

At any one time the Belmont Council is working on a range of projects designed to improve the health & well-being of its residents. Part of this process involves community consultation. It needs an informed and responsive citizenry to do this effectively. Part of our role is to monitor this process and provide feedback.

## A History of Urban

**Forestry.** At the last Ordinary Council Meeting on 16 April 2019 our councillors voted in favour of the long awaited Urban Forest Policy. In it the City of Belmont recognises the importance of an urban forest in providing a range of social, health, environmental and economic benefits. (Refer Attachment 9.)

<http://www.belmont.wa.gov.au/CouncilorPortal/CouncillorMinuteAndMeeting/Minutes%20and%20Agendas%20Documents/16%20April%202019%20OCM%20Minutes.pdf>

It also commits to:

“Adopting a design philosophy for **City projects** that places priority on pedestrian amenity, landscaping and shade trees.” And, “Increasing canopy cover within streetscapes, public open space and **City managed land.**”

According to the minutes of the Standing Committee (Environment) which developed this policy, “... the scope of this Policy relates to only those trees on City controlled lands (streetscapes, recreational reserves, City managed land) and therefore trees on private lands have been excluded. **Trees on private lands are required to be addressed through the Local Planning Scheme and**

## through a Local Planning Policy

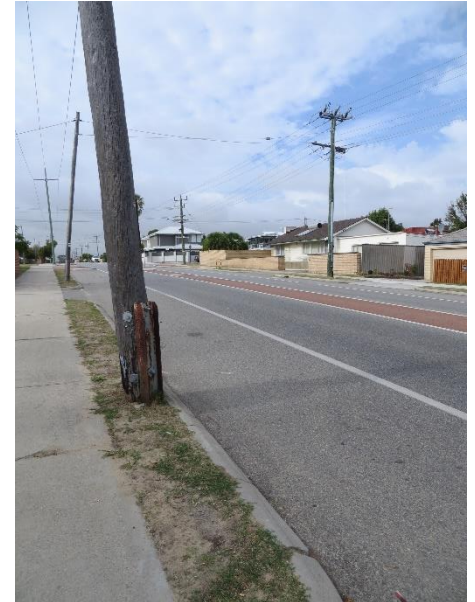
(e.g. provision of trees on development sites or replacement trees).” Refer Council’s Standing Committee (Environmental) minutes of 25 March 2019.

[http://www.belmont.wa.gov.au/CouncilorPortal/CouncillorMinuteAndMeeting/Minutes%20and%20Agendas%20Documents/25%20March%202019%20SC\(ENV\)%20Minutes.pdf](http://www.belmont.wa.gov.au/CouncilorPortal/CouncillorMinuteAndMeeting/Minutes%20and%20Agendas%20Documents/25%20March%202019%20SC(ENV)%20Minutes.pdf)

The Urban Forest Policy is a ‘business as usual’ document which does not address the critical issues going forward such as massive tree loss on **private development sites** due to increasing demands for higher density urban infill; and the looming issue of urban heat island vulnerability.

Nor does it provide any concern for trees on land owned by state utilities. For now we need to wait for an update of the **Local Planning Scheme** and the inclusion of a policy that requires the protection of significant trees on private property; the provision of planting zones in development applications; and mandatory street tree planting.

For a vision for the future we need to refer to the **Urban Forest Strategy** which was released in 2014 (refer last newsletter). The City of Belmont was one of the first Local Government Associations to publish such a strategy. In order to implement this strategy a draft **Urban Forest Canopy Plan** (operational plan) was developed in conjunction with staff, consultants and stakeholders in 2017. [https://joshbyrne.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/170816\\_CoB\\_Forum\\_Flyer\\_A4-4.pdf](https://joshbyrne.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/170816_CoB_Forum_Flyer_A4-4.pdf)



There were 13 ‘Proposed Actions’ in this draft Canopy Plan of which the following are key;

“**Action 4.** Develop innovative policy for canopy creation within residential planning and design.”

“**Action 5.** Develop innovative policy for canopy creation within commercial and industrial planning and design.”

“**Action 6.** Work collaboratively with Government at all levels to incorporate canopy creation and protection into planning policy.”

Commendable stuff. But the draft Canopy Plan is still being developed and has not been released to the public as of 2019. The development of innovative policy appears to have stalled while the council awaits the gazetting of **Design WA Stage 1.**

At the Ordinary Council Meeting 26 March 2019, the Director Community and Statutory Services advised that ... “managing development sites can be difficult as the majority are governed by the Residential Design Codes. This issue

is being addressed by Design WA who are currently in the process of bringing out amendments which will allow local governments to consider existing and future trees and to have greater control over development sites. The City is not permitted to have individual policies in this regard.”

**Design WA** is a State Government initiative to ensure good design is at the centre of all development in Western Australia. **Design WA Stage 1** has been released by the Minister for Planning and will become operational on 24 May 2019.

<https://www.dplh.wa.gov.au/designwa>

In Stage 1, the newly named State Planning Policy 7.3 Residential Design Codes Volume 2 – Apartments (multiple dwellings) is of particular relevance. On page 46,

### **3 Siting the development –**

#### **3.3 Tree canopy and deep soil areas**

“The removal of trees from private land is contributing to a significant loss of urban tree canopy, which can take decades to replace. The planning of a development should make all reasonable efforts to retain appropriate existing trees within the site and have no significant detrimental impact on trees on land adjoining the property.”

<https://www.dplh.wa.gov.au/getmedia/5926602c-ab14-46f0-be6f-56dc31c45902/SPP-7-3-R-Codes-Apartments>

**In the meantime** other councils have been taking some interim action. For example, according to the Standing Committee’s (Env.) presentation where the City of

Belmont looked at what other councils were doing (refer meeting 25 June 2018, 10.2 Trees on Private Property), it was noted that the **City of Stirling** has amended its Local Planning Scheme (LPS) setting out new design requirements for trees on development sites, and encouraging planning design around existing trees.

The **City of South Perth** has introduced a Policy P 350.5 - for Trees on Development Sites and Street Verges. Also development Density Bonuses for tree retention on private land are included (LPS 6). As well as a Register of Significant Trees on public and private land which uses tree preservation orders to protect them from destruction and removal.

Likewise the **City of Fremantle** has introduced a policy ‘the Freo Alternative – Big Thinking about Small Housing’ (LPS 4) which enables tree retention on private land through better design guidelines.

Also the **City of Joondalup** has commenced mandatory verge tree planting and the **City of Wanneroo** is proposing something similar.

Interestingly the importance of trees ranks consistently high on Belmont residents’ wish lists whenever public consultation takes place; be it on the airport’s third runway; the closure of Brearley Avenue; the Golden Gateway Precinct; the GEH Corridor Plan or even the upgrade of recreation facilities.

Is it any wonder; with the **City of Belmont** being identified as having the lowest tree canopy in the metro area; being the most vulnerable LGA to the Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect;

and ranking high on the Socio - Economic Disadvantage Index.

With the upcoming Federal election much of the focus to date has been on tax cuts and balancing budgets, yet opinion polls consistently show that climate change is a major concern among citizens.

No doubt at our next council elections we will hear about keeping council rates in check, crime and road maintenance. Yet that will be against a backdrop of continued loss of tree canopy and increasing traffic congestion, further exacerbating our vulnerability to the UHI effect.

**Who is WARRA?** It is the West Australian Residents and Ratepayers Association Inc. They are a non-party political, not for profit, voluntary organisation. Their objective is to provide advocacy and support to community groups, elected members and other stakeholders (including business entities) of Local Governments. Visit their Facebook page for the latest issues in which they are involved. Or their website below.

<https://www.warra.asn.au/membership?fbclid=IwAR1qZZ4zN8IOND7b3uKr1YM-RNDKBq9UYACXK1AIKjWDJ4NJBWWe8QUzOg>

**Recommended reading:**  
The Bush : travels in the heart of Australia, Don Watson, Penguin Group, 2014.

**Your feedback.** If you would like to submit an article that is relevant to the residents of Belmont, or you would like to join our group, refer contact details below.