



11.2 URBAN FOREST STRATEGY DRAFT VISION AND PRINCIPLES FOR COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: ALLISON KENWOOD, GENERAL MANAGER, COMMUNITY WELLBEING AND INCLUSION

PREPARED BY: JENNIFER WITHERIDGE, URBAN FOREST PLANNER
CLAIRE ULCOQ, COORDINATOR OPEN SPACE
DANA PRITCHARD, MANAGER OPEN SPACE RECREATION AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

1. PURPOSE

1.1 To endorse community engagement on the draft Urban Forest Strategy.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 The Urban Forest Strategy (UFS) 2011 is being updated.

2.2 Urban forestry and urban greening have been recognised globally as a means to manage Urban Heat Island (UHI), water quality, improve health outcomes and as an important contributor for biodiversity, ecosystems and habitat.

2.3 The new UFS will deliver an integrated, long-term framework to guide the planning, provision, protection, integration and management of the urban forest across Port Phillip. The new UFS will have a 20 year timeframe to 2040 with regular review and evaluation periods.

2.4 The UFS is being developed in three stages –

- Current State (evidence base)
- Strategic Direction (Vision and Principles)
- Policy Development (Action, Implementation and Evaluation Plan).

2.5 To date, Council officers have completed a number of key inputs for the UFS development, including:

- Appointing external consultants:
 - St Jack and Co to develop the strategy
 - Player Piano to conduct canopy mapping and assessment
 - Activate Consulting to develop and run community engagement
- Completed a comprehensive community engagement plan
- The first phase of community engagement, a Mayor's Round Table held in May 2023 with key stakeholders (active individuals and representatives of local groups)
- A workshop with Councillors in April 2023 (St Jack and Co)
- Workshops with Council officers (St Jack and Co)
- Completion of Stage 1 (evidence base). The documentation includes:
 - Port Phillip Urban Forest Strategy 2040 Background and Benchmarking Report (St Jack and Co, 2023) **(Attachment 1)**
 - City of Port Phillip Tree Ledger Report 2012-2022 (Player Piano, 2023) **(Attachment 2)**



- Protecting Vegetation in the Private Realm Report (Hansen Partnership, 2022) **(Attachment 3)**
- City of Port Phillip Biodiversity Study and Action Plan Background Research Discussion Paper (Arcadis, 2020, already public) **(Attachment 4)**
- Completion of Urban Forest Strategy Stage 1 Engagement Findings Report (Activate Consulting 2023) **(Attachment 5)**
- Progress on Stage 2 (Vision and Principles)
 - Preparation of the draft Urban Forest Strategy 2040 Strategic Directions **(Attachment 6)**

3. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 3.1 Notes the draft *Urban Forest Strategy 2040 Strategic Directions*.
- 3.2 Notes the *Urban Forest Strategy Stage 1 Engagement Findings Report*.
- 3.3 Notes supporting documents including the *Port Phillip Urban Forest Strategy 2040 Background and Benchmarking Report*, *City of Port Phillip Tree Ledger Report 2012-2022*, and *Protecting Vegetation in the Private Realm Report*.
- 3.4 Endorses the release of of the draft *Urban Forest Strategy Vision and Principles* for community engagement to commence in July 2023.

4. KEY POINTS/ISSUES

Draft Urban Forest Strategy 2040 Strategic Directions

- 4.1 The draft strategic directions include a 2040 Vision and a set of five principles. These were developed from a series of workshops with Councillors, key community stakeholders and Council officers. The vision and principles have been developed to nest, so that the principles all fit within the vision, and have been considered and developed in the context of:
 - the evidence base
 - their fit with leading practice
 - a balance between giving direction and providing scope for emerging practices or issues to be incorporated.
- 4.2 The vision was developed using key words from the workshops, which were distilled into:
 - Biodiversity
 - Green
 - Corridors / Connected
 - Healthy (functional / liveable / design / quality)
 - Together (community / shared responsibility)
 - Leading practice - be bold
 - Add biodiversity to heading or subheading
 - Practical.



- 4.3 The principles were developed from themes that emerged from the workshops. The themes were:
- Biodiversity (Biodiverse)
 - Connectivity, indigenous species use, habitat and wildlife corridor creation
 - Climate Resilience (Healthy)
 - Healthy and sustainable – retain, maintain and protect, succession planning
 - Urban cooling of hotspots, increase permeability to reduce flood risk, equitable access and distribution of greening.
 - Living Infrastructure (Integrated)
 - Alternative Greening in-road planting, green walls, roofs, nature strips, WSUD, depaving and innovation, typically engineered solutions to increase greening.
 - Private Land (Together)
 - Incentives and/or disincentives to increase greening
 - Include non-private land (e.g. schools).
 - Quality Urban Forest Management (Quality)
 - Amenity and Urban Character – including feature boulevards and streetscapes.
 - Education and awareness raising to value urban forest as core element of city
 - Integrated design and development and internal process improvements.

The themes from the Mayor's Round table are summarised below, and fully described in the Urban Forest Strategy Stage 1 Engagement Findings Report (**Attachment 6**).

Our 2040 Vision

4.4 Healthy, Biodiverse, Connected - In the City of Port Phillip, urban greening is healthy and abundant, biodiversity is valued and supported, and nature connects community.

4.5 Our Principles:

1. We work together to value, protect, grow and care for healthy and sustainable greening everywhere.
2. We retain first, respecting established character, and adapt by adding more resilient plant species where they are most needed to reduce heat and flood vulnerabilities.
3. We prioritise biodiversity, supporting healthy ecosystems and establishing wildlife corridors.
4. We invest in thriving integrated urban greening in streetscapes, buildings and gardens.
5. We value the urban forest as a long-term asset that is critical to the health and wellbeing of our community and to our City's character and function, through quality design, construction and maintenance.

Urban Forest Strategy Stage 1 Engagement Findings Report

4.6 A total of 41 key stakeholders (active individuals or representatives of local groups) participated in a Mayor's Round Table held on Monday 22 May 2023, or via email submission or interview (offered to those unavailable for the event). Participants



represented a diverse range of perspectives including environment, biodiversity, business, cultural heritage, older persons, sustainability, young people and the broader community.

- 4.7 Participants were invited to share their aspirations for what a 'green' Port Phillip would be like in 2040 and the challenges that need to be overcome to achieve this.
- 4.8 Words or terms that participants most frequently referenced relating to the vision for 2040 included: community, species, trees, biodiversity, nature, water, spaces, climate and corridor. Refer to Section 3 of the report for a summary and the full detailed findings (**Attachment 6**).
- 4.9 To help shape the guiding strategic principles, table-based group discussions then centred around three topics and participants identified what was important, challenges and priorities for each. The three topics were:
- Protect and manage the existing urban forest
 - Enhance the urban forest
 - Engage and collaborate with the community.
- 4.10 Across the three topics, some repeated themes emerged including:
- The need to engage the whole community to truly value the urban forest for its benefits to health and wellbeing, beauty and neighbourhood character, and climate resilience and adaptation.
 - Enhancing and supporting biodiversity should be a critical aim of the urban forest, through establishing and connecting corridors in particular.
 - Focusing on caring for, and retaining, what already exists and succession planning over time with resilient species, understory, and more canopy.
 - The need to engage and incentivise developers and private landowners to see vegetation as highly valuable and a priority to retain and enhance.
 - A shared commitment, and sufficient funding, to long-term goals and short-term actions, as well as a more equitable approach to greening across different parts of the City.
 - Improved, innovative urban water management practices are a foundational requirement to a thriving urban forest.
 - A desire for bold leadership, cultural change, partnerships, and investment in urban forestry.

The Current State (evidence base)

- 4.11 Alongside comprehensive community engagement, a suite of existing and new reports provides the evidence base for the development of the urban forest strategy. The Background and Benchmarking report and Tree Ledger Report have been commissioned especially for this project, the evaluation of the 2011 Urban Forest Strategy has been completed by CoPP officers and the Protecting Vegetation in the Private Realm Report and Biodiversity Study Discussion paper were completed in 2022 and 2020 respectively.

Background and Benchmarking Report

- 4.12 The report provides the context of the urban forest for Port Phillip, encapsulates what we have already heard from the community from engagement on other strategies and plans, provides the evidence base for benefits of urban greening and key urban forest



trends and challenges, benchmarks recent urban forest strategies including identifying best practice and emerging focus areas, investigates urban forest indicators and targets and provides local and global examples to learn from.

City of Port Phillip Tree Ledger Report 2012-2022

- 4.13 Canopy mapping and assessment, including the changes to canopy every two years for the past 10 years. The mapping and assessment includes a report documenting the status of Port Phillip’s tree canopy and access to a Tree Ledger database for further targeted analysis (12 month subscription).
- 4.14 Overall canopy cover across the municipality has remained relatively steady, with a small loss of 0.69% canopy cover. Small net gains in canopy coverage were achieved on roads (0.4%) and public land (0.1%). However, canopy loss on private land (-1.23%) exceeded gains.

Area	2022 % canopy cover
Municipal	17.17%
Streets	25.86%
Parks	17.22%
Private land	13.82%

- 4.15 There is a difference in canopy analysis results from this most recent analysis compared with the tree canopy analysis conducted by the Victorian Government in 2018.

Area	2018 % canopy cover
Municipal	13.19%
Streets	18.74%
Parks	13.26%
Private land	9.76%

The 2014 and 2018 Victorian Government datasets show significantly lower levels of canopy cover than the mapping and analysis results by Player Piano Data Analytics in 2023. The reason for the difference is the classification of tree canopy and the technology used for mapping and analysis.

In the 2014-18 analysis, only vegetation above 3m was included. The study assigned a per pixel height and aggregated canopy cover for all pixels above 3m, which means that only the portion of tree canopy above 3m high is included in the analysis. Any canopy below 3m is excluded resulting in an under estimate of canopy. Player Piano Data Analytics include the canopy area of the tree if the tree is above 3m, resulting in a more accurate measure of canopy.

The 2014-18 study used instrumentation and data processing to determine whether a pixel in an image is vegetation or not. Player Piano Data Analytics use artificial



intelligence algorithms trained by human analysts to identify an individual tree and make a measurement of the crown area, repeated for aerial images over time. The 2014-18 study measured loss and gain in canopy by subtraction. The technology developed by Player Piano Data Analytics provides greater detail of canopy gain and loss including whether a tree was removed, how much retained canopy grew or senesced and how newly planted trees were surviving. (*Details about differences in methodology and technology supplied by Player Piano Data Analytics*)

The results of each study are consistent within the studies themselves and results are valid. However due to the variation in data classification and analysis between the 2014-18 study and the recent study completed in 2023 means that results using different methodologies cannot be compared.

Protecting Vegetation in the Private Realm report

4.16 In 2022 a discussion paper and options report, Protecting Vegetation in the Private Realm, was commissioned and finalised by Council's Sustainability Team. The report identifies and prioritises appropriate (planning and local laws) instruments, controls and processes that will support increased greening, particularly canopy cover on private property in CoPP. The report evaluates the mechanisms and instruments used by 15 Councils to protect greening on private property and how effective they are.

City of Port Phillip Biodiversity Study and Action Plan Background Research Discussion Paper

4.17 In 2020 a biodiversity study, including a supporting background research discussion paper and action plan, was produced for Council. The research discussion paper is publicly available, The action plan has not been made public and the intention is to incorporate the actions into the new UFS.

5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

- 5.1 Over recent years, Council has already heard significant community feedback related to the urban forest through the development of other projects such as the Public Spaces Strategy, Nature Strip Guidelines, and Act and Adapt Sustainable Environment Strategy revision.
- 5.2 The aim of this engagement program is to build on what has already been heard and work with the community to inform the development of an UFS that balances community needs and desires, with Council's legal requirements (e.g., accessibility, electrical line clearance), and engenders collaboration between the community, Council and key stakeholders to implement the actions developed as part of this strategy.
- 5.3 To achieve this, the objectives of the engagement process are to:
- Gather feedback and input from key stakeholders and the broader community to:
 - Develop our understanding of the current context
 - Gain an understanding of their needs, desires, concerns, and ideas about the urban forest, what and where it is; and
 - Effectively harness and focus community passion and expertise positively into the strategy development.
 - Create community interest in the project, bring them along the journey to develop the strategy and generate buy-in for its implementation



- Implement a robust and transparent engagement process that properly reflects the diversity of community needs and builds confidence in the findings
- Gather, analyse and report feedback to meaningfully inform the UFS.

5.4 In recent years, the Port Phillip community has consistently raised greening as a major priority for the City of Port Phillip. Key themes raised in previous consultation on other strategies, plans and projects include:

- Increasing permeability and becoming a water sensitive city
- Mitigating urban heat, using more shade trees
- Providing more trees and vegetation, including tree-lined streets, maximising greening in existing public space, and setting aside more land for public green space
- Enhancing biodiversity
- Increasing Council influence on private realm greening, including ensuring that housing provides for nature and gardening
- Managing on-street car parking provision vs trees conflict
- Supporting community stewardship or ‘mobilisation’ (including tree planting events, community gardens, nature strips and initiatives like the Bee Pollinator Program in South Melbourne).
- Tree conflict and maintenance issues including potential damage to public and private infrastructure, leaf litter on streets and blocking gutters, shading gardens and solar panels, tree maintenance and safety (limb drop).

5.5 A comprehensive engagement process is being undertaken to ensure that the UFS is locally responsive, innovative and can be delivered in partnership with the community. This will build on the significant community feedback related to the urban forest that has already been received through other recent projects. The key dates for community engagement include:

22 May 2023	Mayor's Round table event held with key community stakeholders
10 July – 11 August 2023	Community engagement on the draft Vision and Principles and what people would like to see in the urban forest (online, in person)
August 2023	CoPP neighbourhood conversations to provide opportunities for people to continue to tell us what they would like to see in the urban forest (in person)
September - October 2023	Community workshops to develop action plan
February - March 2024	Community engagement on the draft UFS

6. LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

6.1 No significant legal or risk implications have been identified. The UFS will include measurable outcomes and timeframes for Council to monitor the progress of the delivery of each action in the strategy.



7. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 7.1 The UFS will include an Action and Implementation Plan to guide Council's investment in the urban forest. The Action and Implementation Plan will be developed with options to maximise outcomes of current budget vs accelerating and amplifying outcomes. Actions will be allocated over short, medium and long-term timeframes and associated costs will be identified.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 8.1 Habitat loss and fragmentation is a main factor in the decline and disappearance of many species in Port Phillip and throughout Australia. Protecting and enhancing the biodiversity throughout the City of Port Phillip and within the region benefits local plants and wildlife and provides ecosystem services that cool the city and contribute to flood mitigation and improved water quality.
- 8.2 The urban forest is vital to maintaining comfortable urban environments for humans and non-humans alike. Improving the urban forest will contribute to UHI and flood mitigation, storm resilience and improved amenity.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 9.1 Throughout recent community engagements, our community has emphasised the importance of urban greening and biodiversity for connection to place and community, for amenity and provision of ecosystem services to mitigate against urban heat islands and flooding, and the value of biodiversity, plants, birds, animals and insects as important in and of itself.
- 9.2 The urban forest and biodiversity contributes to a sense of place and amenity for Port Phillip residents, and contributes to a connection with Country for many. Strengthening the urban forest and biodiversity improves greener public places and has been demonstrated to have positive health and wellbeing benefits.

10. ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICY

- 10.1 Council Plan - Strategic Objective: Sustainable Port Phillip includes the following actions:
- The City is actively mitigating and adapting to climate change and invests in designing, constructing and managing our public spaces to optimise water sustainably and reduce flooding (blue/green infrastructure).
 - We will provide urban forests to increase tree canopy, vegetation, greening and biodiversity and reduce urban heat, in line with Council's Greening Port Phillip and Act and Adapt strategies, prioritised within available budgets each year
- 10.2 The *Places for People: Public Space Strategy 2022 – 2032* includes a short-term priority action to update GPP and the street tree planting program 2017-22 to reprioritise key actions based on the Public Space Strategy and other Council commitments.
- 10.3 Move Connect Live: Integrated Transport Strategy (2018-28) and Act and Adapt Sustainable Environment Strategy (2018-28) include greening actions.
- 10.4 Further opportunities for policy links include the Housing Strategy, Foreshore Management Plan and Coastal Adaptation Strategy and South Melbourne Structure Plan.



11. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

11.1 TIMELINE

- 11.1.1 Community engagement on the draft Vision and Principles and what people would like to see in the urban forest will be conducted online and in person from 10 July to 11 August 2023.
- 11.1.2 Council neighbourhood conversations to provide opportunities for people to continue to tell us what they would like to see in the urban forest will be held in person in August 2023.
- 11.1.3 Community workshops to develop the action plan will be held in September and October 2023.
- 11.1.4 Community engagement on the draft UFS will occur between February and March 2024.

11.2 COMMUNICATION

- 11.2.1 A comprehensive engagement process is being undertaken to ensure that the UFS is locally responsive, innovative and can be delivered in partnership with the community. This will build on the significant community feedback related to the urban forest that has already been received through other recent projects.

12. OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT INTEREST

- 12.1 No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any material or general interest in the matter

ATTACHMENTS

1. **Urban Forest Strategy 2040 Background and Benchmarking Report**[↓](#)
2. **Tree Ledger Report 2012-2022**[↓](#)
3. **Protecting Vegetation in the Private Realm Report**[↓](#)
4. **Biodiversity Study and Action Plan Background Research Discussion Paper**[↓](#)
5. **Urban Forest Strategy Stage 1 Engagement Findings Report**[↓](#)
6. **Draft Urban Forest Strategy 2040 Strategic Directions**[↓](#)