

TREE POLICY

PURPOSE

This policy provides guidance for the integrated management of Council's street, park and reserve trees to achieve a sustainable and safe urban forest.

DEFINITIONS

An **Urban forest** is defined as the total vegetation growing in or in close proximity to urban areas; it includes all local indigenous, planted and self seeded trees, shrubs and ground layer plants, whether indigenous, native or exotic, growing in streets, parks and reserves.

A **tree** is defined as a woody plant having one or more erect stems or trunks, a crown of foliage and a height of 5m or more at maturity.

Park refers to public open space developed primarily for amenity and recreation.

A **reserve** is typically public open space managed in a natural state to conserve biodiversity and for other environmental benefit, though accommodating low levels of informal recreational use.

RATIONALE

The urban forest provides significant community, environmental and economic benefits. Considerable investment is required to provide these benefits and to minimise Council's exposure to risk. Through integration of tree management with established urban development and civil works disciplines, this policy will assist the continued provision of these benefits.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Management of Mitcham's street, park and reserve trees will be based on professionalism, open communication, consistency, quality and best practice. It will enhance the character, desirability and sustainability of the City through:

1. **Community Consultation and Support**

By effectively consulting, communicating with and engaging staff and the community, Council will ensure that the City's street, park and reserve trees and urban forest outcomes remain relevant, effective and efficient with regard to both short and long-term goals.

2. **Cultural and Environmental Suitability**

Mitcham's street, park and reserve trees will be matched to the City's cultural, natural and urban characteristics to enhance amenity, ensure financial efficiency, maintain biodiversity and improve environmental performance.

3. Integrated Works

Integrating street, park and reserve tree requirements with urban development, civil works and utilities will minimise conflicts between built and natural assets to achieve financial efficiencies and enhance the urban forest.

4. Consistency

The City's street, park and reserve trees will be managed consistently to improve urban forest planning, development, maintenance and risk management. Defined standards will facilitate communication, consistency and equity of provision.

5. Best Practice, Research, Innovation & Leadership.

Council will foster urban forest research and development through association with TREENET Inc. and related agencies. Council will demonstrate a highly professional approach to arboriculture through strict adherence to accepted best practices and standards.

POLICY STATEMENT

1. Tree Asset Management

Council recognises the urban forest, comprising all street, park and reserve trees, as a valuable public asset which makes significant contributions to the sustainability of the community, economy and environment. It directly influences the City's appeal, desirability, and the quality of life of residents. To ensure ongoing community benefit Council will plan for, resource and implement effective urban forest management processes.

Street Trees

- 1.1. Council will develop and maintain a street tree asset register. The register will document the location, type and condition of street trees. The tree register will be used to prioritise and document street tree planting, removal and maintenance requirements and actions.
- 1.2. Council will prepare a strategic Street Tree Planting Plan which will identify tree planting and maintenance goals for each streetscape.
- 1.3. Council will develop and implement annual streetscape development programs based on the Street Tree Planting Plan and priorities identified from the street tree asset register.

Park Trees

- 1.4. High quality tree cover will be sustained on parks to provide amenity and enhance recreational use. The number of trees established on parks by Council in any five year period will exceed the number removed.
- 1.5. Council will develop and maintain a register of park trees. The register will document the location, type and condition of park trees. The register will be used to prioritise and document park tree planting, removal, maintenance requirements and actions.

Reserve Trees

- 1.6. Appropriate tree cover will be sustained on reserves to conserve local indigenous tree types, habitat and natural amenity.
- 1.7. A register will be maintained of trees planted on and removed from reserves.

2. Tree Selection and Planting

Council recognises that its existing environment and heritage values support a diverse urban forest, the conservation of which is fundamental to maintaining the City's appeal, character and biodiversity. Mitcham's existing urban forest has several distinct facets, including: the predominately exotic vegetation of the urban plain, the remnant indigenous vegetation of the hills, and historical plantings in areas such as Colonel Light Gardens, Springfield and Mitcham Village. To preserve its environment, heritage and amenity, Council will select and utilise plant species and cultural practices appropriate to socially, environmentally, economically and culturally sustainable development.

- 2.1. Council will select tree species to match local environmental conditions and planting program goals. Responsibility for tree species selection rests with Council's Senior Horticulturist.
- 2.2. Standard procedures for consultation regarding proposed tree planting projects will be developed and implemented. They will guarantee stakeholders likely to be impacted by proposed works appropriate timeframes and mechanisms for comment. (Ref: Local Government Act 1999, Section 232 (b)).
- 2.3. Tree planting will meet statutory and regulatory requirements with regard to utilities and built infrastructure as prescribed in the:
 - Local Government Act 1999, Section 232(a).
 - Electricity Act 1996, Part 5 and Electricity (Principles of Vegetation Clearance) Regulations 1996, Section 10.
 - Sewerage Act 1929, Section 13 (XI) and Sewerage Regulations 1996, Section 24.
 - Waterworks Act 1932, and Waterworks Regulations 1996 Section 37 (1).
- 2.4. Council will maintain a close working relationship with TREENET Inc., and will incorporate the planting of small numbers of unfamiliar species and newly developed cultivars into research programs to determine suitability to local conditions and purposes. Progress of trial plantings will be documented on the TREENET website www.treenet.org or similar.
- 2.5. Planting sites will be located to ensure adequate space to enable tree growth to maturity with minimal pruning and maintenance. New trees will not be planted beneath the canopies of existing specimens, as experience has shown this to cause stunting and disfigurement of saplings.

- 2.6. Trees planted by Council will be high quality stock and of a size suitable for the application. Tree planting and establishment will utilise current best practice.
- 2.7. A diverse range of species will be planted to minimise exposure to risk from pests and diseases.

Street Trees

- 2.8. Council will establish and sustain tree cover throughout residential streets. The number of street trees established by Council in any five year period will exceed the number removed.
- 2.9. Streets will be prioritised for streetscape development tree planting. Priority will be given to streetscape planting which maximises amenity, reduces maintenance requirements, aids risk management and affords a high level of cost effectiveness. Streets with a high proportion of deteriorating trees, or with a relatively high number of missing trees, will be planted as a priority.
- 2.10. Streetscape development programs will, where practical:
 - Replace street trees where they are missing in established avenues.
 - Retain and maintain existing healthy and structurally sound street trees, and may
 - Replace trees which have a relatively short life expectancy, structural flaws or developing hazards.
- 2.11. Street tree planting will consider potential impacts on visibility, access and road safety. Tree planting locations will be consistent with motorist and pedestrian safety requirements as detailed by Transport SA in Operational Instruction 20.1: *Care, Control and Management of Roads by the Commissioner of Highways*. (Ref: Highways Act 1926 - Section 26A.)
- 2.12. Council will plant street trees in response to requests from the community if:
 - Site constraints do not preclude planting.
 - Streetscape development planting has not been scheduled within the following two years.
 - The resident making the request commits to watering the tree until it is established.
 - The species planted is consistent with the Street Tree Planting Plan.
- 2.13. Individuals wishing to plant a tree or trees on a road verge must apply to Council in writing for authorisation (Local Government Act 1999, Section 221 (2)(e)).

Park Trees

- 2.14. Tree planting on community land will be consistent with the purpose for which the land is held, as detailed in the relevant Community Land Management Plan.

- 2.15. Tree planting will focus on improving recreational use of parks through the provision of shade and shelter.
- 2.16. Council may support community tree planting events on parks. Groups or individuals wishing to plant trees on parks must apply to Council in writing for authorisation.

Reserve Trees

- 2.17. Appropriate tree cover will be sustained on reserves. The number of reserve trees established by Council in any five year period will exceed the number removed.
- 2.18. Indigenous species will be favoured in and near natural bushland areas to conserve biodiversity and maintain character. If exotic species are required in or near natural areas, preference will be given to planting sterile forms or species which are not likely to self propagate.
- 2.19. Council may support community tree planting events on reserves. Groups or individuals wishing to plant trees on reserves must apply to Council in writing for authorisation.

Heritage Areas

- 2.20. Tree planting will support the nature and purpose of heritage areas through compliance with relevant management plans. Tree planting in Colonel Light Gardens will maintain original themes as detailed in the Colonel Light Gardens Conservation Management Plan.

3. Tree Removal

Council views removal of established, healthy trees as undesirable but recognises it may be required on occasion. Tree removal may be approved subject to the following provisions:

- 3.1. Except by resolution of Council, no tree over 5m in height will be removed from property under Council's care and control unless it is dead, presents an immediate threat to the public or to property of substantial value, is diseased and treatment is not feasible, or it is a proclaimed pest species. Reports regarding removal of trees over 5m in height will be considered by the Engineering and Environmental Services Committee.
- 3.2. Where a Council tree is removed, a suitable replacement will be established unless it is impractical to do so due to the proximity of existing vegetation.
- 3.3. Requests for removal of trees growing on property under Council's care and control must be made in writing.
- 3.4. Where Council determines that a tree will be removed on the request of a resident or ratepayer the cost of tree removal and replacement may be recovered from the resident, unless the tree was removed due to its death, disease or risk to public or property.

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- 3.5. Where a request for tree removal is based on allergy, consideration may be given to removing the tree if:
 - The request is supported by evidence from a medical specialist, and
 - The medical evidence directly attributes ongoing allergic reaction to a particular species of tree, and
 - The species of tree is uncommon in the vicinity of the applicant's residence, and
 - Alternative options for managing the issue have been determined to be unfeasible.
 - 3.6. Trees which provide valuable habitat or contain active bird nests will not be removed except for reason of public safety. Where pruning or removal of trees with active hollows or nests is required, work will be delayed to avoid impacts on fauna if it is safe to do so. Consideration may be given to relocating hollow logs into neighbouring trees.
 - 3.7. Details of all street and park trees removed, including those less than 5m in height, will be documented in the relevant tree asset register.
 - 3.8. Ratepayers will not be given authority to remove trees from Council property, other than proclaimed pest species. Ratepayers wishing to remove proclaimed species from the nature strip adjoining their property must apply in writing and obtain Council authorisation prior to undertaking the works (Local Government Act 1999, Section 221 (2)(e)).
 - 3.9. In emergency situations Council may clear trees that have fallen from private property onto Council property. Council may recover the cost of such works from the property owner if the tree failure resulted from negligence. Where practical, the property owner will be consulted regarding disposal of the wood.

4. Tree Maintenance.

Council recognises that comprehensive and professional tree maintenance is essential to the sustainability and safety of the urban forest. Council will endeavour to utilise accepted best arboricultural practices in all tree establishment and maintenance functions.

- 4.1. Council will develop and implement standards which integrate accepted best practices into tree planting and maintenance programs. The standards will focus on delivering customer and staff satisfaction through tree establishment, long and safe tree life expectancy, and ensuring public and staff safety.
- 4.2. Council will water trees planted as part of streetscape development works for two to three years. Residents will be encouraged to water new trees for two to three years until established.
- 4.3. Council will minimise the need for staking young trees by purchasing quality stock. Should stakes be required, they will be removed as soon as practical after tree establishment.

- 4.4. Council trees will be pruned to the standard detailed in Australian Standard AS 4373-1996 Pruning of Amenity Trees. Trees will be pruned to:
 - Establish a sound and amenable structure appropriate to the species, the planting site and purpose.
 - To manage risk.
 - To maintain tree health and longevity through correction or prevention of structural flaws, disease or potential damage.
- 4.5. Council will trial tree establishment and maintenance products and processes to determine their suitability to local purposes and conditions. Council will make information gathered through trials available to the public.
- 4.6. Residents and ratepayers are not authorised to prune trees on streets and reserves.
- 4.7. Council will maintain a close working relationship with essential service providers to ensure that impacts on trees and amenity are minimised. Council will work with ETSA Utilities to develop a Vegetation Clearance Agreement (Electricity Act 1996, Section 55A), to monitor associated works (Electricity (Principles of Vegetation Clearance) Regulations 1996) and to ensure compliance with the conditions of the Vegetation Clearance Scheme.

5. Trees, Urban Development and Civil Works

Council recognises that vegetation is an integral part of urban infrastructure which in some circumstances may be in conflict with other community assets or private property. As an example, interaction between footpaths and roots can injure trees, damage footpaths and increase risk to pedestrians. Such conflict reduces community benefit and increases cost. Council therefore aims to manage interaction between the urban forest and other assets to balance environmental, social and financial goals and achieve sustainable outcomes.

- 5.1. Council will endeavour to sustain quality tree cover through urban development and civil works projects. Horticulture personnel will collaborate with other professions to integrate sustainable urban forest practices with civil infrastructure and development projects. Where trees are removed due to civil works or urban development, appropriate replacements will be planted.
- 5.2. Where replacement of street trees is planned due to their declining health or structural integrity, maintenance or upgrading of built infrastructure will be coordinated with their replacement.
- 5.3. Civil works planning processes will document:
 - The nature and condition of trees existing on the site and adjoining properties prior to works.
 - The nature and condition of vegetation to be retained and/or established.

- Requirements for tree protection and maintenance before, during and following construction.
 - Methods, materials and processes employed to prevent or minimise impacts between trees and other infrastructure.
- 5.4 Development applications will detail footing designs that are capable of withstanding all foreseeable impacts of existing and proposed trees in the vicinity, including impacts related to street, park and reserve trees.
 - 5.5 Should development require a driveway or service connection to the street, designs will avoid or minimise impacts on trees that are to be retained or established.
 - 5.6. A driveway crossover shall not be constructed or installed within 1.0 metre or 2.5 times the tree's diameter at 1.5m above ground level (whichever is the greater) of any Council tree, unless essential to provide primary access.
 - 5.7. Should a request be received for an additional driveway crossover, or for widening of an existing driveway crossover, the request will be refused if in conflict with 5.5.
 - 5.8. If approval is granted for tree removal to allow service or driveway connection, Council will recover the cost of tree removal, planting and establishment of a suitable replacement.
 - 5.9. Installation or maintenance of underground services beneath established trees will utilise work methods which minimise root impacts.

6. Significant Trees

Council recognises that individual trees may possess or develop increased significance in relation to a range of criteria beyond those for which protection is provided by the Development Act 1993. The time that may be required for trees to develop such significance makes maintaining existing specimens and planning their replacement an ongoing and long term requirement. Council will plan and implement maintenance and planting programs to ensure that significant trees are provided for future generations.

- 6.1. Specimen trees will be planted in appropriate locations to provide significant trees for the future.
- 6.2. Existing and potentially significant trees will be identified in a significant tree asset register.
- 6.3. Trees of significance will be nominated for inclusion in the Significant Tree Register of the National Trust of South Australian.
- 6.4. Maintenance and protection requirements of significant trees on community land will be documented in the relevant Community Land Management Plan.

7. Tree Risk Management

Council recognises that the benefits provided by trees require continued public provision and that appropriate measures are necessary to effectively manage associated risk.

- 7.1 To minimise risk associated with public trees, tree planting processes will be consistent with *Trees: Legislation and Risk Management Guidelines for Local Government* (Local Govt. Association Mutual Liability Scheme, 2004).
- 7.2 Priority will be given to tree maintenance works involving trees assessed as having highest risk to public or property.
- 7.3 Should a resident or ratepayer request Council involvement regarding a dispute or risk associated with a neighbour's tree, Council will in the first instance limit assistance to provision of the Legal Services Commission of SA's booklet *Trees and the Law, a guide for neighbours* and referral to a community mediation service. Consistent with Local Government Association Mutual Liability Association guidelines, in extreme circumstances where an immediate risk to persons or property exists, Council may consider issuing an order requiring the owner to undertake work on the tree (ref: Section 299, Local Government Act 1999).

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER/DEPARTMENT

Senior Horticultural Officer, Arboriculture

ADDITIONAL CROSS REFERENCES

Replaces Policies 14.25, 14.26, 14.27, 14.28 and 14.29.

RELATIONSHIP TO STRATEGIC PLAN

Objective 2.1 The essential character and form of the City is protected
 Strategy 2.1.7 Plant 1000 street trees annually to maintain the current stock
 Strategy 2.1.8 Undertake street tree plantings where none currently exist

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