

DAMPER CREEK DOINGS

March 2019

The newsletter of
FRIENDS OF DAMPER CREEK RESERVE INC
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C-125 summary

Our February meeting was devoted to a Q&A with Council staff, Peter Panagakos, Director City Development Planning, Natasha Swan, manager city development, Richard Whitting, Monash building surveyor as well as councillors Patterson, Fergeus and Saloumi. Matt Fregon MP for Mount Waverley and his executive officer John Mullahy. Members of the Friends of Damper Creek committee spent many hours trawling through various regulatory documents to confront the council staff with a range of questions regarding the decision on 31 Bengal Crescent. The end result of nearly two hours of questioning was that no change to the decision was made and, in all likelihood, the process had proceeded to the point where the decision could not be reversed. Sadly we have to report that building work on the property has commenced.

Why could C-125 not be implemented in the case of 31 Bengal Crescent? The answer, hidden in the two hours of questioning and as a result of further investigation, is that C-125 is an incomplete process. Who is responsible for this situation? Various regulatory inconsistencies were put forward by the speakers, citing obsolete state regulations, failure by the State Planning Minister to approve part 2 of C-125, lack of a satisfactory definition of "Neighbourhood Character" and inability to effectively object to a building through the Building Appeals Board. C-125 was seen as "aspirational", with its restrictions considered optional and concessions readily granted for "irregular" blocks. It seems, also, that the City of Monash has not followed through by responding in a timely fashion to the Minister's requests on part 2 of C-125.

Why should we, as members of the Friends of Damper Creek Reserve, be so concerned about the case of 31 Bengal Crescent?

It is no secret that the City of Monash is changing at a rapid pace. Long term residents are unsettled by the rate at which perfectly good houses are being demolished to be replaced by monolithic structures which dominate the streetscape and maximise coverage of the block. When a house is demolished the block is invariably "moonscaped" with a near total loss of vegetation. Exceptions exist but they are rare and usually the builder is happy to pay the fine for the removal of an inconvenient tree. Objections are countered by the statement that the council has no control over the construction of single dwellings. C-125 was formulated to address this concern.

The situation for Damper Creek and other reserves within Monash is at a critical point as the properties adjoining the reserves, referred to as “Creek Abuttal” in C-125, contribute to the environmental envelope of the reserve. Studies show that the backyards of adjoining properties are used by wildlife and are a critical part of the ecosystem . This is particularly significant for Damper Creek as it is a long, narrow reserve which relies heavily on backyard vegetation to contribute to its value as a wildlife corridor.

A walk around the boundary of Damper Creek will reveal that a high proportion of the properties adjoining the reserve are “old stock” housing. Built in the 60’s and 70’s, their demolition is almost inevitable. The original house at 31 Bengal Crescent was one of the better ones, yet it went! The council decision on 31 Bengal cited nearby properties with structures which approached the reserve closer than the 7 metres suggested by C-125. If precedent is to be a consideration, Damper Creek Reserve is set to lose much of the backyard vegetation, even if C-125 is implemented! Further attention to the interpretation of C-125 is necessary when C-125 is fully implemented. Additionally, many of the properties are on irregular blocks, a situation which allows the council to give special consideration to building applicants.

The Friends of Damper Creek Reserve is committed to keeping pressure on the council to fully implement C-125 and increase the involvement of the community in planning decisions which affect creek abuttal areas.

Hopefully, this would lead to the adoption of more powerful strategies than the Neighbourhood Residential Zones which are the keystone of C-125. Such a strategy, as used by other councils, would be to create overlays where restrictions are mandatory.

Gardens for Wildlife

For our May meeting (May 22nd) we will be hosting a workshop on “Gardens for Wildlife” presented by Monash council staff Anna Mezzetti and Daniel. Gardens for Wildlife is a programme which focuses on assisting property owners to provide vegetation that is beneficial to wildlife. Whether you are interested in assisting others or simply learning about appropriate plants to include in your garden, you are sure to learn plenty from this workshop.

I have observed this programme operating in the adjoining municipalities of Knox and Whitehorse. The facilitators of the programme in those municipalities are eager to share their experience and expertise.

The key to the success of the programme is to have some individuals who are willing to visit participating properties and advise on appropriate planting. We will be reaching out to other organisations to find those who are willing to commit time and expertise to help make Monash a more wildlife friendly municipality.

Our Guest Speaker Programme

For our March meeting (March 27th) we will be hosting Dr. Greg Moore of the Burnley Horticultural College, Melbourne University (retired). Greg is an inspiring advocate for trees and has particular interest in the economic effects of trees. He continues to pursue an active research profile and supervises post graduate students in any matters that relate to trees in the urban environment and revegetation.

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On July 24th we will be hosting Dr Lindy Lumsden of the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research. Her topic will be “Bats, Fascinating Creatures of the Night”. She is an honorary life member of the Australasian Bat Society. The Northern free-tailed bat—*Ozimops lumsdenae*—was named after her.

We are seeking a guest speaker for September and would welcome any suggestions.

For your diary:

Wednesday March 27th 7-30pm **Guest Speaker Dr. Greg Moore “Economic Effects of Trees.”**

Sunday March 31st Working Bee 10-00am to 12-30, Meet at Stephenson's road carpark Road car park.

Wednesday April 24th 7-30pm. Business Meeting.

Sunday April 28th Working bee 10.00am to 12-30 park at the Park Road car park and meet at the main pond.

Note for working bees: Please help the environment and the friends group be bringing your own water bottles and coffee / tea cups to working bees. We will fill them up for free!

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