

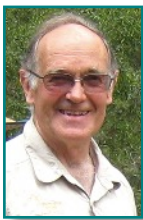
Damper Creek Doings

July 2018

Members of the Friends of Damper Creek Bushland Reserve will have read the opinion piece from Cr Geoff Lake in the recent Monash Bulletin. In it he reiterated his stance that Council cannot tell residents what to do regarding mature trees on their properties, an opinion that developers find extremely favourable to their designs for our suburb. Cr Lake's position is held despite all the other restrictions that MCC places on residents including the stipulation that we must maintain our nature strips even though these do not 'belong' to us.

Our President wrote the email below to Cr Lake.

The Editor reproduces Doug's email in full. Although Doug was writing in a personal capacity, I am sure the sentiments will find wide support amongst our members.



Geoff, Your profile in the Monash Bulletin has rehashed your position on the VPO debate, an issue supposedly settled years ago.

Am I one of the vocal minority who believe that no tree should ever be allowed to be removed? I will let you judge! Personally, I have applied to the Council to have four trees removed. I have never had a problem getting permission for the removal of inappropriate trees. I have sympathy for property owners who find themselves saddled with trees that worry them for whatever reason. It is easy to plant a tree for a quick result, but this usually means it will grow too large for the situation and by the time the property owner realises this, the tree is covered by the VPO and the owner is of an age that resultant maintenance issues are a burden. Why are you being contacted by anxious and upset residents, frustrated because the Council prevents them from dealing with a problem tree on their property? I think what we have here is not a problem with regulation but a problem with process. We have a neat criterion within the VPO for deciding if a tree comes under the VPO regulations. If this is rigidly applied, an enthusiastic Council officer will rightly refuse permission for removal. What we need is not rigid application of regulation, but a mediation process. There are many reasons for removal of trees and these should be assessed in relation to the "value of the tree", the property owner's situation, the character of the neighbourhood and the plans for restoration after the tree is removed.

My neighbour, a property investor, when asked what he wanted to do with the front garden, said he wanted to level it, concrete it and cover the concrete with fake grass. We offered to help with the garden and now we

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have a garden which flows between the two properties and enhances the neighbourhood. The removal of a tree is a serious decision. **The many benefits of trees, sociological, hydrological, contributing to health, biodiversity, wildlife corridors, reduction of urban heating and, simply, being part of the neighbourhood character, are enormous.** To save a significant tree is to save fifty years of growth for any replacement. There are options to be explored. Sensitive reduction of the canopy should be considered, not all arborists are sympathetic to this approach, they make more money from declaring a tree as dead, dying or dangerous and removing it entirely (even a dead tree has significant habitat value). Offset planting is an option where neighbourhood character is not an issue. Monash is already doing a good job revitalising parks and reserves, so where does this offset planting occur?

I recently attended a presentation which detailed the experience with the City of Whitehorse. They have a fund which can be used to purchase property for revegetation or expansion of reserves. With the number of multiple dwellings being built on what were single blocks, surely an objective of purchasing a small proportion for urban open space could be consistent with an obligation to house a greater population within the municipality?

Is it reasonable to say that Council has no place telling residents what they can and can't do in their own gardens?

That depends on how those actions impact on neighbours, neighbourhood character and the environment. Society requires that we obey certain laws that govern our behaviour and Council applies many restrictions on what we can do with our own properties. For too long, neighbourhood (Continued>



The Friends of Scotchmans Creek and Valley Reserve have a very interesting speaker at their meeting on Wednesday 15 August at 7.30 pm at Alvie Hall - James Paterson from the Monash Council will discuss how Monash is updating its storm water drains to cope with flooding - an increasing problem.

character and the environment have taken a back seat. The losses have been enormous and are set to continue with the crunch of houses being demolished becoming a daily part of the soundscape of Monash. Monash does not compare well to other municipalities on measures of open space and vegetation canopy and I cringe when I see blocks with mature gardens being moonscaped and replaced with a minimal garden space populated with a limited palette of landscaper-preferred plants. (*Tree canopy cover in Monash has fallen from 26% to 22% from 1992>2015*)

Should the Council step in and interfere with what is, after all, residents' private space?

I quote Councillor Cathy Oke, Chair of the Environment portfolio for the City of Melbourne, who was interviewed on "Blueprint for Living" on Radio National on 18 May. Talking about the City of Melbourne's revegetation objectives she said: "We can plant as many trees as we can in the public realm but that's not going to create the city of green that we want. We also need the private realm to also make sure the private buildings and private land are also contributing".

For the City of Monash to balk at infringing private landholders rights is to condemn any vegetation strategy to failure. The losses in the private realm have been considerable to date. It is time to halt those losses, if not reverse them. Property owners need to be listened to, treated with the respect and supported in addressing their concerns while progressing a strategy appropriate to municipal objectives. The Monash Urban Landscape and Canopy Vegetation Survey is a serious document which deserves study without the delay which has already occurred and those who are intimidated by its implications should read and understand where it leads us. This is a personal opinion but you should be aware that I am the President of the Friends of Damper Creek Reserve, proud to be a friend of the environment and a citizen of Monash. Sincerely, **Doug Scott**

FoDCR MEETING 25 JULY

Our meeting at 7.30 pm on Wednesday 25 July will address the Monash Urban Landscape and Canopy Vegetation Strategy (MULCV Strategy).

Over the years there have been few occasions when the Council of the day has shown powerful leadership on environmental matters - the preservation of Damper Creek Reserve in the mid-70s, the adoption of the Vegetation Protection Overlay and the extensive street tree planting undertaken by the Waverley Council just before its forced amalgamation are three that come to mind - I can think of no others. Unfortunately the ledger is balanced by Cr Lake and his colleagues in their thwarted attempt to overturn the VPO. Unfortunately this policy continues to suffer the death of a thousand cuts.

The MULCV Strategy is an opportunity for Monash Council to make a deliver on a broad-ranging plan for the betterment of the City now and for the next 50 years. In the same way that we look back in wonder at the preservation of Damper Creek, residents of this City will look back and be amazed at the foresight shown by Councillors in 2018 when they voted to adopt this document as a blue print to demonstrate that the oft-quoted 'green, leafy City of Monash' was a reality and not lip service whilst the developers clear-felled sites and paid trivial fines for removing canopy and habitat trees that are many decades old and will take decades to replace.

However it is not just up to Councillors - it is up to us to make our voices heard on this vital matter, to indicate to Councillors that we all care about the future of our City. Councillors in favour of the strategy need your support.

You can obtain a copy of this excellent and well-thought out strategy by attending one of the drop-in sessions. One is at the Monash Civic Centre on Monday 23 July, 1 pm to 4 pm. Others are on the Council website. When you read the document it will bring home to you how much the City has already lost.

A further valuable document is an Implementation Strategy but it will only happen IF THE MULCV STRATEGY IS ADOPTED. Philip has added this document to our website, click on the Current Events tab to read or download.

Everything is available on the following Council website:

www.monash.vic.gov.au/About-Us/Council/Have-Your-Say/Draft-Urban-Landscape-and-Canopy-Vegetation-Strategy

Finally, we must all respond to the survey being conducted by the Council. Go to the MCC website (www.monash.vic.gov.au) and scroll down and you will find the link to the survey on the right side.

Feedback to Council must be submitted by Wednesday 15 August

For Your Diary

Wednesday 25 July, 7.30 pm, Alvie Hall: General meeting.

Sunday 29 July, 10 am: working bee - site to be confirmed - check the website closer to the date.

Wednesday 15 August, 7.30 pm, Alvie Hall: Invited speaker at the meeting of the Friends of Scotchmans Creek - see over.

Wednesday 22 August, 7.30 pm, Alvie Hall: 10 am: Annual General Meeting.

Community Planting Day: Sunday, 26 August: planting for the Jubilee Project.

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