



The Goulburn Valley Environment Group Inc.

Po Box 2073 Shepparton Vic 3632 Ph0358269557

e-mail gveg@shepparton.net.au

Draft Urban Forest Strategy

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the City of Greater Shepparton's Urban Forest Strategy draft document.

The Goulburn Valley Environment Group (GVEG) believes the Urban Forest strategy is a good low risk strategy that will deliver significant environment, economic and health and wellbeing benefits to the region.

This is such an important initiative that GVEG considers it of utmost importance for Council to appoint a staff member whose entire role is to inform the community about the benefits of trees. The person would engage with all businesses, schools and every service, environmental, sporting and cultural group within Greater Shepparton to ensure that this initiative is embodied into our values

Feedback questions :

1. Why do you think the urban forest is important for Greater Shepparton?

The term 'Urban Forest' can potentially be misleading but the establishment and management of urban trees and shrubs will lead to an improvement in the health and wellbeing of residents, improve biodiversity outcomes and be economically beneficial as outlined in the draft.

The strategy is also an important one in terms of general environmental outcomes across the municipality. The promotion of trees and green spaces in urban centres, and the benefits gained from the establishment and management of the urban forest has the potential to influence behaviour and biodiversity outcomes in the rural parts of the municipality.

There are several things listed for rating; Building healthy communities, Adapting the city to climate change, Enhancing the city brand, Improving the City's economic prosperity, Enhancing the environment.

These things are all important and will all occur through the implementation of the strategy. The point about enhancing 'the' environment should be changed to '**our**' environment. It is important that every resident has the understanding that it is our environment and our health, wellbeing and economic prosperity is intrinsically linked to it.

It should also be noted that most of the issues raised in the draft are issues that go beyond the confines of our urban centres. An urban forest strategy sends the very clear message that the City understands the overall value that trees play in our environment, whether natural or constructed.

2. What element of the Urban Forest should Council invest in as a priority?

Once again all the listed things are important and should be worked on. The linkages to areas of natural value have the potential to deliver biodiversity benefits as well as improving amenity. Increasing shade in our parks is important in providing an enjoyable and inviting environment to encourage people into our open spaces.

It should be noted that if improving linkages to natural assets then management activity also needs to occur around weed management and pest animal control. There is no point working on improving species movement through our landscapes if we then allow our cats and dogs to eat them.

3. Are there any issues regarding urban trees that you feel Council should consider as part of this Strategy?

The protection of existing, usually old large native vegetation with irreplaceable habitat benefits should be highly prioritised for protection.

The fact that the species most planted is exotic and only one species in the top ten species planted is indigenous is concerning. The biodiversity benefits improve exponentially the closer you get to planting indigenous species and efforts need to be made to improve this situation. Recent works have led in many areas to removal of large shade trees, deemed a public risk, and replaced by much smaller ornamental trees that offer limited shade opportunities.

We suggest planting a higher proportion of large trees and let future generations, enduring much warmer and difficult climatic conditions, decide the suitability of these plantings. We believe, given climatic conditions, future generations may well view the risk profile of these large trees differently.

4. What opportunities do you feel exist for Greater Shepparton in relation to the Urban Forest?

The Urban Forest strategy should be closely aligned to existing strategies and groups. The City of Greater Shepparton has an environmental strategy that should influence how and where things are done. The RiverConnect project should also be an integral part of the Urban Forest strategy. The regional catchment strategy should also be one of the main influences on any urban forest activities.

It will be important to better align rural and urban outcomes. The Urban Forest strategy draft has highlighted the number of trees the City Council manages within the confines of the urban centres. The City Council has no idea how many trees there are in the rural parts of the municipality, has no idea how many isolated large old habitat paddock trees are being lost annually in relation to what's there and has no programs in place to encourage the retention and recruitment of these trees.

There is no point feeling good about the work being done in the municipalities urban centres if the situation is declining in the rural parts.

Council has many vacant land parcels within the urban areas of the municipality. Council should be working closely with Landcare, RiverConnect, ParksVic and others to plant as many of these blocks as is practicable. Council should also be working to plant out as many of the vacant tree sites as possible. Management of existing trees needs to ensure we are not losing them as they are planted.

5. How can the community be involved in planning and managing our Urban Forest?

Council needs to actively promote the value and benefits we all get from having an urban forest. Information could go out with rates notification. Residents could be encouraged through rates adjustments that reflect the collective benefits gained. Competitions and awards are another good way of keeping the issues relevant and prominent. CO2 monitoring and reporting will also highlight some of the benefits.

6. Do you have any big ideas for the Greater Shepparton's urban forest?

Council could be a leader. Imagine if our subdivisions were biodiversity positive? Reduce or increase rates to reflect whether the property is contributing toward biodiversity outcomes or not. For example, backyard full of exotics and two cats and a dog running around- high rates, backyard full of indigenous plants and no destructive pets- low rates. This strategy could also cover energy use, dwelling footprint size, aspect and other things that reflect its long term sustainability and contribution to urban centres that are happy, productive environments.

7. Any other comments

Goulburn Valley Environment Group would like to congratulate the City of Greater Shepparton for the Urban Forest initiative. We live in a region predominately cleared of pre European vegetation that is one of the major food production areas in the country. Our Urban centres are home to or adjacent to some of the best indigenous vegetation we have left and any efforts that encourage people to think about the multiply benefits we all get from trees are to be applauded. It is hoped that this strategy will contribute to an improved awareness, understanding and appreciation of our trees.

Thank you

John Pettigrew
GVEG President

Protecting the environment for generations to come