



# MORNINGTON PENINSULA SHIRE

*CITIZENS' PANEL*

Urban Forest Strategy

6 September 2023



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## LIMITATIONS OF USE

The sole purpose of this report is to provide a summary of insights and comments from members of the 2023 Citizen Panel from online engagement activities hosted by MosaicLab on behalf of the Mornington Peninsula Shire.

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# BACKGROUND



The need for an Urban Forest Strategy arose from a Notice of Motion from Mornington Peninsula Shire (MPS) Councillors in October 2022 to substantially increase canopy cover across the peninsula, improve urban cooling and reduce ground temperatures, improve amenity and support biodiversity.

The urban forest consists of all trees and vegetation within the urban environment. This includes street trees, reserves, parks and open spaces, and vegetation on private and public land. It generally excludes bushland reserves, national parks and the green wedge areas. An urban forest needs active planning and maintenance from the community, the shire and many other stakeholders.

A resilient urban forest has many benefits to the people and environment on the peninsula. These include reducing the urban heat island effect, build climate and urban resilience, create shading for energy efficiency in homes and workplaces, improve the amenity and liveability of neighbourhoods to name a few.

Preparation of the MPS Urban Forest Strategy supports and delivers on a range of other Shire Policies, including the Council & Wellbeing Plan, Climate Emergency Plan, Biodiversity Conservation Plan, Integrated Water Management Plan and the Integrated Transport Strategy in development.

To support the Citizen's Panel understanding of this topic, they were provided with an Information Pack and encouraged to explore their residential area to find an example of a street, an open space or a particular tree that's meaningful to them. If they were able, panel members were asked to share a photo of a street with lots of canopy and shading, a street with a low canopy, or a particular tree that's significant, valuable or attractive.

The following report outlines the panel discussion, their outputs and responses to council's key questions on this topic at the Citizen's Panel Session held on 6 September 2023, namely:

*What are the most important factors to consider when increasing and expanding the urban forest?*

*What do we need to think about when prioritizing where we plant trees on the peninsula?*

# PANEL PROCESS + OUTPUTS

Thirty-six members of the 47 member Citizens Panel met online on the evening of Wednesday 6 September 2023 to understand, discuss and consider council's key questions to inform the draft Urban Forest Strategy.

## AGENDA



Welcome and Purpose of the session

Understanding the background material & Q&A with Guest Speakers:

- ♦ Samantha Dalla Santa - Contract Coordinator - Parks & Roadsides
- ♦ Lucy Allison - Team Leader - Climate Change (observing)

Aspirations for the future and factors to consider when increasing and expanding the urban forest

Prioritising planting across the peninsula

Final reflections, comments and next steps



## UNDERSTANDING THE TOPIC AND BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Samantha Dalla Santa, Contract Coordinator – Parks & Roadsides with MPS provided a short introductory presentation covering salient points from the pre-reading.

The panel was divided into small groups to discuss what they've read and heard and respond to three questions:

- ♦ Three things that stand out,
- ♦ Two positive things,
- ♦ One question for council.

Panel responses to these questions appear below and have been lightly themed for readability.



### THREE THINGS THAT STAND OUT:

<b>Overall</b>	The encouragement of getting out into the streets for a healthy lifestyle
	It's a big plan. Good concept, but we worry about the budget
	The majority wanted vegetation increased and that we are not aware of the consultation process that has already happened.
	The interest in ensuring that KPIs are made and met during the process
	That the council is being proactive about improving the streetscape through vegetation
	The overwhelming response from the community
	Why is this limited to Urban Forests? Is there a strategy for Rural / Green Wedge?
<b>Maintenance</b>	Are arborists adequately trained? Seem to just be hacked when they overhang
	Better selection under powerlines
	Can we work around trees rather than always removing them
	Consciousness about water management and general resource management
<b>Quantity</b>	Lots of overgrowth and weeds that appear to be neglected
	We need more trees!
	30% seems too low
	Some trees are being removed with nothing replaced (eg Somerville trees)
	The fact that there is still a net loss and council aren't doing enough for it
<b>Type of planting</b>	Public perception is that some places are leafy (Mornington) but in actuality they aren't.
	Difference between suburbs and how much vegetation there is
	Not much info on native trees or type of trees
<b>Other</b>	We would love to see more indigenous trees brought into the area
	Balnarring is duplicated in the township graph .. both with different levels. Perhaps one of these is meant to be Blairgowrie??
	Detail missing in the data.
	The fact that council is starting to plan now



## TWO POSITIVE THINGS:

The mission is very positive and I believe our nature is one of the best aspects of the peninsula

Having a strategy is positive and not ad hoc

Trees are generally supported

Happy that we are 'planning' and that forestry is important

The council is willing to ask for community input

Council doing a good job with urban heat map... very small amount of 10-15 degrees Celsius

That the council is starting to plan for this now

The peninsula is beautiful and green in comparison to other areas in Melbourne

Looks like they want to increase canopy cover

That is subject is being treated seriously and actually being actioned on.



## ONE QUESTION FOR COUNCIL:

A plenary Q&A session was held with Samantha Dalla-Santa from council to provide responses to the following questions raised in the panel conversations:

Why aren't trees being replaced when removed?

Is there selection criteria (type and placement) and a maintenance plan for tree (pruning and roots pushing up footpaths)?

Are there regulations in force whereby removal of trees to prevent shading of householders panel's is controlled to the point that installers have to notify of their intent to do so?

Can we replace each lost tree with 2 new?  
There is a lot of natural attrition from storms, and from trees falling at a certain age. Also many fall prematurely due to the sandy soils.

Can we include more school children into reforestry projects? it would excite the kids and they would continue to be invested as they grow (and the trees row!)

Could council make a list of weeds and noxious

Do we account for smaller vegetation?

Is this going to provide a fire risk?

Parking of cars, trailers, caravans on nature strips is presumably illegal? has council the powers to enforce compliance notices. Even the control of residents who level/clear and path nature strips to facilitate long term parking.

Is succession planning employed when trees are destroyed by storm, fire or wilfully removed by landowners/ householders removed by land owners?

Are arborists consulted when trees are selected re- their suitability for i.e. nature strips etc. considering potential damage to footpaths line of sight etc.

Curious about how flora is decided and planned? appears to be random.

Why did council permit the removal of almost every tree from a 3/4 acre block supposedly in the cause of bush fire protection. 2 days of chain sawing and a huge pile of chip.

### Recommendation:

We recommend Council use these questions to guide and inform any FAQs developed for future community consultation.

## TASK 1

# OUR FUTURE ASPIRATIONS FOR THE URBAN FOREST

With a deeper understanding of the topic the panel considered their first task. This was a visioning exercise where they were to imagine they'd woken up and it was 2035. What might the urban forest look like across the Shire?

In small group conversations, they captured their aspirations in GroupMap. Their responses have been lightly themed and appear below:

### IMPROVED PLANNING FOR NEW DEVELOPMENTS

With new developments that the % of the land must remain green (whether commercial or private land), should be reinforced by council.

Can individual homes plant more trees to promote forestry goals?

Amalgamation of councils / Arborists experts around the state. currently too much bureaucracy

No developments where you can't plant trees on the block. Everything should have their place

More self-sustaining homes

Overloading blocks of land with too many houses =less places for trees

Better planning or rules for nature strips planting

### MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF EXISTING AND END-OF-LIFE TREES FOR SAFETY

Environmental weeds eradicated.

Regular replenishment of fallen trees in parks

Safe distances of tall trees from dwellings to prevent unforeseen accident

Management strategy for replacement of mature trees

That tree trimming is kept to a minimum

### INCREASE VOLUME AND DIVERSITY OF NATIVE/INDIGENOUS PLANTINGS TO SUPPORT FAUNA

More trees native to the area

Diverse - lots of different flora species that support different fauna species - birds, insects, mammals etc

Flowering native shrubs and trees which attracts native fauna

To see more indigenous plants/trees around

More native trees not pine or oak trees.

Definitely more trees if we can maintain them

We see a carbon neutral, self managed native wilderness that embraces indigenous heritage, that is rates free.

Canopy with understory well maintained with dead wood, shrubs be removed regularly

More small shrubs for small animals

Increase in the volume of plantings

Concentrate on increasing flora/trees with emphasis on such factors being the LUNGS of the Earth

More established trees in parks and nature reserves

Established trees in parks and nature reserves (larger trees)

## IMPROVE AND SUSTAIN AMENITY AND LIVEABLE SUBURBS

Bring the rural environment to the urban areas.

More trees particularly in areas where council has identified a larger percentage is needed. Plentiful animal life

To see potentially more fruit/veggie trees planted instead of the same trees that are usually planted everywhere. More variety

Maximise foliage above one side of the road for walkers.

Need to see huge upgrade in the no of trees being planted. PLANT PLANT PLANT PLEASE

Lots of green with nature enjoying all the vegetation.

Where we live, the natural environment is already so beautiful. I'd like it to be maintained and strengthened

More shade, more greenery

Alot more trees in the local area.

More shade in the streets

More focus on aesthetics, and making the forest look nicer, maybe making people want to take care of it more

## OTHER COMMENTS

Not one size fits all. Consider street types and purposes and apply a specific strategy based street usage. EG Courts - Trees + Shrubs and ground covers. High Streets and main roads - Street Trees Only. Local roads - Mixture based on category

An environment that is calming to move within all year round.

we need to get inspired? check out Singapore's airport <https://www.changiairport.com/corporate/media-centre/changijourneys/the-airport-never-sleeps/behind-the-rain-vortex.html>

Better maintained. and better car parking policing.

Streets that are easy to navigate, without pot holes or excessive on street parking that prevents safety

## BETTER CONNECTION - BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER AND LINKING GREEN SPACES

Connected canopy along street lines - plus biolinks or corridors that connect to larger parkland or important habitat

Communities being brought together by the forest. Potentially through having edible plants, like herbs for example, like a small community garden

Make the peninsula connected by having equal distribution of similar vegetation, (eg. not 1 particular town being famous for pines)

Four panel members volunteered to take the panel's aspirations above and draft a vision statement for the Urban Forest Strategy. This work was still to be completed at the time of preparing this 'what was said' report and will be shared with the panel at their next session in October.



## TASK 2

# WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN INCREASING AND EXPANDING OUR URBAN FOREST

Council is keen to increase and expand the urban forest across the peninsula. To guide and inform their thinking, the panel was asked to identify the most important factors (criteria) council should keep in mind when undertaking their work.

In pairs and then groups of 3-4s, panel members discussed their thoughts and agreed on their group's top TWO ideas, captured into GroupMap. Facilitators lightly themed each response to identify key factors for consideration against panel comments:

### Diversity of Flora

Colour, Colour and colour as well as green e.g. Flowering natives with a community ownership for the strategy.

Diversity in species being planted - for ecosystem resilience, climate adaptation and habitat for fauna

Indigenous; sustainable for the future.

### Budget Consideration

The cost of funding this strategy and maintaining it is to be considered. particularly when there are people really struggling just to pay their bills.

### Location, Location

Choosing actual areas to plant

Fit for Purpose - Tree Selection, location, height restriction, usage of the street differs location to location

Not one size fit all! Consider the diversity of the peninsula, the variation on climate and also the variation of land use and residents requirements.

The shire should be more prescriptive regarding green spaces, and requirements for new developments.

### Maintenance

Sustainable: maintainable within reasonable costs, placed appropriately, safe,

Weed control - reducing threats such as sweet pittosttrum and ivy / also education to community of what are the weeds in the area

### Other

Urban Forest v Streetscape & Urban Parkland - Consider terminology to avoid confusion

Utilise experts more in the planning process so that conservation can occur not just in the streets but in individuals homes, high density living, rural areas, green belts

(Fund and Support) education (schools? universities?) to be involved in the planning of and planting/maintenance of forestry

## TASK 3

# WHAT DO WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT WHEN PRIORITIZING WHERE WE PLANT TREES?

The final conversation asked panel members to consider what the priorities need to be when planting trees across the peninsula. Ideally, everyone would love more trees everywhere, yet there are budget and human resource constraints. So how do we prioritise locations.

In small group conversations, panel members were asked to consider the question, socialize ideas and then discuss and collectively agree on a rating across a list of possible priorities. The results from the whole group appear below. Note in the below sliding scales the orange vertical bar represents the **mean** from across the panel responses and the light green vertical bars represent the **spread** of group responses.

### Recommendation:

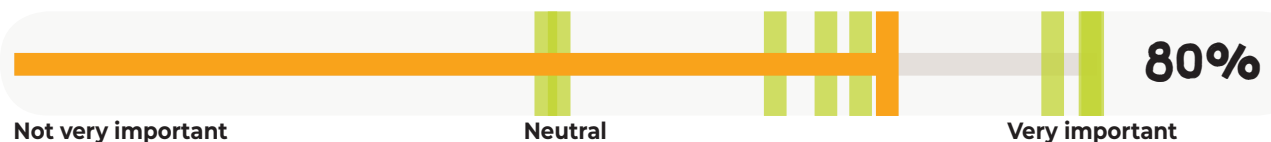
Should council consider utilizing a similar rating scale in future community engagements, we recommend providing definitions for each priority factor as panel members found some terminology unclear

## WHEN CONSIDERING HOW TO PRIORITISE WHERE TO PLANT TREES ACROSS THE SHIRE, WHAT IS YOUR COMFORT LEVEL WITH THE FOLLOWING FACTORS:

Areas with low current canopy cover



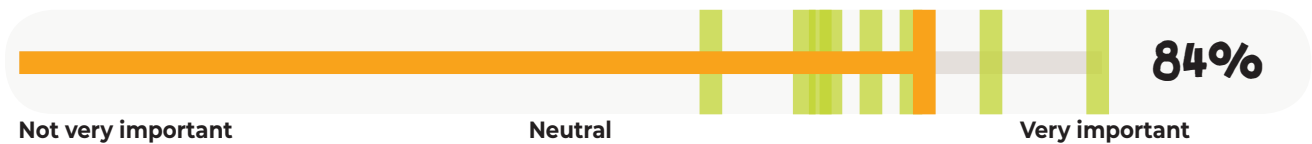
Areas with low socioeconomic status



Streets used for active transport



## Principle pedestrian network



## Coastal areas



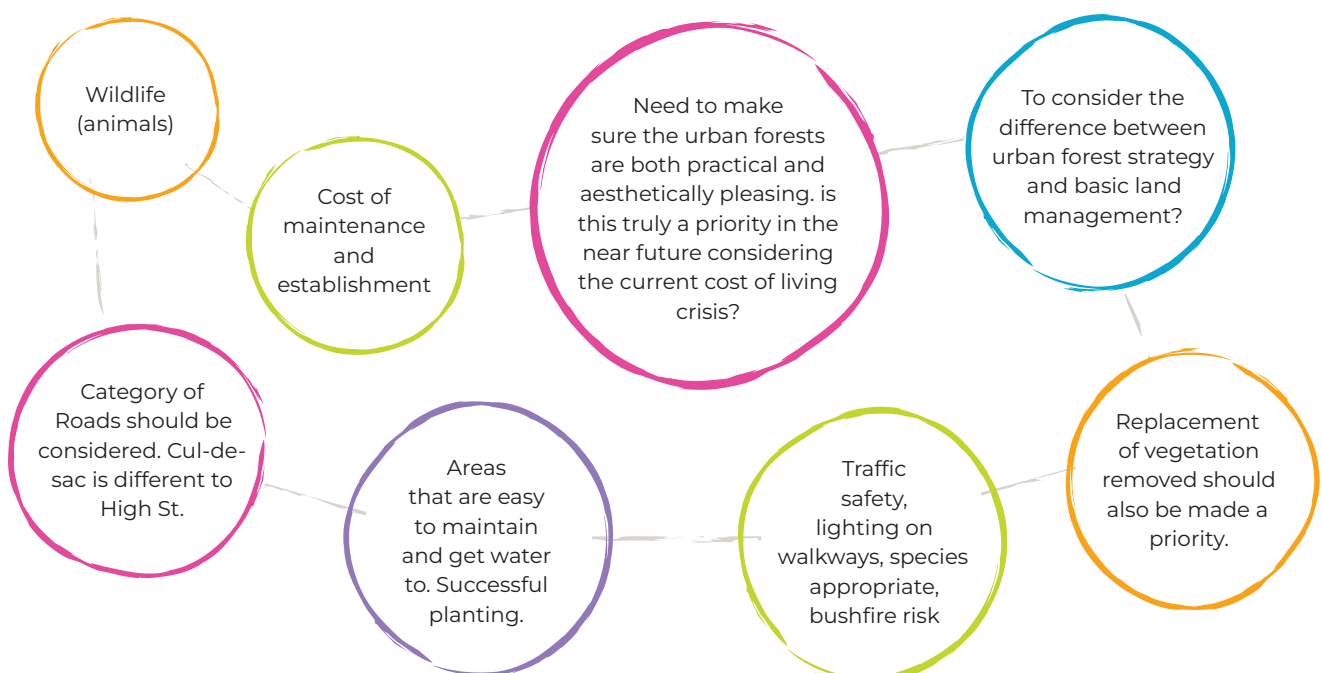
## Urban areas close to bushland reserves



## Waterways



## IS THERE A FACTOR THAT'S MISSING - ADD YOUR THOUGHTS HERE



## FINAL REFLECTIONS ON THE SESSION

The final task for the evening was a personal reflection for each panel member responding to - **One thing I've learnt** (Head), **One thing that inspired me** (Heart) and **One action as a result** (Hands). Note that not all panel members completed this reflection:



**HEAD**

### ONE THING I LEARNT TODAY....

Alot to consider in creating an urban forest strategy

Currently no existing Urban Forest Strategy but there is going to be by the end of next year...that is a good thing!

Good to see a Strategy being developed. Not just planting trees to tick a box

How complicated it is with lots of factors

How important trees/shrubs are in terms of cooling our environment

Is it the right time for this strategy given the financial challenges the council and rate payers are having

Safety beach had the lowest canopy cover

That the Shire is making a plan to deal with tree planting, and that they are not just in the business of tree-logging. Inspired: that there is going to be an on-going plan for more greenery within the Shire.

That the shire is thinking about an Urban Forest Plan which is great

That there was no formal strategy for reforestation by the council.

The amount of thought that goes into planning

The many factors to consider when planning for Urban forests

The number of factors involved in this consideration

The topic is being looked at with significance by council

There are a lot of factors to consider in regards to urban forest

Tujuca forest, Rio de Janeiro, is the oldest urban forest in the world started in 1844 and nothing involving the council is easy

We as a group appear to have very similar observations/opinions.

What an urban forest is



## ONE THING THAT HAS INSPIRED ME...

Communities enthusiasm for this topic

Community has a genuine interest in wanting to get this right to the first time, Fit for Purpose

Great debate with different perspectives

How passionate I actually am about this!

My overall feeling is that I want to go out and hug a tree.

So many people are passionate about the environment

That so many care about this issue and I hope we can harness this to the benefit of all things green or human.

That the broader community will be exposed to the idea of improving our vegetation in our shire

The group cares about the amount of trees being cut down

The low percentage of canopy peninsula wide

The majority of respondents wish to have something planted on their nature strip.

The passion from the team about the topic.

The quality of discussion and healthy debate. We need to see more of this in society. Though tonight, many people seemed aligned

The range of ideas tonight and also the fact that everyone is so engaged with this topic.

To look and learn more in my own community surroundings

To look more closely to the nature around me

To plant more natives on my own property

We need to think about how to increase trees which is cost effective to maintain in the future



**HANDS**

## ONE THING I'LL DO AFTER TONIGHT IN SUPPORT OF THE URBAN FOREST.....

Carry a 3 L water bottle in the car to help newly planted trees/shrubs that are struggling :-)

Continue to plant more natives!

Going for a walk to see what is around and where I think improvements can be made.

I am going to have a larger appreciation and awareness for the trees and forestland around me

I would like to be involved in the feedback on the draft strategy when it is done

I'm going to plant some natives in my garden

Keep pulling out the weeds in my road as they won't kill themselves

Learn more about types of trees and trees that suit our environment

Look to follow up and see what the actual strategy is and what they have taken from our involvement.

Plant more natives on my property

Plant more trees/shrubs

Read about the different harmful weeds on the website

Show all my neighbours the weed brochure

Take more notice of the canopy in various areas

Take more notice of the differences in the urban forest from area to area.

Teach my kids about the importance of trees

Watch out for the Community Consultation in 2024!

We trust this report offers insight into what a representative sample of the broader Mornington Peninsula Shire community may consider important as Council drafts it's Urban Forest Strategy, as well as guidance on future communications and messaging in support of the Council's position.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Every effort has been made to transcribe participants comments accurately. Please contact Melinda Jacobsen at [melinda@mosaiclab.com.au](mailto:melinda@mosaiclab.com.au) should you have any queries about this report.

*MosaicLab is a Victorian-based consultancy that specializes in community and stakeholder engagement, facilitation, negotiation, strategic planning and coaching*

*We pay our respects to the traditional custodians of all the lands on which we live and work. We acknowledge their continuing connection to land, water and culture and the ongoing contribution they make to our society today. We extend this respect to elders' past, present and emerging.*



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