



Item 7.1 Petition Response – Request to remove Norfolk Island Hibiscus Trees on Park Street, South Melbourne

A Petition containing 46 signatures was received from local residents.

The Petition states the following: -

We the residents of Park Street, South Melbourne, strongly urge the Council to remove the Norfolk Island Hibiscus trees due to the ongoing discomfort and year round aggravation they cause.

The biggest issue is the amount of very fine and painful prickles they produce that are extremely difficult to see and remove. These prickles make it particularly hard for children to play in their neighbourhood, but also causes issues with pets requiring veterinary assistance for removal.

Leaves are dropped all year round and the flowers continuously drop fine sticky sap as well as becoming extremely slippery on the footpaths when they are dropped.

The following petitioners hereby request the removal of all Norfolk Hibiscus trees from Park Street, South Melbourne between Ferrars and Montague Streets. We would like them to be replaced with something deciduous such as the pear trees that are on the adjacent Draper Street or nearby Morton Street.

OFFICER COMMENT

Officers thank the residents for submitting the petition seeking to remove and replace the Norfolk Island Hibiscus trees on Park Street between Ferrars and Montague Streets. Officers acknowledge that the petitioners are supportive of the benefits of trees in the urban landscape but that they seek the replacement of the current trees.

Council also acknowledges the vital importance of trees to the City. Council's Greening Port Phillip Strategy articulates the many benefits that this urban forest provides including shelter, shade and beauty. The urban forest helps clean the air, regulate the temperature reducing the impact of the urban heat island effect thus reducing energy needs of nearby spaces. Trees intercept stormwater and reduce the load on stormwater drains, they protect and increase the life of infrastructure, and provide habitat to native birds and animals. For these reasons, Council's Greening Port Phillip Strategy supports the retention and protection of trees and only considers removal of trees if there are no other viable options.

This petition relates specifically to 24 Norfolk Island Hibiscus trees (*Lagunaria patersonii*), situated on both sides of Park Street, between Ferrars Street and Montague Street, South Melbourne. The trees are planted approximately 16m apart within the bitumen footpath cut-outs, approximately five metres from the adjacent property boundaries. The trees are well established and are estimated to be 40-50 years old. The trees contribute to the character of the streetscape which forms part of a consistent tree lined street.

Council's arborists have undertaken inspections of these trees and they were found to be in good health, structurally sound and providing important canopy cover for the immediate area. As part of Council's annual high voltage electric line clearance program, the trees were pruned for powerlines, footpath and roadway clearance, between May and August this year.



There are over 700 established Norfolk Island Hibiscus trees across the City, making it one of the ten most common species in the municipality. Whilst it is acknowledged this species can cause skin irritation, there is no evidence to suggest this species presents an unacceptable risk to public safety. Whilst the Norfolk Island Hibiscus is no longer part of Council's planting palette, the existing mature trees contribute to the municipality's diverse range of trees and are noted for ongoing management within the Greening Port Phillip Strategy.

Council considered a separate petition from residents at its meeting on 1 July 2020 with regards to a request to remove Norfolk Island Hibiscus trees. Council resolved to retain the trees in line with the existing Strategy.

Given the benefits of the 24 trees, and their health, and the requirements of the Greening Port Phillip Strategy it is recommended that the trees be retained and that their removal not be supported at this time.

As outlined in this, and the previous petition considered in 2020, there is a level of community desire to replace existing Norfolk Island Hibiscus trees across the City. A balance must be struck between the benefits that these existing mature trees provide and any disbenefits. The best way to do this is to look holistically at the urban forest across the City. Council's Greening Port Phillip Strategy was first adopted by Council in 2010 and is due to be updated and the reviewed within the next 12-months. It is proposed that Council give consideration as part of this review to a staggered replacement program for the City's diverse and significant population of Norfolk Island Hibiscus trees. A staggered replacement program can enable trees that have undesirable characteristics, such as the Norfolk Island Hibiscus trees, to be replaced progressively whilst maintaining a connected urban forest across the City.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Thanks the community for their petition.
2. Notes that Council policy is to retain healthy and structurally sound trees, and to only consider removal if there are no other viable options.
3. Denies the request for tree removal consistent with Council's Greening Port Phillip Strategy.
4. Notes that Council officers will assess the suitability of Norfolk Island Hibiscus trees and consider a long-term replacement strategy within the review of Greening Port Phillip Strategy.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil