



ST PETERS RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION INC.

E-mail : info@stpeters.asn.au

ABN 86 794 177 385

Representing the Residents of St Peters, College Park, Hackney, Stepney, Maylands, Evandale & Joslin.

St Peters Residents Association submission to the Draft Urban Greening Strategy for Metropolitan Adelaide

This Strategy is a planning document which includes targets and visions. The St Peters Residents Association (SPRA) is happy to comment on some of these but also considers it important to suggest concrete actions which could be taken to improve the greening of Adelaide.

Public Open Space:

The relatively low percentage of land devoted to public space in Adelaide in comparison with other Australian cities is a major block to its greening (Adelaide about 10% compared to Sydney 57%, Perth 40%, Hobart 22% and Melbourne 20% (page 44 Draft Urban Greening Strategy).

There should be a major effort put into purchasing land for public open space, particularly in the older suburbs where public open space is so inadequate. Public greening projects for newly purchased land could help galvanise the public and community groups to become involved in planting projects and ongoing maintenance activities. Fruit tree orchards and local forests could be considered.

Community garden groups are playing an important role in providing gardening activities for residents and these could be encouraged. Likewise, the role of “friends” of different parks could be encouraged to expand.

Private Open Space:

On page 8 of the Strategy, it is pointed out that “more people have small or no, front and back gardens”. What is not acknowledged is the role that governments have played in this outcome.

From generous immigration intakes allowed by federal governments leading to our ongoing population growth, to the urban infill policies of successive State governments, pressures on the availability of land for housing and providing the infrastructure needed for residential use continue apace.

While our planning system has tended to protect front garden street setbacks in established suburbs, back-gardens have been allowed to reduce in size or disappear altogether. This has been done by relaxing built site coverage in our planning system and/or reducing the size of blocks of land from the 1980s. We refer you to the seminal work by Tony Hall "The Life and Death of the Australian Backyard" (CSIRO Publishing, 2010).

Smaller blocks have often been accompanied by bigger houses. In terms of site coverage, 50-60 per cent site cover sounds reasonable but actually results in houses being built without back-gardens. Small strips of open space around the house are used for paving, clothes drying and perhaps a pot plant or two, but there is not sufficient space for trees or gardens, apart from in front of the dwelling in some cases. Swimming pools also deter people from planting trees as many don't want leaves dropping into their pools.

The loss of gardens around dwellings has had a negative impact on Adelaide's trees, urban wildlife and the amenity of neighbourhoods. It is important that the re-greening of Adelaide is carried out with some urgency as climate change may bring hotter summers and possibly more frequent droughts.

Our Association submits that the planning system should set a maximum site cover of 40 per cent in Character Overlay Areas and Historic Overlay Areas of the Established Neighbourhood Zone, together with a maximum impermeable site cover of 50 per cent to allow adequate space for trees and gardens. The functions of garden and trees to cool, enhance and allow cooling breezes in summer to circulate around dwellings needs to be publicly recognised. Limits should also be placed on site cover and impermeable surfaces in areas targeted for infill housing.

Perhaps some Demonstration Homes could be provided on World Environment Day and Sustainable Housing Day to demonstrate how good it is to have a back garden. Your children can play outside without you having to keep an eye on them (as you must do in public parks).

Targets:

The present target is to increase green cover in Adelaide by 20 per cent by 2045. We note that this target is being reviewed for the Greater Adelaide Regional Plan.

In view of the success of the 2016 target to increase Adelaide's canopy cover by 20 per cent by 2029, which was achieved within five years, we submit that the 20 per cent increase in green cover should be targeted to be achieved by 2035. This seems a reasonable target. We note that it may be more difficult to measure "green cover" than it is to measure tree canopy cover.

Maintenance Issues:

Who will water young trees and understory plants on commercial / industrial properties and shopping centre carparks in hot summers and dry autumns? We can go five months without any rain in Adelaide.

At present many shopping centres have hot barren carparks with little to no summer shade for hundreds of parked cars (e.g. Firlie Shopping Centre, Northpark Shopping Centre, Churchill Court Shopping Centre). Planning consent conditions are generally ineffective unless councils are active in ensuring good landscaping and trees in their areas. Council planners have told us "We can't make shopping centre owners water trees". All council planners can do is make the owners plant new trees when the pre-existing ones die. Most residents give up complaining to councils about this. Councils may also eventually give up following up with these shopping centres.

The issue of who will maintain landscaping on rental properties is also important. Good landlords will ensure that landscaping of their rental properties is kept in good condition. Lazy or neglectful landlords will ignore landscaping and allow them to become barren and unsightly. In the latter cases, residents may be deterred from planting a tree or watering a dried-out lawn. In less affluent suburbs with less trees and landscaping, people appear to be likely to be more impacted by neglectful landlords. This contributes to the greening "inequity" the Strategy refers to. There is no easy solution to this problem.

In the same way, requiring every new dwelling to have at least one tree in its front garden under the Planning and Design Code will raise the issue of the long-term maintenance of this tree. Some owners will be happy to see the tree

die if they do not like trees. Are councils expected to check up on the welfare of these trees? And what do they do if it has died or been pulled out? Councils may not have enough staff to do this follow up work.

Greening Equity:

We submit that trees should be planted on main roads running through suburbs with lower tree cover as a matter of priority. Much of South Road, Regency Road, Hampstead Road and North East Road lack trees. Perhaps the Department of Infrastructure and Transport (DIT) could help local councils plant trees on these roads or contribute to funds for planting and watering.

The watering of new trees on main roads is a hazard for water trucks, be they operated by DIT or by councils. We are aware of disagreements between DIT and councils over who is responsible for watering median strip trees and note that many of these trees fail to thrive perhaps through lack of regular watering in dry periods in their formative years.

Role of River Torrens Linear Park:

Much of the Linear Park is has neglected landscaping. Lawns are mowed by councils and gum trees survive from the original plantings. There is generally very little understorey. Hence the Linear Park provides limited habitat for wildlife.

Community groups such as the City of Norwood Payneham & St Peters' 'Friends of the Billabong' are working on revegetation projects around the St Peters Billabong. There is a need to foster more similar groups to help revegetate the Linear Park, and parks generally, for better wildlife habitat, environmental value, amenity and local tourism.

Tree Hollows:

The hollows of large old trees provide vital habitat for birds, possums and other small creatures. These should be protected with special measures. Councils and DIT should be prevented from bull-dozing old trees with these hollows for roadworks and stormwater pipe upgrades.

More innovative solutions need to be found to protect these trees.

Role of transport and electricity bodies:

DIT has a reputation for mass tree removal across Adelaide. The chopping down of over 100 gum trees at Golden Grove a few years ago, is one example of its sorry record. This Department should be controlled more tightly than it currently is. It should be required to provide yearly reports to Parliament on the numbers of trees, both protected and unprotected, which it has removed.

SA Power Networks (SAPN) regularly cuts out the middle of street trees, leaving them devoid of value as habitat for native wildlife as the trees are opened up to more rain and wind, and generally look awful. This pruning often shortens the life of a street tree, as many trees never recover. SAPN should also be required to submit yearly reports to Parliament on its treatment of our urban trees.

Creeklines:

We submit that developers and councils should be prevented from lining and covering any more creek lines with concrete. These should remain open as environmental assets, even if they are on private land. Scarce water resources for our hard-pressed wildlife should remain open channels.

Councils and private property owners should be encouraged to open up these creek lines, where practical, and to plant their banks with native plants and trees.

Lines of historic pre-European River Red Gum trees can still be seen following the line of Second Creek through Kensington, Norwood and Stepney. These elderly trees should be mapped and recognised in an environmental inventory. Other remnant gum trees along other creek lines should also be mapped.

General Comments:

In the 1960s & 70s councils gave residents free young trees. This practice should be revived.

Non-stop human population growth is a significant pressure on Adelaide's re-greening, perhaps just as, or more important than, climate change which is referred to many times in the Strategy. Some recognition of the "limits to

growth” in terms of population in this the driest state in the driest inhabited continent in the world would be welcome.

The Strategy’s 2050 “vision” includes the goals of “people caring for their local natural spaces” and people having a “stronger connection to place”. We submit that many people already have a strong connection to where they live. This doesn’t necessarily mean that they will go out into the street to look after their nature strip, however. But we live in hope that more will.

The Strategy also has the vision of the goal of “agencies working together”. Good luck there.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission.

David Cree
President
28 June 2024