



NATURE STRIP MAINTENANCE POLICY

Bushland, public open space and biodiversity are key concerns of the Mosman Parks & Bushland Association and we are therefore pleased to have the opportunity to make some observations on the proposed "Nature Strip Maintenance Policy".

We have compared the proposed new policy with the existing policy and we have looked at the two policies which are intended to be included in the new policy - 'Trees - Planting by Residents on Council Land' and 'Nature Strips - Mowing by Council'

The Association recognizes the need for greater clarity in the policy. Process has indeed been better established and explained. However, in achieving clarity with regard to **process**, we consider:

- 1. That the emphasis of the draft policy has shifted away from the desirable outcomes**, especially those of biodiversity, amenity and aesthetics. The existing policy is more positive in this regard.
- 2. That the proposed policy has become less resident friendly** in both content and tone. The policy has perhaps become clearer for Council officers, but is it well explained for residents?
- 3. That bushland nature strips receive scant treatment** - only under 'Exemptions'. The Association would like the existing policy's discussion of bushland sites reinstated and for positive mentions to be made elsewhere in the policy where possible.

Going through the policy systematically, we shall make step by step comments and we shall conclude with some general observation and comments.

INTRODUCTION

The existing policy contains an introduction which is very positive and provides a simple and straightforward explanation of the need for a policy. An amendment to the draft policy to include a similar introduction would provide residents with a framework for understanding the policy. The introduction would also provide an opportunity for encouraging residents to maintain and plant beautiful nature strips with species that support biodiversity and enhance the amenity of Mosman's streets.

1. PURPOSE

- The existing policy used the term **"Objectives"**. We submit that "Objectives" is a more positive term as it suggests an aim to achieve a desirable outcome.
- We prefer the order in which the purposes/objectives appear in the existing policy to the order of the draft policy. Starting with positive objectives and continuing on to the more prescriptive definitions will encourage residents to proceed.
- We are not sure why the last objective in the existing policy does not appear in the purpose as it seems to express what the policy hopes to achieve. Later we suggest that the Street Tree Masterplan could be attached to the policy as an appendix so that all relevant information can be found in the one place providing comprehensive advice and information to residents.

2. DEFINITIONS

- We suggest that **"Definitions - Land to which this policy applies"** is more reader friendly
- The inclusion of types of nature strips in the new policy is helpful.

3. SCOPE

A confusing sentence. Council approval is needed for new or changed work, but it is not required for maintenance if there is no change.

4. LEGISLATION AND PLANNING INSTRUMENTS

This is a sensible inclusion, but off-putting for residents who are simply wondering about planting a few shrubs.

Later in this submission we suggest referring residents to Guidelines. The guidelines would explain the need to observe the legislation and planning instruments and tell residents in simple language what they need to do.

5. GENERAL CONTROLS

- **"General Controls - Areas expected to be maintained by residents"** (or similar) will be more helpful to the reader.
- A cross reference to the Exemptions section for areas that Council would consider maintaining would be helpful here.
- 5.2 first paragraph. We suggest the addition of "they must not make the nature strip look like private land". We are pleased that this point is now top of the list in "ASSESSMENT". However, if the general controls contain this reference it provides another opportunity to make this important issue clear.

3.

- "Planting of trees is subject to Council's Street Tree Masterplan"
We suggest a 5.4 for this plus further clarification eg "and must have Council approval" or "and is the responsibility of Council".

6. APPLICATION PROCESS

- Fee discussed under 8.

7. ASSESSMENT

- We approve the top billing for whether "public land will be made to look like private land".
- "and/or used for a private purpose" could be included
- We suggest a further point - whether "the works interfere with public access"
- We suggest that including "the public interest" may be useful. Although the public interest is a vague term, people understand it.
- Lastly, we would like the inclusion of some more positive criteria such as adding to the aesthetics of the streetscape, and the environmental benefits of increasing biodiversity.

8. FEES AND CHARGES

We understand the reason for the introduction of a fee and the amount proposed is certainly not excessive. However we are concerned that it will act as a disincentive to make changes and inhibit residents' desire to consult. This may result in illegal works including the alienation of public land. Once work is in place, it is more difficult to have it rectified than it is to have prevented it in the first place. Residents need to feel free first to talk to an officer to establish whether their plans require an application. Once it is established that their ideas would be considered and that approval is needed, then residents should submit the application.

11. EXEMPTIONS

- A heading, "Exemptions - bushland and large sites" would provide guidance to the subject
- The bullet points are good.
- The application for exemption based on physical or financial hardship is a separate issue and may apply to grassed areas so should be separated out from the discussion of bushland areas.
- We would like to see the existing policy's more expansive discussion about bushland areas included in the new policy.
- Also missing from the new policy is the help that may be given to residents who wish to be involved in maintaining their bushland nature strips including becoming a bushcare volunteer, receiving support with workplans, the provision of tubestock etc.

4.

- Including such inducements would create a more positive tone.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS, COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

1. Council should apply its policy consistently and where there is a departure from the policy, give reasons.

2. Council should promote the policy and encourage residents to create more aesthetically pleasing nature strips and increase biodiversity

3. We have suggested the inclusion of the Street Tree Masterplan as an Appendix.

4. We suggest that the policy include the need for residents to be aware of services when planting is undertaken. The work itself and the species chosen can impact services - sewer and storm water in particular and on a built footpath. Adverse impacts on these services/assets can have environmental, health and financial consequences. Sydney Water is believed to have a list of species to avoid when planting on a nature strip. The list should be included in the policy.

5. **Guidelines:** Our research revealed that Murrickville Council publishes Guidelines entitled "Planting Your Nature Strip - Guidelines". The Guidelines include a checklist. We strongly recommend adapting these Guidelines to Mosman and publishing them. They are simple, straightforward, helpful and encouraging.

We attach "Planting Your Nature Strip - Guidelines" Murrickville Council.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.



Kate Eccles
President