

Policy Statement

Public street trees are one of Yarra's greatest assets and are a fundamental component of the urban landscape that help reduce the urban heat island effect and, through the provision of natural shade, make Yarra a greener, more liveable city. Street trees are also an integral component of the neighbourhood amenity and provide valuable habitat for wildlife.

Council supports an increase in the quality and quantity of trees in its streets and is committed to the prioritisation of street trees through integrated streetscape design. However Council also recognises that primarily due to poor historical planning there are significant street trees that may need to be removed as they present an unacceptable risk to person and/or property.

Council recognises that in the highly constrained urban conditions found in much of Yarra, street tree planting is in competition with pedestrian, parking and infrastructure needs. The Procedures accompanying this Policy seek to balance these conflicting demands through encouraging appropriate tree species selection, planting location, maintenance practices and by outlining the criteria for removal and replacement.

Council recognises the benefits of healthy and diverse street trees and promotes biodiversity values across the Municipality. Native and indigenous species are preferred as street trees to build on their ecological value and provide valuable habitat that accommodates a range of wildlife. However in certain circumstances it is recognised that non-indigenous trees can provide superior canopy and amenity benefits.

Council also values the contribution that heritage street trees and avenues make to the City of Yarra. Council therefore advocates for the protection of street tree plantings that are consistent with Yarra's 19th and early 20th Century heritage character where exotic species are in the majority, and where appropriate, planting new or additional street trees to complement this heritage character.

Aim

To provide a policy framework to guide street tree planning, planting, maintenance removal and replacement in the City of Yarra that will increase the benefits provided by trees in the urban landscape.

The vision for Yarra's streetscapes is enhanced liveability and amenity through green streets that contribute to social, environmental and financial sustainability.

Background

Yarra City Council currently owns and maintains approximately 20,000 street trees, which is increased by approximately 500 trees each year.

A number of streets in Yarra do not have street trees and are given priority as part of Council's annual planting program-

Community surveys confirm that the community values street trees very highly as an integral component of the many facets that make up overall neighbourhood amenity. Furthermore community feedback suggests that the community supports improved management and

planting of street trees and is highly engaged in the street tree selection and planting process.

As nature strips in Yarra are relatively uncommon, street trees are generally be located in footpaths or roadside cut-outs and must therefore compete for space with urban infrastructure, pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles.

Street trees influence, and are influenced by, many strategic and operational services provided by Council including infrastructure, transport planning, parking and town planning.

Effective management of street trees must acknowledge to the needs of external service authorities including, but not limited to, water, gas, electricity and road asset owners.

Council also acknowledges that street trees contribute to public liability claims and understands that the costs of maintaining assets are significant and are increasing due to the street trees. Therefore the effective management of street trees and adjacent infrastructure is critical if Council is to limit increases in its Public Liability Insurance premiums and the value of claims and ensure financial sustainability.

Council documents which relate directly to this Policy include:

- Open Space Strategy, 2007
- Environment Strategy, 2013-2020
- Road Management Plan
- Urban Wildlife Management Plan, 2009
- Asset Management Policy, 2011
- Open Space and Sustainable Asset Management Strategic Risk Registers
- Bicycle Strategy 2010-2015
- Parking Management Strategy, 2013
- Strategic Transport Statement 2006 (with Revised Actions 2012)
- Encouraging and Increasing Walking Strategy 2005
- Access and Inclusion Plan 2014-2017
- Water Sensitive Urban Design Policy
- Various Structure Plans and Urban Design Frameworks for specific precincts and streets
- Long term financial management plan.

External stakeholders that affect and inform this Policy include but are not limited to:

- Water, gas and electricity asset owners;
- VicRoads;
- MAV Insurance (Council's Public Liability Insurers)
- VicTrack; and
- Council's public liability insurers
- Local businesses and community groups.

Policy Objectives

Objective 1 – Net Increase in the number of street trees and overall street tree canopy.

1. Actions

- 1.1 Continue to implement infill and replacement street tree planting program.
- 1.2 Continue to implement a coordinated street tree planting program.
- 1.3 Develop a Street Tree Strategy to replace the 2004 Precinct Planting Master Plans.
- 1.4 Minimise tree removals (refer Tree Removals Procedure).

Expected Outcomes:

- Prioritise new planting in streets with no trees or poor quality trees.
- Prioritise space for street trees, particularly for large canopy trees which provide the greatest benefits.
- Retain and maintain existing street trees of an appropriate species and location.

Objective 2 – Improve the Quality of Street Trees

2. Actions

- 2.1 Select tree species and locations that ensure a tree can develop a sound structure and requires minimal pruning.
- 2.2 Select trees that are less likely to have an adverse impact on surrounding Infrastructure.
- 2.3 Select tree species that can tolerate pruning under power lines.
- 2.4 Minimise the impact of tree removals through a planned replacement program.
- 2.5 Investigate new planting techniques to improve tree quality and reduce impact on surrounding infrastructure.
- 2.6 Develop a street tree asset management plan including a tree inventory supported by Council's Geographic Information System (GIS) to ensure accurate information is available and supports regular auditing, inspections and asset planning.

Expected Outcomes:

- Prioritise space for trees in the streetscape to allow for healthy, mature growth.
- Healthy street tree canopies will be preserved for current and future generations.
- Appropriate species selection to achieve quality trees, tolerant of urban conditions and to limit damage to infrastructure and property.
- Support innovative planting design and establishment techniques to achieve quality solutions.
- Consistent auditing that helps preserve the health and wellbeing of street trees
- Life cycle asset management costs that are sustainable and supported by Council's long term financial management plan.

Objective 3 – Increase diversity of street tree species

3. Actions

- 3.1 Trial new tree species to broaden the available palate of trees available for planting across the Municipality.

Expected Outcomes:

- Increased biodiversity and wildlife habitat with the use of native and indigenous species.
- Contribution to a sustainable urban forest, which does not present risks associated with mono-cultures.
- A more varied species palette available for street tree selection.
- Reflect change and diversity of neighbourhood character.

Objective 4 – Recognise and contribute to Natural and Built Heritage

4. Actions

- 4.1 Develop replacement plans for senescent heritage trees.
- 4.2 Develop a Street Tree Strategy to reflect precinct character and areas of environmental and built heritage.

Expected Outcomes:

- Existing 19th and 20th Century heritage trees are protected or replaced via appropriate species selection.
- A variety of both native and exotic species will be maintained and planted.
- Native and indigenous species will be planted near waterways and ecological corridors.
- An increase in avenue-style planting where appropriate with species that complement the built heritage of the streetscape.

Objective 5 - Integrated Streetscape Design

5. Actions

- 5.1 Coordinate street tree planting with other Council services that have an impact on the amenity and management of streetscapes and associated infrastructure.
- 5.2 Consider Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) opportunities when planning street tree planting programs.
- 5.3 Consider and enhance access for people with disabilities wherever possible.

Expected Outcomes:

- Yarra's streetscapes which are safe, accessible, sustainable and enhance neighbourhood amenity.
- Innovative street tree planting design and establishment practices.

- Integration between different Council services and external agencies to achieve best streetscape outcomes.
- WSUD and stormwater reuse is integrated into streetscape design and tree planting.

Objective 6 – Education and Communication

6. Actions

- 6.1 Educate the community through consultation on street tree planting and replacement programs.
- 6.2 The provision of educational and information material for circulation on the benefits and management of street trees.

Expected Outcomes:

- Improved understanding of opportunities and constraints of street tree management.

Street tree removal and replacement criteria

Consistent with Objective 1 of the Street Tree Policy, Council's preference is for trees to be retained wherever possible.

Effective management of street trees requires street trees to be removed from time to time in order to limit risk to person and/or infrastructure, and reduce life cycle costs or to provide a street tree canopy for current and future residents,

Reasons for removal include, but are not limited to:

- Trees that are dead, dying or unsafe;
- Minimisation or elimination of risk to the public;
- Trees that are the subject of public liability claims;
- Trees that are in inappropriate locations due to tree size, structure or root network;
- Trees that are adversely impacting on vehicle and/or pedestrian safety;
- Trees that are causing damage to public or private infrastructure;
- Trees that are identified for removal following consultation as part of a street tree planting program;
- Trees that are identified as weed species; and
- Trees that are causing excessive renewal and maintenance costs to surrounding infrastructure.

Because street trees provide considerable benefit to the community by way of improved amenity and reduction in the urban heat island effect, Council will not support individual requests to have trees removed, or subjected to additional pruning, in order to:

- Reduce or eliminate leaf litter or tree debris;
- Improve private amenity;
- Increase car park numbers;
- Reduce overshadowing and/or preservation of solar access; and
- Preserve lines of sight to advertising boards.

Where a tree is considered for removal, it will be assessed against the following criteria, by the Council officer with the appropriate delegation.

	Identified issue ¹	Authority to approve
1	Street trees (alive or dead) posing an unmanageable risk to public safety	Coordinator Streetscapes and Arboriculture
2	Dead street trees	Coordinator Streetscapes and Arboriculture
3	Street trees with less than 5 years useful life expectancy (dying trees)	Coordinator Streetscapes and Arboriculture
4	Street trees posing an existing or potential risk to private infrastructure ²	Manager Recreation and Open Space in consultation with Council's Risk and Audit Advisor
5	Street trees posing an existing or potential risk to public infrastructure ²	Manager Recreation and Open Space in consultation with Manager Engineering Services and Council's Risk and Audit Advisor
6	Trees are identified for removal following consultation as part of a street tree planting program ³	Manager Recreation and Open Space

Table 1

¹ A tree may be deemed to fit in more than one category and will be assessed as such. In such cases the delegated authority to act will rest with the higher order issue.

² Street trees that are identified as impacting on private or public infrastructure will only be removed after viable tree management interventions have been investigated. Options include:

- Tree pruning;
- Installation of root barriers;
- Root pruning;
- Alternative material selection; and
- Realignment of infrastructure.

³ Coordinated street tree planting programs are subject to multiple rounds of consultation where local residents and absentee owners are asked to contribute to the process. In such projects, unless the tree(s) meet the criteria 1-4 in Table 1 above, no more than 25% of trees in any one street will be removed at one time.

Note 1: This procedure does not apply to trees approved for removal as part of a Town Planning Permit, which is subject to its own statutory advertising process.

Note 2: This procedure does not apply to private trees covered by Local Law 3: Sect 8 - Significant Trees

Community consultation for street tree replacement and removals will be consistent with Council's Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy

Right of appeal

A decision to remove or retain an individual tree will be made by the officer with the delegated authority in Table 1 above. Except where a tree is deemed to represent an unmanageable risk to public safety, where a decision is disputed by an individual or group, the decision will be referred to the delegated officer's line manager.

