

2016-2020



RURAL CITY OF
WANGARATTA

Tree Management Strategy



RURAL CITY OF WANGARATTA

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Executive Summary

Trees are an integral part of our urban environment and support the basic elements that sustain life: the air we breathe, and the water we drink. They also provide shelter from the wind in winter and the sun in summer. The trees within our parks and streets gives residents and visitors pleasure and a sense of wellbeing as they observe and interact with nature. Urban trees encourage exercise and outdoor recreation, essential building blocks for long and healthy lives. They contribute positively to the aesthetics and livability of our neighborhoods.

The Rural City of Wangaratta has a rich heritage of trees in our parks and streets. From magnificent River Red Gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) in Merriwa Park, Sydney beaches and our bike paths, to shady Plane trees (*Platanus x acerifolia*) in King George V Gardens. The continued challenge is to have plans in place to guarantee the care and maintenance of our urban trees in the face of climate change, increasing urbanisation and resource limitations.

The aim of the Tree Management Strategy is to establish direction and improvement actions for enhanced urban tree strategic management, improve tree health and diversity, minimise risks to the public and maximise the benefits provided by a healthy and sustainable urban environment. The Strategy aligns with objectives identified in Councils Corporate documents, the 2030 Community Vision and the Council Plan, and has been developed in consultation with key stakeholders. The Strategy focuses on Council managed urban trees growing within township boundaries.

The Strategy will:

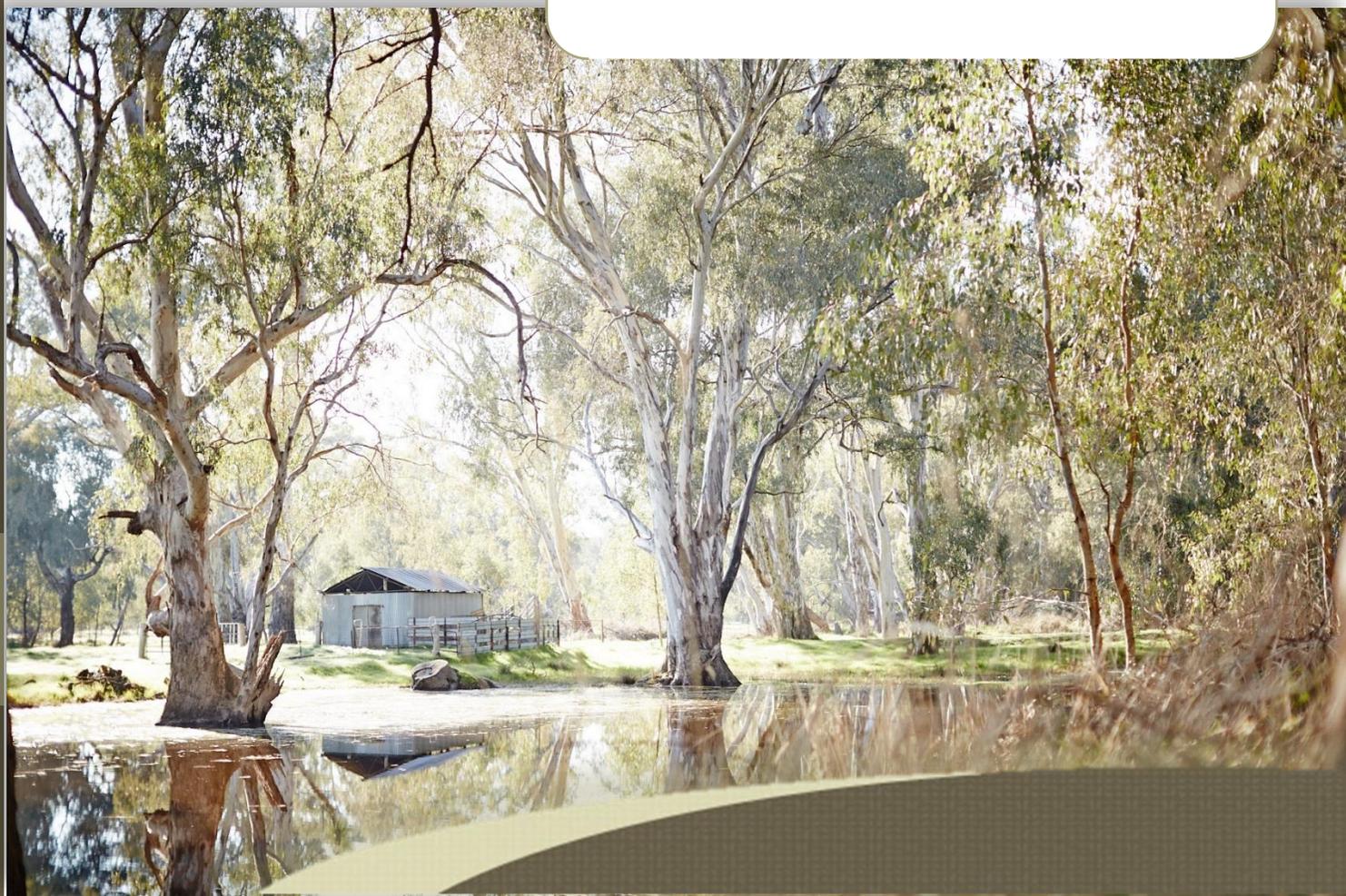
- Provide information regarding tree diversity and quantity;
- Outline Council vision and strategic objectives in regard to tree management;
- Identify key stakeholders, relevant legislation and regulations;
- Provide a summary of the current state of operations and identify gaps in current practices; and
- Identify improvement themes and strategic initiatives for the improved management of urban trees.

The improvement of the environment and the importance of urban trees for the future has been recognised in Council's 2030 Community Vision, with goals for treescapes to be enhanced through increasing canopy cover, identification and protection of trees, and for Wangaratta and the rural townships to be renowned for their prominent and significant street trees.

It is anticipated that this Tree Management Strategy and associated Improvement Action Plan will facilitate this. The Rural City of Wangaratta look forward to providing a greener future for the community now and for generations to come.

*The best time to plant a tree is
20 years ago. The second best
time is now.*

~ African Proverb





Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this Tree Management Strategy is to:

- Establish the Rural City of Wangaratta’s future strategic direction for tree planting, protection and maintenance;
- Provide guidelines with which to actively manage the urban tree population including urban streets and parklands for improved environmental, social and economic outcomes for Wangaratta; and
- Provide a framework for decision making by standardising processes to ensure consistency in the management of Rural City of Wangaratta’s urban trees.

Scope

This Strategy applies to all street and park trees located within urban Wangaratta, and those within Council managed facilities.

The management of rural roadside trees and trees along rural and urban waterways are **not** addressed under this Tree Management Strategy. Please refer to the following documents:

- Rural Roadside Conservation Management Plan (2014);
- Wangaratta Urban Waterway Action Plan (2004).

Council Managed Tree Assets

Trees that are considered and managed under this Tree Management Strategy are as follows:

- Urban Trees
 - Street Trees
 - Trees in Parks and Gardens
 - Trees in Council managed facilities

‘Urban trees’ is a broad term that covers any tree growing within the boundary of a town or city. The Rural City of Wangaratta has many locations in which trees would be considered ‘urban’ although some situations are managed differently depending on context. This strategy focuses on the management of trees in streets, parks, recreation reserves, open spaces and other Council managed sites, such as the saleyards, sports grounds, arts complex, kindergartens and child care facilities.

Trees actively planted within nature-strip reserves are considered ‘Street trees’. At current count, there are 8,202 street trees within the City of Wangaratta. It is generally expected that there should be at least one street tree per property frontage.

Trees in Parks and Gardens are those that are managed by Council and are located in open space sites. There are approximately 1,139 Council managed trees in Parks and Gardens within Wangaratta.

Key Stakeholders

Council’s key stakeholders with respect to managing tree assets are summarised in the table below:

TABLE 1: KEY STAKEHOLDERS

STAKEHOLDER	ROLE OF STAKEHOLDER
Rural City of Wangaratta	As custodians of the tree asset
Federal and State Governments and Agencies	Standards and regulation development and implementation.
Council Members	Community representatives
Council Staff	Operational and administration providers
Government Authorities (DEWLP, VicRoads)	Agreements for maintenance

STAKEHOLDER	ROLE OF STAKEHOLDER
Service Authorities	Owner of assets within the road reserve
Community	Road Users (including drivers and passengers, motorcyclists, cyclists and pedestrians), residents and ratepayers of the Rural City of Wangaratta
JLT and MAV	Council Insurers
Contractors	Those undertaking work on behalf of Council

Relevant Legislation

In regards to tree management and maintenance, Council is required to meet many legislative requirements including Australian and State legislation, and State regulations.

Legislation which impacts on the management of tree assets is outlined in Table 2.

TABLE 2: LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

REGULATION	
Flora and Fauna Act 1988	Council's management of remnant trees must guarantee that Victoria's flora and fauna can survive in accordance with this legislation
Planning and Environment Act 1987	Council's management of environmental, heritage (section 21.10) needs to abide by the Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) as part of the Wangaratta Planning Scheme legislated under this act
Road Management Act 2004	Management of trees and vegetation near roads is undertaken in accordance with this legislation
Electrical Safety Act and the Electricity Safety Act (Electric Line Clearance) Regulations 2015	Council must ensure that the risk of vegetation interfering with urban electrical lines is minimised and must complete an annual Electric Line Clearance Management Plan to demonstrate compliance.

REGULATION	
Country Fire Authority Act 1958	Tree management activities are to abide by this Act and activities are not to be undertaken during weather conditions that could ignite a fire
Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992	Use of chemicals need to abide by this legislation
Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004	Provision of a safe workplace
STANDARD	
Australian Standard for Pruning of Amenity Trees AS 4373-2007	Provides guidance for Council's pruning practices
Australian Standard for the Protection of Trees on Development Sites AS 4970-2009	Recommended guidance for protecting trees throughout the construction process
Australian Standard for Tree Stock for Landscape Use AS 2303-2015	Provides guidance for the selection of best quality tree stock

Strategic Context

Municipal Profile

The Rural City of Wangaratta covers an area of 3670 km² and encompasses many small townships.

The municipality has a variety of mature remnant trees and vegetation located along rural roads, waterways and in urban areas that provide significant historical links with aboriginal culture and local native wildlife. In some towns, past tree plantings provide a connection to bygone cultural events including war memorials, gold mining, early pastoral activities and other land uses.

Within the urban environment of the municipality the tree canopy has been reinstated over time, resulting in a canopy that contains a variety of species of different size, age and level of significance. While these trees provide many benefits including the beautification of treescapes and habitat for wildlife, it is also recognised that trees of the wrong species or trees growing in the wrong location have the potential to increase risk unnecessarily.

Both public authorities and the community have certain obligations with respect to the protection of trees, therefore tree management in the urban environment is about balancing the benefits that trees provide against any associated risk, this will ensure the best outcome for the community.



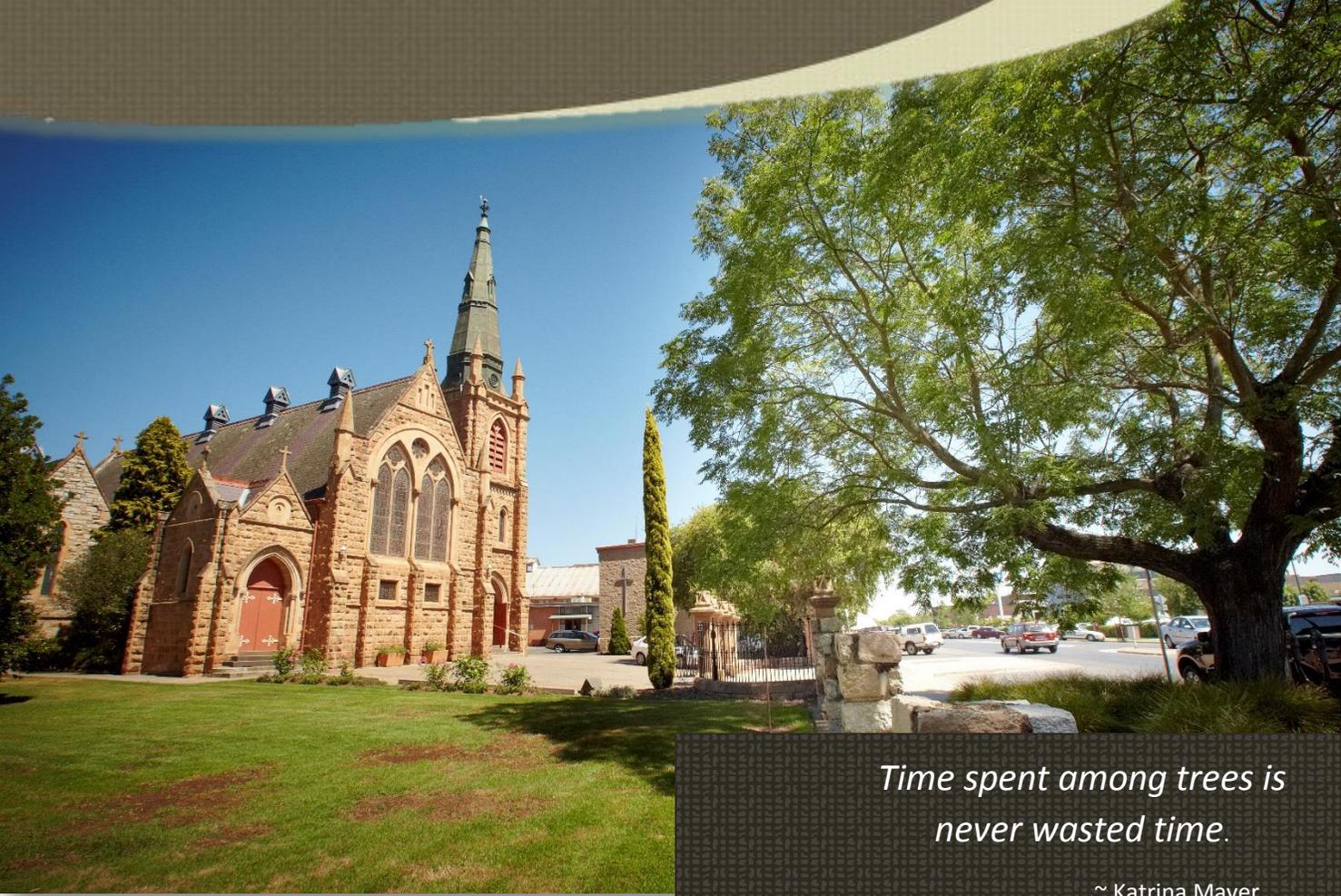
Tree Diversity

The Rural City of Wangaratta recognises the positive impact trees have in the community. A lack of species diversity leaves the urban tree population vulnerable to threats from pests, disease, and stress due to the effects of climate change. A greater range of species will provide more resilience and long-term stability for the urban environment as a whole. In order to ensure the viability of the tree population for predicted climatic changes, species diversity is key.

Currently the dominant tree species within urban Wangaratta are Callistemon, Melaleuca and Lagerstroemia, generally street trees, located in residential streets. Many of Council's more prominent, established and well known street trees are located in the CBD and include Plane trees and Elms which were planted during the early- to mid-1900's. A majority of these large specimen trees have been pollarded or lopped as was common practice during the post-war era to accommodate the installation of powerlines.

As these trees reach the end of their useful life, or are no longer suitable for their locations, there is the risk of losing parts of our horticultural heritage. Plans need to be developed in conjunction with the community for the continued care of trees such as these, which are coping with the increasing pressures of urban development. In some instances it will be necessary to explore the possibility of tree removal and replacement with more suitable species, focusing on planting the right tree in the right place.

It needs to be recognised that trees are living organisms with finite lifespans and eventual removal is inevitable. The additional stressors applied to trees growing in an urban environment can cause issues for both the tree and surrounding environment that can severely reduce its life potential. In the interests of maintaining a consistent and healthy tree population for future generations, it is necessary to remove and replace trees that are reaching the end of their useful life. This may be done as a whole street, alternating or as individual trees, with the purpose of ensuring the best long-term outcome for the community and the overall treescape.



Time spent among trees is never wasted time.

~ Katrina Mayer

Council Vision and Strategic Objectives

Relationships and Links to Strategic Objectives

Council’s corporate documents such as the 2030 Community Vision and the Council Plan, contain various goals and objectives that will influence the way in which tree assets are maintained and managed. Table 3 outlines these and other documents that are specific to tree management.

TABLE 3: LINKS TO STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

DOCUMENT	STRATEGY GOAL
2030 Community Vision	Wangaratta’s 2030 Community Vision is a visionary document achieved through a comprehensive community engagement program. In regards to tree management, goals outlined through this process are to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and enhance vegetation coverage and treescapes across urban and rural landscapes

DOCUMENT	STRATEGY GOAL
Council Plan 2013 – 2017	<p>Council’s strategic direction to meet the present and future needs of the community. The plan identifies the clear vision: <i>“Wangaratta – the ultimate in liveability”</i>. Council Plan goals relevant to tree assets are as follows:</p> <p><i>We are Sustainable- to ensure long-term viability and capacity to deliver quality services and infrastructure, we will continue to meet the changing and complex challenges that face us.</i></p>
Asset Management Policy	<p>The policy compliments and builds upon the Council Plan vision to provide a more formalised approach to asset management principles and methodology. The Policy vision is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide and maintain assets that are accessible, safe, sustainable and responsive to the needs of the community.
Asset Management Strategy	<p>The strategy develops a structured set of actions aimed at enabling improved asset management. Goals are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek to find a balance between good asset management practice, the community’s expectation in relation to the condition of assets and the financial capacity of Council to meet those expectations;

Community Engagement

The Rural City of Wangaratta values community opinion and encourages consultation and communication. Input from the community by way of consultation plays an important role in understanding the needs and wants of the community. The Rural City of Wangaratta has a number of platforms for community consultation including the Communication Strategy (2015).

When making decisions in regards to the management of tree assets, there are four levels of engagement that Council will use to communicate with relevant stakeholders:

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	EMPOWER
Ensuring residents, ratepayers and other organisations are well informed	Consulting with the community	Involving the community in decisions or working in partnership with the community on specific issues	Empowering the community to make its own decisions

Community engagement has been identified as a key element for tree management and is discussed in more detail in Strategic Tree Management Initiatives. Refer to page 15.



Tree Management Vision

Tree Management Vision and Objectives

The appearance and general environment of many streets is improved considerably by the presence of trees, unfortunately in the short-term, Council's tree assets are irreplaceable. Trees require close monitoring and management, both in the short and long term to ensure continued good health and to maintain their amenity and value.

In recognition of the aesthetic, natural and recreational values of Council owned and managed trees, the Rural City of Wangaratta has resolved to protect, maintain and where possible, enhance our tree assets. It is also recognised that at times due to safety, risk and poor health, trees need to be removed and replaced with tree species more suited to the conditions and location. Taking this into consideration, the Rural City of Wangaratta's vision for tree management is as follows:

“Enhancing Wangaratta’s livability through diverse and healthy trees”

The Objectives of the Tree Management Strategy are to:

PROTECT: Existing urban trees, parks, gardens and reserves, and significant heritage trees for cultural and historical reasons.

MAINTAIN: Existing treescapes, their visual amenity and qualities.

ENHANCE: Treescape values, new subdivision treescapes and parks, and the benefits provided by trees for the community.

MINIMISE: Damage and risk associated with Council owned and private trees, site specific conflicts, and the spread of pests and diseases.

Strategic Management Initiatives

Key Themes for Tree Management

Council have identified seven key themes for tree management. These are as follows:

- Inspections and Risk Management
- Species Selection and Tree Planting
- Tree Removal and Replacement
- Tree Protection
- Tree Health and Maintenance
- Community Engagement
- Tree Asset Data Management



Focusing on the key themes, the table below summarises the current state, i.e. how the Rural City of Wangaratta are currently managing their tree assets. Also listed and discussed are Strategic Tree Management Initiatives. The initiatives identifies ways in which Council can improve current management practices. Based on these themes, an Improvement Plan will be developed and actioned. The current state and associated strategic initiatives are outlined in Table 4.

TABLE 4: CURRENT STATUS AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

TREE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES	CURRENT STATUS	STRATEGIC INITIATIVES
<p>Inspections and Risk Management</p>	<p>Tree inspections are currently undertaken routinely although record keeping is minimal, except where required for insurance purposes.</p> <p>A yearly Electric Line Clearance Management Plan details the actions Council will take to minimise bushfire risk associated with vegetation surrounding powerlines.</p> <p>Council do not have a proactive inspection schedule in place to actively manage risk.</p>	<p>The Rural City of Wangaratta will develop a Tree Management Plan (TMP) to establish a maintenance management system for tree assets. The TMP will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline responsibilities and demarcation in regards to tree management • Establish reactive response timeframes • Establish frequency of proactive inspections • Identify priority risk inspection areas • Identify acceptable mitigation actions <p>The TMP will provide a link between Councils strategic objectives and the on-the-ground operational activities.</p> <p>To further minimise risk in Council’s road reserve and to establish guidelines regarding what is acceptable, a Nature Strip Policy will be developed.</p> <p>To improve inspections and record keeping, Council will formalise the way that tree inspections and reporting is undertaken.</p>

TREE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES	CURRENT STATUS	STRATEGIC INITIATIVES
<p>Species Selection and Tree Planting</p>	<p>Tree planting is determined each year for that season, planning for subsequent years is minimal. Council have a list of preferred species for planting, however, documentation of preferred species in certain locations or zones has not been established.</p> <p>Plans have not been established for planting in significant areas such as the CBD (Central Business District) or major park areas.</p>	<p>A tree planting program will be established in advance to plant in areas that require infill planting, remove (and replant) trees that are at end of life, and to satisfy resident requests.</p> <p>The Rural City of Wangaratta will plant the most appropriate tree species based on site suitability, aesthetics, functionality and biological attributes. An accepted species selection list will be developed for areas/zones within urban Wangaratta. Also specified will be tree stock standards.</p> <p>To trial potential street tree species, Council will be innovative and create an arboretum (or similar). This will allow for monitoring how trees react to growing in our local region and assist in selecting suitable species.</p> <p>The focus will be on the sound arboricultural practices of planting “the right tree in the right place”.</p> <p>The CBD Masterplan establishes a vision for a more welcoming, greener space. A CBD Tree Plan will be developed to compliment the aspirations outlined in the CBD Masterplan. This will include plans for the protection and further enhancement of Wangaratta’s major parks and green spaces that reside in the CBD such as King George V Gardens, Merriwa Park and Apex Park.</p>

TREE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES	CURRENT STATUS	STRATEGIC INITIATIVES
Tree Removal and Replacement	<p>When road reconstruction works are to commence, Council will inspect the trees in that street. If trees look unhealthy or are causing major damage to infrastructure, they will be considered for removal.</p> <p>At times, Council will receive a Customer Action Request asking for a tree to be removed. Trees will be considered for removal if they pose an unacceptable risk to the public, are in decline or are unsuitable for the location.</p>	<p>Trees will be inspected and programmed for removal if they have been identified as unsafe, if they have reached their useful life expectancy, and/or are seriously damaging existing infrastructure. Any tree removed will be replaced with trees consistent with a neighbourhood planting scheme.</p> <p>Trees removed will inform an infill planting program, with the eventual goal of replacing trees removed within two seasons of removal.</p>
Tree Protection	<p>Council has no formal process to implement proactive tree protection. Where internal consultation has been provided the Australian Standards (AS 4970-2009) is referenced.</p>	<p>The Rural City of Wangaratta will recognise trees that contribute to the environmental, cultural and social character of Wangaratta through the Significant Tree Register.</p> <p>To protect the significance of Heritage Trees, a Heritage Tree Management Plan will be developed.</p> <p>Bonds will be imposed on Developers (through Asset Protection Permits) to ensure the protection and retention of Council trees.</p> <p>Where Council plants a tree on behalf of the Developer, a tree valuation methodology will be used to determine and justify the agreed amount.</p> <p>Guidelines will be established to protect trees from construction works and other activities that threaten tree health and stability.</p>

TREE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES	CURRENT STATUS	STRATEGIC INITIATIVES
Tree Health and Maintenance	Trees are reactively and formatively pruned to the Australian Standards (AS 4373-2007). In regards to pests and diseases, Elm Leaf Beetle is routinely treated. Currently only new plantings and some park trees are mulched for the first growing season.	<p>Ongoing maintenance is required to ensure trees are kept in a safe, healthy and structurally sound condition. Programs will be developed to ensure Council are more proactive and less reactive. Actions include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased inspection levels (Inspections and Risk Management) • Regular pruning • Watering, feeding and mulching (new tree establishment) • Pest and disease treatment <p>Priority tree care will be provided for trees recognised as significant.</p>
Community Engagement	When a tree has been identified for removal, letters are delivered to those residents who are immediately affected. Letters are distributed when large scale plantings are to be undertaken.	<p>Development of Councils consultation process regarding trees will be based on the Community Communication Strategy 2015.</p> <p>The establishment of a Community Tree Consultative Group will assist in creating clear communication with relevant community stakeholders.</p> <p>Education for residents will be provided through informative tree publications and guides and engagement programs.</p>

TREE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES	CURRENT STATUS	STRATEGIC INITIATIVES
<p>Tree Asset Data Management</p>	<p>Council maintains a database recording details of most of Council’s tree assets. Data was collected in 2009 and requires updating in order to better inform strategic planning.</p>	<p>The Rural City of Wangaratta will undertake a tree data collection project to update the current tree asset database. Information from the data collection will facilitate decision making and funding requirements.</p> <p>The Rural City of Wangaratta will incorporate technology to assist with tree management. The implementation of mobile work orders and maintenance schedules will ensure that an accurate history of works is recorded on the tree asset.</p>

Benefits of Implementing this Strategy

By implementing this strategy, Council will be able to improve the current tree management practices. This will allow for the delivery of a healthier, more diverse and stable tree population. The key benefits are:

- Implementing processes that will allow improved clarity and efficiency for Council in fulfilling its tree management responsibilities;
- An improvement in Councils ability to monitor and manage tree related risk;
- Optimisation of tree health and the benefits trees provide to the community;
- The ability to schedule and prioritise tree works;
- Ensuring long term sustainability in delivering adopted levels of service;
- Improved community awareness and involvement in the maintenance of street and park trees; and
- Increased canopy cover across Council’s urban areas.

Implementation and Review

Vision and goals for Tree Management are to be achieved through the continual implementation of actions resulting from the Tree Management Strategy. Council's Cross Departmental Tree Management Group are responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the Strategic initiatives.

- This Strategy will expire in June 2020.
- Responsibility for review upon expiry – Asset Officer- Arborist.

A man doesn't plant a tree for himself. He plants it for posterity.

~ Alexander Smith



References

2030 Community Vision

Council Plan 2015 Revision

CBD Masterplan

Communication Strategy 2015

Tree Management Strategy 2007

