% rather than undertake traditional precinct tree plans. See City of Melbourne Urban Forest Strategy.

Recommendation 5: That Council consider including deep soil improvement/remediation to support the development of new tree canopies in medium and high-density developments. From 2021, the City of Perth initiated technical cross collaboration (soil science, arboriculture and landscape architecture) resulting in an evidence-based soil specification to meet the unique constraints and requirements of tree planting within highly urbanised areas.

Recommendation 6: That Council monitor ambient street temperatures on selective streets using heat mapping technology. As part of a strategy to plant street and park trees, develop a program of heat-mapping as a high priority areas – e.g. carparks and streets around schools, transport hubs, bus stops, shopping centres and parks as part of the developing a priority strategy for planting street trees.

Recommendation 7: That Council establish the feasibility of establishing micro-forests across the Northern Beaches and work with the community to find suitable locations.

Recommendation 8: That Council seek better cooperation with Transgrid for the management of street trees including the bundling of cables in residential areas to reduce the “savage pruning” of street trees.

Recommendation 9: That Council audit the effectiveness of the compliance measures to stop the removal of trees on public land and to enforce plantings on new developments that are part of the notice of compliance.

Recommendation 10: That Council specify and explain proposed incentives for private landowners to retain and plant large canopy trees. In the Draft Tree Canopy Plan the need for incentives is discussed, but there is no mention of how they are to be funded. A number of councils in Australia have good incentives to maintain or expand tree canopy cover on privately-owned land – these should be discussed in the Draft Tree Canopy Plan.

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References

ⁱ City of Sydney, Urban Forest Strategy, adopted 2013, pg. 1-1

ⁱⁱ Schwab, James C (Ed.), 2009. Planning the Urban Forest: Ecology, Economy and Community Development American Planning Association Planning Advisory Service Report No. 555

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://apo.org.au/node/308370>

^{iv} Astell-Burt & Feng 2019, [Association of Urban Green Space With Mental Health and General Health Among Adults in Australia | Psychiatry and Behavioral Health | JAMA Network Open | JAMA Network](#)

^v <https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/urban-forest-strategy.pdf>

^{vi} www.participate.melbourne.vic.gov.au