

30 - Townsville City Council Public Tree Management Policy and Guidelines

REPORT TO COUNCIL

Authorised by	Director Infrastructure & Operations
Prepared by	General Manager Construction Maintenance & Operations
Section	Infrastructure and Operations - Construction Maintenance and Operations
Date	21 October 2021

Executive Summary

Council is the custodian of the City's public tree network. The purpose of the Public Tree Management Policy is to provide a framework that protects, enhances and manages public trees, therefore demonstrating Council's commitment and strategic direction on this matter. The management of public trees often becomes an emotive issue and this policy serves to provide clear guidance and criteria to inform the general public of Council's position.

The key principle for tree management is public safety, however this policy also seeks to preserve, protect and improve the City's image, health and resilience by prioritising public trees within the urban landscape. Tree removal will only occur if the risk associated can not be economically managed and mitigated through arboricultural means. No highly significant or significant tree will be removed without notification to Council and following public consultation.

The policy provides a clear framework and informs the community on Council's commitment and strategic direction for the management of public trees that is both consistent and best practice. The policy also formally recognises the value of trees as a fundamental and intrinsic landscape element in the urban environment.

Following community consultation, the public is supportive of adopting the Public Tree Management Policy.

Officer's Recommendation

That Council:

1. Adopt the Public Tree Management Policy
2. Note the Public Tree Management Guidelines

Names of Parties with a Known Interest

» Nil

Link to Corporate Plan

Goal 2 - A circular economy that advances business and moves towards zero waste.

» Retention of trees supports Council targets of zero waste as they can be used as a carbon offset.

Goal 4 - A sustainable destination that embraces and participates in the arts, sports, events and recreational activities.

» The public tree policy supports healthy living and sustainable parks and open spaces.

Economic Activation

» Nil

Community Engagement

Recently an e-petition was represented to Council regarding the creation of a significant tree register and a process for the removal of trees on Council land.

The adoption of this policy will provide a clear framework for management of public trees.

Financial Sustainability

This policy will guide Council expenditure on trees for maintenance such as pruning, root management and removal. These activities are funded as part of Council's annual budget.

Consultation (internal/external)

Consultation has occurred with various internal Council departments.

The policy was presented to the Infrastructure Committee meeting on 8 September 2021 prior to its release for community consultation.

The results of the community consultation are as follows:

- » Total visits to the Have Your Say: 643
- » Unique visitors: 537
- » Informed visitors: 277
- » Completed a feedback form: 51
- » Document downloads: 237

It is important to note that the people and organisations that responded are engaged in this area and are assessed as seeking a policy that has a higher level of protection and preservation of trees than Council is likely to adopt. Council must balance public safety and the city's liveability.

The following breakdown indicates high level key findings associated with the Public Tree Management Policy consultation:

- » Participants indicated an extremely high level of support for the adoption of a Public Tree Management Policy
- » Participants indicated an extremely high level of support for the adoption of a Public Tree Management Significant Tree Register
- » Participants indicated a high level of interest in ensuring trees of historical and cultural significance are protected
- » Participants indicated some concerns within the policy regarding removal of trees
- » Participants indicated significant appreciation for inclusion and equity in the consultation process

Based on the feedback from the community consultation the Public Tree Management Policy requires minor amendment to better define weeds and invasive species.

Feedback also requested that this policy be expanded to include private property, nature reserves, drains and firebreaks. This is not recommended as the intent of this policy was to complement existing documents and provide a framework for how Council manages trees in public spaces such as parks.

On 18 October 2021, Council officers met with the following groups:

- » North Queensland Conservation Council
- » Landcare
- » Magnetic Island Nature Care Association
- » Magnetic Island Community Development Association

This meeting provided feedback to detailed responses which were received during the consultation period. At the meeting, Council officers outlined reasoning to sections of feedback which were not adopted into the policy. The balance of the feedback centred on:

Magnetic Island as World Heritage listed area - Urban areas on Magnetic Island are excluded.

The policy be widened to cover private land, nature reserves, drains and fire breaks and also apply to developers. It was highlighted at this meeting that intent of the policy and guidelines was to deal with in situ trees on Council controlled land and that there are local laws and the Development Manual that addresses these areas.

The development of the tree register was discussed and Council will use a precinct approach to encompass areas such as ANZAC Park, The Strand, the strip to Pallarenda, Ross River and similar areas.

Overall Council staff were able to provide a response to the key groups and Council will continue to close out feedback with the remaining respondents.

Policy/Legislative Implications

» There is no policy or legislative implications arising from this policy.

Legal Implications (statutory basis, legal risks)

» This policy gives a transparent framework for the management of public trees.

Risk Implications

Risks associated with endorsing the recommendation:

- » Potential public or developer pressure to remove trees based on criteria in the policy.
- » Lack of local community will to follow the policy.

Risks associated with not endorsing the recommendation:

- » Council would continue to have no transparent and consistent approach to managing public trees.

Attachments

1. Stakeholder Engagement Public Consultation Report - Public Tree Management Policy
2. Public Tree Management Policy
3. Public Tree Management Guidelines