

# Tree Management and Donation Policy

## Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to

- establish the City of Sydney's commitment and future strategic direction for tree planting, protection, management and maintenance of its urban forest.
- address tree management and maintenance issues faced by the City of Sydney.
- provide a framework for decision making, documentation and standardised processes to ensure consistency in the management of the City of Sydney's urban forest.
- support the City of Sydney in achieving its Greening Sydney Strategy vision for a *cool, calm and resilient Sydney*, including the delivery of endorsed greening and canopy cover targets.

The Tree Management and Donation Policy is one of a suite of documents used to proactively manage trees in the City of Sydney. The relationship between the tree management documents is illustrated in **Appendix A**.

## Scope

This Policy applies to all trees located within the City of Sydney local government area (LGA).

## Policy context

The City of Sydney covers an area of approximately 26 square kilometres. The land use within the LGA is diverse, and includes the Central Business District, harbour foreshore edges, 19th century terrace housing, urban renewal residential areas, along with industrial, warehousing and commercial development.

Within this intensively developed urban area is a tree canopy that has been reinstated over time. This canopy now contains a variety of tree species of different size, age and level of significance in the landscape, including trees of considerable heritage significance, that are recognised as heritage items within the City's planning controls.

These trees provide many social, economic and environmental benefits. They beautify and soften streetscapes, provide wildlife habitat and play a significant role in determining the urban character of our city. Trees are critical in providing a healthy urban environment, they improve our health and wellbeing and reduce the impacts from urban heat islands.

The benefits of trees do not come without some costs or compromises. We must invest in planting and establishing new trees in our city. We must maintain them as they grow, and we must remove them when they reach the end of their useful life. We must also live with any inconveniences (disservices) that result from them. Trees can drop leaves, fruit and flowers, and their roots can damage infrastructure, if not built to accommodate them. Minimising the costs and inconveniences, whilst also maximising the benefits, is the key to successful integration and management of trees in the urban landscape and the provision of positive outcomes for the community.

Through adhering to the basic principle of *the right tree for the right place* the City will continue to achieve a favourable balance for the community now, and for future generations. (City of Sydney Urban Forest Strategy 2023).

## Definitions

Term	Meaning
Canopy cover	The area of land covered by tree canopy when viewed from above.
Donated Tree	A tree planted as a result of a person or organisation donating the fees for its planting by the City.
Donation Register	Online record of the location of the donated trees and the date planted.
Donor	Person or organisation who pay fees for a tree to be donated.
Tree	A tree includes any woody perennial plant, any plant resembling a tree in form and size – with the potential to grow to five metres or more in height, and any other plant prescribed by the City’s regulations.  This definition relates to this Policy only, and other tree definitions may also be used by the City.
Tree Species List	A specific list of tree species that are considered suitable for planting within the local government area.
Urban forest	All the trees, or groups of trees, that exist in urban areas, including trees in parks, streets, and growing within private or public properties.

## Policy Statement

The objectives of the Tree Management and Donation Policy are to:

- prioritise the protection and management of trees across the LGA.
- broaden the emphasis of tree management to include urban forestry principles, with trees managed as a collective asset, to maximise the benefits canopy cover provides
- improve the quality and quantity of the City of Sydney’s canopy cover
- increase species diversity and improve the age spread of the urban forest
- recognise and protect trees considered significant due to heritage, ecological, cultural, social and planning control criteria
- increase awareness and educate our communities, utilities, developers and City staff on the value of trees in the urban landscape
- enhance the City of Sydney’s reputation within the community as a steward and manager of trees and the urban forest.

The Tree Management and Donation Policy is divided into seven key areas:

1. Tree Management and Protection
2. Tree Species Selection and Planting
3. Tree Removal
4. Public Tree Asset Management
5. Community Consultation and Engagement
6. Tree Donation
7. Trees as essential infrastructure

### 1. Tree Management and Protection

The City of Sydney recognises the social, economic and environmental benefits that the urban forest provides. The management and protection of trees is given high priority in all aspects of the City’s activities.

The relevant Tree Management controls in the State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) Biodiversity and Conservation 2021 and the City’s Development Control Plan (DCP) provide the main legislative tools for the protection of all trees located within the City of Sydney.

The following policy principles apply to tree management and protection:

Issue	Policy Statement
<b>Tree Inspection and Assessment</b>	We use tree inspection and assessment procedures, based on recognised industry standards, to ensure consistency in the approach to inspection, assessment and determining tree management outcomes.
<b>Tree Management planning controls – SEPP and DCP</b>	<p>We regulate tree pruning and tree removal through the relevant planning controls. This includes the State Environmental Planning Policy Biodiversity and Conservation 2021 (SEPP) and the City’s Development Control Plan (DCP).</p> <p>We assess and determine tree applications either through a permit or development application process, dependent on the tree and/or the property’s heritage significance.</p> <p>The Australian Standard for the pruning of amenity trees (AS4373) is specified by the City of Sydney to ensure quality pruning work is achieved.</p>
<b>Neighbouring trees</b>	We accept applications for the pruning of a tree located in a neighbouring property, under the SEPP and DCP, however applications for the removal of a tree in a neighbouring property will not be accepted without the tree owners’ written consent. The City does not resolve disputes between neighbours.
<b>Register of Significant Trees</b>	We recognise trees that contribute to the environmental, cultural and social character of our local area through the Register of Significant Trees. We prioritise the retention and protection of significant trees.
<b>Development Applications</b>	We ensure that development applications include all necessary information to allow full assessment of potential impacts on all trees to be retained and an appropriate number and standard for new tree planting to achieve the required canopy cover targets.

	We provide tree report guidelines to assist external stakeholders with the necessary reporting information and standards.
<b>Development activities / events</b>	We require the protection of trees from construction works and other activities/events that threaten to impact their health and stability. The Australian Standard for the protection of trees on development sites (AS4970) will be used to achieve consistency in tree protection requirements.  Event specific tree management plans may be implemented to assist with the protection of the City’s tree assets.
<b>Bonds</b>	We impose bonds on developers and event organisers to ensure the protection of trees to be retained.
<b>Construction hoardings</b>	We ensure that construction hoardings are built in such a way to protect trees to be retained; trees will not be permitted to be removed for the provision of construction hoardings.
<b>Unauthorised Works / Poisoned trees</b>	We notify the community of illegal works and undertake site specific responses following tree poisoning or illegal tree removal. We investigate unauthorised tree pruning, poisoning and removal and pursue enforcement action where appropriate in accordance with the City’s Prosecution and Civil Enforcement Policy and the Compliance Policy.

**2. Tree Species Selection and Planting**

The City of Sydney proactively identifies opportunities to increase canopy cover across the local area. Improving the quality of the canopy cover will be achieved through planting “the right tree in the right location”. Quality planting includes nursery stock quality, installation, selection criteria and species diversity.

Our urban forest is a mix of endemic, native, exotic, evergreen and deciduous trees. Each has an important role to play. Deciduous trees are valued for their ability to shade and cool the city during summer but also allow access to light and warmth during winter.

We recognise that low species diversity has the potential to create an unsustainable forest with increased vulnerability to climate extremes and pest and disease issues. To meet the current and future challenges that face our city, the urban forest will continue to be a mix of native and exotic tree species, ensuring the future resilience of the forest and a liveable city.

The following policy principles apply to tree planting and species selection:

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Policy Statement</b>
<b>Increasing canopy cover</b>	We continue to identify new tree planting opportunities to achieve the canopy cover targets for streets, parks and properties, and to deliver ongoing environmental, economic and social benefits.
<b>Street Trees</b>	We plant street trees in accordance with the Street Tree Master Plan to ensure the coordinated development of streetscapes that are attractive, functional and deliver the appropriate canopy cover for that street.

<b>Park trees</b>	We plant park trees in accordance with the specific park Tree Management Plan, through park upgrades and/or to achieve the appropriate canopy cover for the park type (such as iconic park, neighbourhood park, pocket park) taking into consideration park activities and uses.
<b>Property trees</b>	<p>We assess applicable Development Applications against the DCP, tree replenishment rates and deep soil requirements, to ensure sufficient healthy canopy cover is established. Assessment and determination will also be made on the provision of suitable replacement trees when assessing tree removal applications through the permit process.</p> <p>We will ensure diverse tree species selection is compatible with the City of Sydney Tree Species List and the specific site planting conditions, and in accordance with the Landscape Code.</p>
<b>Tree species selection criteria</b>	<p>We plant the most appropriate tree species based on site suitability, aesthetic, functional and biological attributes, performance and the potential to contribute to landscape character.</p> <p>Species planted within the LGA will be selected from the City of Sydney Tree Species List, which includes species that will thrive in the changing climate.</p>
<b>Urban forest diversity</b>	<p>We will increase the diversity of the urban forest by monitoring the composition of the street and park tree population, and adjusting species selection towards the LGA as a whole achieving no more than 10% of any single species, 20% of any single genus, and no more than 40% of any single family.</p> <p>In private properties, this diversity approach needs to be considered when selecting species for planting to assist with achieving this overall benchmark. The City will provide information that may assist in selecting diverse species, including the Tree Species List.</p>
<b>Tree supply standards</b>	We require quality nursery stock to be planted according to the latest best practice and standards. All trees supplied will conform to the Australian Standard AS2303 - Tree Stock for Landscape Use.
<b>Installation details</b>	Standard technical specifications and installation techniques are used by the City's service providers and third parties to ensure successful establishment of newly planted trees throughout the LGA.
<b>Tree establishment</b>	We undertake tree establishment maintenance, for between one and two years following planting, including regular watering, fertilising, formative pruning and mulching.

### 3. Tree Removal

Trees like all living things grow, age and eventually die. Over their lifespan, trees require active management to maintain their health and structure and to minimise potential risks. Whilst tree removal is a “last resort”, public safety always takes priority.

Selective tree removal and replacement programs, over many years, are vital in managing canopy cover to ensure that the numerous benefits trees provide are sustained for future generations.

We assess all council owned trees and undertake tree removal and replacement programs when required.

We assess applications to remove trees on private property and determine these applications in accordance with this Policy and the relevant planning controls (SEPP and DCP).

The following policy principles apply to tree removal and replacement:

Issue	Policy Statement
<b>Assessment and determinations</b>	<p>We use tree assessment procedures, based on industry standards to ensure consistency in the approach to determining tree removals.</p> <p>The retention of significant, healthy, and structurally sound trees is a priority.</p> <p>We approve the removal of trees that are in poor health or have significant structural defects. We will also approve the removal of trees where there is significant damage to an approved habitable structure or significant infrastructure, where it is demonstrated the tree’s removal is the only option available to address the issue.</p> <p>Tree removal is not permitted to facilitate views (including advertising signs), off-street parking, installation of solar panels, to reduce the extent of leaf / flower / fruit drop, or to reduce the impact from any bird / bat / other animal waste or noise.</p>
<b>Emergency situations</b>	<p>Risk to public safety and property takes priority in tree removal decisions in emergency situations.</p>
<b>Public tree removal notifications</b>	<p>We notify the community of a planned street or park tree removal by placing a notification sign on the trunk, for a period of up to 14 days, confirming the reason for removal and the replacement planting proposed.</p>
<b>Poor performing trees</b>	<p>We remove and replace poorly performing trees to reinvigorate the urban forest.</p>
<b>Weed species</b>	<p>We undertake the staged removal and replacement of trees classified as noxious or environmental weed species. The impacts to canopy cover is a key consideration in removing trees as part of this process.</p>
<b>Poisoned or damaged trees</b>	<p>We will consider the retention or delayed removal of appropriate trees that have been poisoned or otherwise damaged. These trees will be managed until they are removed and/or replaced.</p>
<b>Age diversity</b>	<p>We aim for a sustainable spread of our street and park tree age classes (e.g. young, semi mature, mature, over-mature) to minimise the impact of high numbers of tree removals required within short timeframes and / or within specific areas as a result of age over-maturity.</p>
<b>Capital works improvements</b>	<p>We will develop strategies for the installation of new plantings, where feasible, prior to tree removal required for capital work projects.</p>

#### 4. Public Tree Asset Management

We recognise that trees are a vital asset and play an important role in making Sydney a liveable, attractive and healthy city. Our trees are growing in a harsh urban environment, which requires specialised care and management.

We are committed to a high-quality maintenance regime that provides adequate resources for the long-term health of the City’s urban forest.

The following policy principles apply to tree asset management:

Issue	Policy Statement
<p><b>Best practice tree maintenance</b></p>	<p>We ensure that best practice tree maintenance is applied across all street and park trees, and trees located on council properties (such as libraries, childcare centres).</p> <p>Inspections of our street, park and property trees are undertaken on an annual basis to confirm tree health, condition and any maintenance works required.</p> <p>Maintenance will be undertaken by qualified arborists, ensuring nominal footpath, road and infrastructure clearances are maintained. Standards for pedestrian accessibility will be met wherever possible, but compromises will be necessary in locations where the historical growth of trees prevents compliance.</p> <p>City staff undertake regular audits to ensure that high quality delivery standards are maintained at all times.</p>
<p><b>Tree Management Plans</b></p>	<p>We prepare Tree Management Plans for our 19<sup>th</sup> century parks, such as Hyde Park, other iconic parks and streetscapes. The Plans will provide long term strategies that will guide short term activities to ensure the health and amenity of tree assets.</p>
<p><b>Tree pruning</b></p>	<p>We undertake street, park and property tree pruning to improve our tree health, structure and to provide nominal clearances from pedestrians, traffic, buildings and other essential infrastructure.</p> <p>We do not prune or permit tree/s to be pruned to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• facilitate views (including to advertising signs and other installations),</li> <li>• facilitate the installation or continued function of solar panels,</li> <li>• facilitate installation of temporary non-essential infrastructure,</li> <li>• reduce the extent of leaf / flower / fruit drop, or to reduce the impact from bird / bat / other animal waste or noise.</li> </ul> <p>We advocate for the improved pruning of our street trees located under powerlines that is performed by third parties.</p>
<p><b>Lighting and other attachments</b></p>	<p>We do not support lighting (including fairy, festoon) or other attachments being attached to or placed within our trees.</p>
<p><b>Pests and diseases</b></p>	<p>We monitor and treat pest and disease issues as part of the tree maintenance program.</p>



<b>Risk management / insurance claims</b>	We proactively manage tree risk management issues. Guidelines are provided to assist the community to address the common issues raised, outline the City’s approach and the responsibilities for rectifying any issues.
<b>Tree Asset Database</b>	We maintain a tree asset database for our park, street and council property trees to facilitate decision making, prioritise resources and to maintain accurate historical data.
<b>Tree information systems</b>	We keep abreast of new technology in the field of arboriculture and urban forestry and incorporate technical tools into management and maintenance techniques where appropriate.

**5. Community consultation and engagement**

We value our community’s opinion and will encourage consultation and communication about tree management and the urban forest.

The following policy principles will apply to community consultation and engagement:

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Policy Statement</b>
<b>Community notification and consultation</b>	We notify the community of a planned removal of a council tree by placing a notification sign on the trunk, for a period of up to 14 days, confirming the reason for removal and the replacement planting proposed.  We consult with the community about the proposed removal of council trees as part of major tree renewal projects or other specialised projects impacting on council trees.  We provide information about the new street trees planted to the residents located adjacent to the planting.
<b>Community awareness</b>	We will provide programs to encourage community awareness of urban forest management issues.
<b>Community information</b>	We will increase community knowledge about the benefits of trees and the urban forest, and the various strategies, policies and master plans the City uses for their management, through the City’s website, online mapping and story maps and other media.



**6. Tree Donation**

In accommodating community tree donation requests, this policy seeks to provide positive outcomes for both the community and the City, while ensuring a planned and systematic approach to tree planting and management. The following policy principles apply to tree donation:

Issue	Policy Statement
<p><b>Donation planting location, species selection and supply.</b></p>	<p>We ask donors to nominate their preferred planting location (park, street) and/or tree species (if applicable).</p> <p>The City’s Tree Management Team review the location and/or species to assess its suitability. The tree species selection criteria, tree location and supply policy statements in section two of this policy will be used to determine the most appropriate species, location and to secure quality stock for planting.</p> <p>If multiple requests are received for a specific location, or there are no opportunities for additional tree planting, alternate locations will be suggested to the donor.</p> <p>We plant and establish the trees as outlined in section two - Tree Species Selection and Planting.</p> <p>We do not accept the donation of trees or other plant material for planting on council land. All tree donation materials are supplied, planted and maintained by the City.</p>
<p><b>Donation timing</b></p>	<p>We plant the donated tree during our annual tree planting season, between March and September, as planting in the cooler months improves the tree’s establishment and long-term health.</p> <p>Donors are advised of the actual planting time to allow them to attend and/or participate in the tree planting.</p>
<p><b>Work Health and Safety</b></p>	<p>In the interests of public safety, the tree donor’s role in the planting process (if they elect to be present) will be limited to adding topsoil, after the tree has been positioned into the planting hole. We will address any Work Health and Safety issues prior to any community participation in planting large, and/or heavy trees, including a site induction. Tree donors will be covered by the City’s existing insurance policies for volunteers.</p>
<p><b>Tree Maintenance</b></p>	<p>Once established, we manage and regularly maintain each donated tree, as outlined in section four – Public Tree Asset Management.</p>
<p><b>Park benches</b></p>	<p>We appreciate that planting a memorial tree is not suitable in all situations. An alternative is for a park bench to be donated and installed. The seat style and materials used are specified in the City’s Streetscape Design Code and Parks Technical Manual.</p>
<p><b>Donation Register</b></p>	<p>We record all donated trees once planted, or seats when installed, into the online Donation Register. This register records the location of the tree / seat, the date planted / installed and if the donor prefers, information about the reason for the donation.</p> <p>We do not allow individual plaques to be installed.</p>

<b>Donation Fees</b>	<p>The required Donation Fee, for the different tree container sizes at planting and planting locations, and the extraordinary circumstances when fees may be waived, is detailed within the Revenue Policy - Fees and Charges.</p> <p>We also accept general donations as a contribution to the City’s tree planting programs, however these donations will not be included against a specific tree on the Donation Register. They will be listed as a general donation.</p>
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**7. Trees as essential infrastructure**

Trees are the largest living things in the urban environment and are the biggest contributors to vital green infrastructure, a city’s natural life support system. Trees are essential in cities. Their environmental, social, cultural, and economic benefits are well established and beyond doubt.

Trees improve our mental and physical health in many ways, from reducing blood pressure and risk of getting diabetes, improving our cardiovascular and metabolic health, improving the quality of sleep, reducing depression and loneliness. They shade and cool our streets, parks, and homes. They increase biodiversity and enhance economic activity and property values. Therefore, trees are a cost-effective, nature-based solution in providing a cool, healthy and resilient city.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation suggest that the return on investment in urban forests far exceeds the cost of installation and maintenance compared with grey infrastructure and should be considered a “smart deal” for public authorities and the community. (City of Sydney Urban Forest Strategy 2023).

The following policy principles apply to trees as essential infrastructure:

Issue	Policy Statement
<b>Trees as essential infrastructure</b>	We will consider and manage trees as essential infrastructure. Tree retention, protection and planting will be prioritised when determining associated works, projects and developments. Trees will be considered as long-term assets, similar to utilities and the built form, ensuring tree removal is not an expedient option in our city, and planting locations are maximised.
<b>An integrated urban forest</b>	We will explore the potential for using nature-based solutions, and optimise the interactions between green, grey and blue infrastructure, to improve the city’s resilience and liveability.
<b>Trees and canopy cover on public land</b>	<p>We will continue to identify opportunities for new and replacement tree planting in streets and parks, and ensure trees are planted in the best locations to optimise canopy cover.</p> <p>We will identify streets where tree planting and provision of canopy cover should be prioritised over other uses of public space, such as on-street car parking and other road space that is underutilised.</p> <p>Canopy cover is important for public health however, retrofitting trees into existing streets can be a complex process. In selecting planting locations, we will respond to the specific context after considering the constraints, design issues, design guides and overall health outcomes.</p>

<p><b>Trees and canopy cover on properties / private land</b></p>	<p>Canopy cover retention and growth on private land will be managed through revised provisions within the DCP, including minimum tree planting requirements for specific development typologies.</p> <p>We will also engage with the owners or managers of large land areas within the LGA to explain the City’s targets for canopy cover and encourage action within their land towards achievement of those targets.</p>
<p><b>Build awareness of trees as essential infrastructure</b></p>	<p>We will engage with a broad range of practitioners, including planners, landscape architects and engineers, to guide them in how best manage assets, and to plan and deliver projects on private or public property that recognise trees as essential infrastructure and to also contribute towards meeting the canopy targets.</p>

**Responsibilities**

The City’s Urban Forest Manager is responsible for implementation of the Tree Management and Donation Policy.

**Consultation**

The Tree Management and Donation Policy was placed on public exhibition from 13 December 2022 to 28 February 2023.

**References**

<p><b>Laws and Standards</b></p>
<p>State Environmental Planning Policy Biodiversity and Conservation 2021 (SEPP).</p>
<p>City of Sydney Local Environmental Plan (LEP)</p>
<p>City of Sydney Development Control Plan (DCP)</p>
<p>City of Sydney Landscape Code</p>
<p>Australian Standard for pruning of amenity trees (AS4373)</p>
<p>Australian Standard for the protection of trees on development sites (AS4970)</p>
<p>Australian Standard for Tree Stock for Landscape Use (AS2303)</p>
<p><b>Policies and Procedures</b></p>
<p>Greening Sydney Strategy</p>
<p>Urban Forest Strategy</p>
<p>Street Tree Master Plan</p>
<p>Park Tree Management Plans</p>
<p>Register of Significant Trees</p>
<p>Prosecution and Civil Enforcement Policy.</p>
<p>Compliance Policy</p>

### Review period

This policy will be reviewed every 10 years.

### Approval Status

The Council approved this policy on 26 June 2023.

### Approval History

Stage	Date	Comment	TRIM Reference
Original Policy	26 June 2023	Approved by Council  Replaces the Tree Management Policy and Tree Donation Policy, inclusion of trees as essential infrastructure.	2023/393844
Commence Review Date	26 September 2032		
Approval Due Date	26 June 2033		

### Ownership and approval

Responsibility	Role
Author	Urban Forest Manager
Owner	Urban Forest Manager
Endorser	Director City Services
Approver	City of Sydney Council

Appendix A – Strategic Framework

