

ARE WE THERE YET? LEARNING FROM THE PAST: LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

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Summary

The City of Sydney (the City) has undergone a massive change in its awareness, understanding and appreciation of trees within the past 10 years. Numerous tree management policies have been written, adopted and executed.

Now we have to keep the momentum going. With the adopted policies and thousands of trees planted, is Sydney there yet? Will we ever get there? And where is there?

This paper discusses the City's evolution over the past 10 years, with expanding boundaries, growing tree population and increased community awareness about the importance of trees in our urban environments. It will also briefly cover the future vision of tree management in the City, and the integral role of the urban forest in the City's 2030 Sustainable Sydney strategy.

The City

The City has a high profile due to its geographic location, the presence of icons such as the Harbour Bridge and Opera House makes it a major tourist destination, and the central business district houses many Australian and international financial, legal and other prominent businesses. Apart from its commercial core, the City also has a significant residential component.

The City's Local Government Area (LGA) covers approximately 26 square kilometres. Stretching from the harbour side suburbs of The Rocks, Barangaroo, Pyrmont, Woolloomooloo and Rushcutters Bay, through the Central Business District (CBD) and inner City suburbs of Surry Hills, Kings Cross, Darlinghurst, Chippendale, Redfern, Glebe, Newtown and to our southern residential and industrial areas of Alexandria and Rosebery.

Within the boundaries of the City of Sydney, waterways and some public areas are under the executive control of various State Government agencies. These include the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, the Department of Transport, Sydney Ports Corporation, the Centennial and Moore Park Trust, and the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust.

The City provides numerous services to a wide range of clients, including residents, businesses and visitors, whilst managing an enormous portfolio of assets that vary in size, value and scope. The City is responsible for the management of 42,000 public trees in its parks and streets and tens of thousands more on private property and in the grounds of institutions such as universities and schools. These are the major component of the City's green assets.

The Timeline

Ten years ago Sydney was preparing for the 2000 Olympics. Sydney was used to throwing a large one night New Years Eve party, but now had to deliver a two week party on the world stage. The preparation for the Olympics resulted in a huge capital works and maintenance program. Roads, footpaths, parks and tree planting works were rolled out on a large scale.

In 1999, the City of Sydney was a much smaller local government area than it is today. It comprised only of the CBD and the Pyrmont and Ultimo areas, and a tree population of 9,000 street and park trees. The trees were managed by contracted external service providers, and works were largely programmed.

During 2003 and 2004, the City underwent a massive transformation in size and focus, with the amalgamations with South Sydney Council and a portion of Leichhardt Council. Once predominately business focused; the City now encompassed large resident areas, and had to (and still is) operating under three different LEPs, numerous DCP's and the transition of staff and services.

In relation to tree management, the City went from having no tree management team and old policies, to a team of six staff, each of whom holds a Diploma of Arboriculture (AQF 5). This led to the development and adoption of numerous policies and management plans for our 19th century parks, and saw over 6,000 advanced street trees planted since 2004.

The provision of tree maintenance services was also reviewed and high quality specifications were developed to ensure the City's trees are managed in a programmed way and to best practice principles. This led to the City's street trees, and half of the park trees, being maintained by external service providers (ie. contracted).

Our service providers must employ AQF Level 2 and 3 staff for certain works, (except trainees) and 95% of our internal tree maintenance team also hold a minimum AQF Level 2 – with many planning to progress through to AQF 3, and one completing the Diploma of Arboriculture (AQF 5). The continued upgrading of arboricultural qualifications is imperative.

Within a 10 year period, the City local government area has almost tripled, and the tree population has increased ten fold. Human resources and financial budgets have been increased to manage this change, and to ensure that the City undertakes best practice tree management.

In addition, the growing awareness and attitudes across Council about the importance of trees – from the roadway and footpath crews, through to the planners, has steadily increased and improved. This improvement has come from both the 'top down', through the Lord Mayor and Councillors, and the CEO, and also from the 'bottom up' as more individuals are aware of and understand climate change.

The table below highlights the City's evolution and existing tree management practises.

Table 1 - Tree Management Timeline

	1999	2003	2004	2009
Area of LGA	9km ²	15km ² Amalgamation with South Sydney & parts of Leichhardt Council	26 km ² Amalgamation with remaining 100% of South Sydney Council	26km ²
Tree Population	7,500	13,000	22,500	28,500
Street	1,300	4,500	11,000	11,400
Park	4,000	40,000	80,000	80,000
Private (est)				
Tree Maintenance Budget	\$450,000	\$1.1m	\$2.2m	\$3.6m
Capital Works Budget (tree planting)	\$1m	\$500k	\$1m -\$2m pa	\$500,000
Service Provision	100% contract	100% contract	50% contract 50% internal	100% street trees under contract 50/50% park trees contract / internal
Style of Service Provision	Young Trees Programmed Mature Trees Reactive	CBD 100% Programmed New areas 100% reactive	2004 - Transition of all contracted works to 100% programmed 80% internal works reactive	100% programmed

Policies (in existence or developed)	1976 Tree Preservation Order (TPO)	1976 TPO Draft Street Tree Masterplan (STMP)	2004 TPO (adopted) Draft STMP Draft Urban Tree M'ment Policy (UTMP)	2004 TPO 2005 STMP (adopted) 2005 UTMP (adopted) 2006 Register of Significant Trees (adopted) Hyde Park Tree Management Plan (TMP) Redfern Park TMP Observatory Hill TMP Draft Victoria Park TMP Draft Wentworth Park TMP
	1999	2003	2004	2009
Tree Management Team	None – works were undertaken by parks maintenance	1 x Street Tree Contract Coordinator	1 x City Arborist 1 x Tree Management Coordinator 1 x Street Tree Coordinator 2 x Tree Management Officer	1 x City Arborist 1 x Tree Management Coordinator 2 x Street Tree Coordinators 2 x Tree Management Officers
Politics	Labour	Labour	Independent (since early 2004)	Independent

Improved Maintenance Specifications

The shift from reactive to programmed works has greatly changed the management of our trees, their health, structure and longevity, and has certainly reduced the numbers of customer requests received.

The reduction of customer service requests (CSM) are shown in the graphs below. Note the first graph shows the 'East and West' areas of the City, the areas that were transferred in 2004, and the steady decline in customer requests. 2004/05 year figures would spike as the transition to programmed works focused on main streets, streets with high numbers of requests, aged trees etc. Note that the 2005 figures do not include requests received via email – and so would sit higher than 06/07.

EAST/WEST CSM YTD

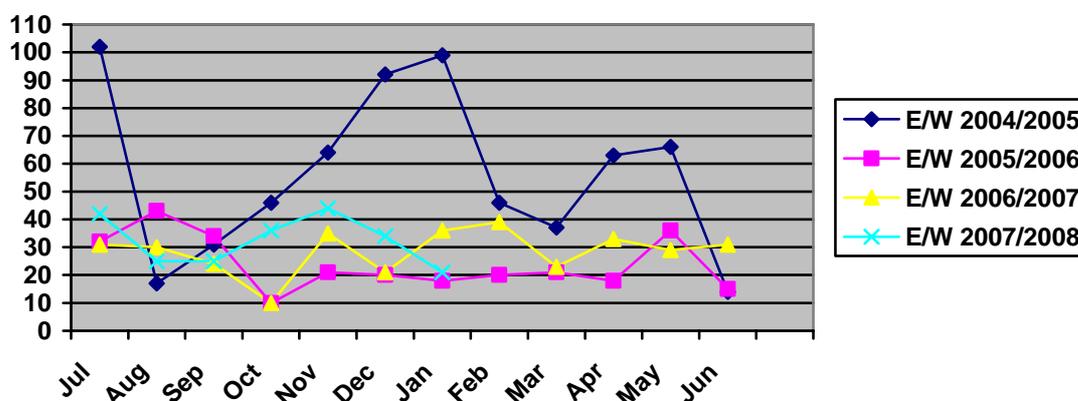


Figure 1. Number of customer requests received from 2004 to 2008.
Source: Citywide Monthly Report, January 2008

Following the decision to contract all street tree maintenance works in December 2007, all street trees are now maintained on a programmed basis. Each tree is assessed annually, logged into an electronic database, and works performed as required.

The following graph highlights the steady decline in customer requests as a result of the programmed pruning. Note transition of reactive services requests from internal team to contractors occurred through March and April 2008 – hence the steady increase of numbers.

Customer Service Module Year To Date

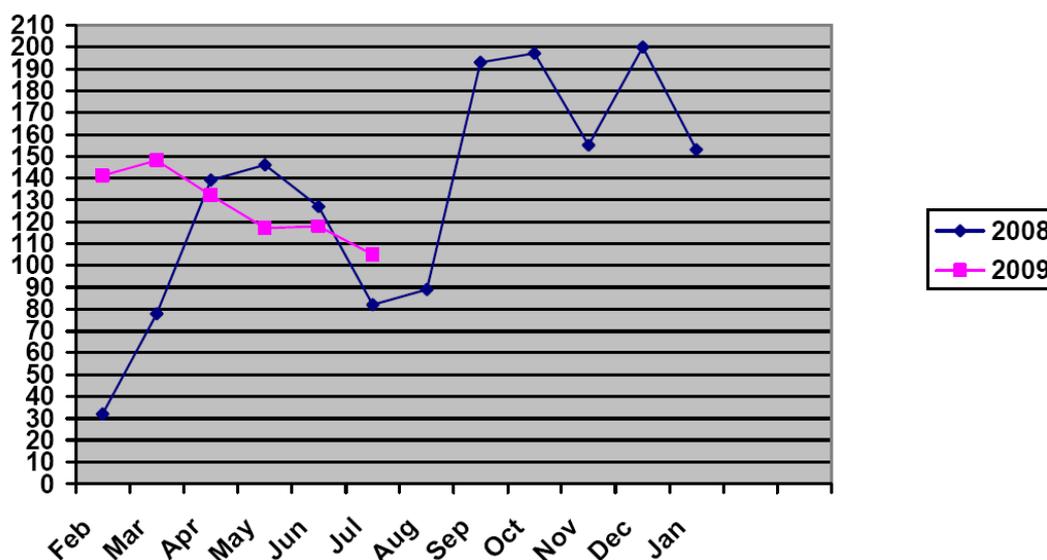


Figure 2. Number of customer requests received from Feb 2008 to July 2009.

Source: Citywide Monthly Report, July 2009

The first year of programmed works is similar to a critical works package, where the main safety issues are targeted (footpath, road & house clearances, defects, deadwood) coupled with the formative pruning of young trees.

The second year requires all clearances to be achieved, defects removed/addressed and formative pruning to have commenced on all trees. The works are staged to limit a mass amount of tree pruning undertaken within the first or second year.

As the community understands that Council will undertake regular maintenance, the complaints regarding trees have dropped significantly. It is expected that as each year progresses, customer requests will continue to drop until an estimated plateau of 50 requests per month. With the trees' details recorded into the electronic tree database, it is easier to manage a customer, and their complaint, when it occurs.

The electronic database will also allow improved data analysis and statistical modelling for managing the existing and planned future tree population. This may include detailed species profile in relation to maintenance timeframes and costs of managing particular tree species (ie native compared to exotic).

The Future

'Sustainable Sydney 2030 - Green, Global and Connected' is the City's vision. This vision, now policy, responds to the current challenges (eg. global warming, declining affordable housing), by detailing the moves and actions required to transform the City into becoming:

- Green – an environmental leader, successful sustainable community
- Global – an innovative City, creatively growing a sustainable global community
- Connected – moving easily between villages to connect with each other and the world

The 'SS2030' strategy demonstrates that the City is an organisation that constantly focuses on sustainable practices that continue to service the community, while protecting the interest of the natural environment and while remaining fiscally responsible.

Greening Sydney

The future of tree management will soon be captured within a wide range of policies, strategies and actions. The City is due to commence the development of a Greening Sydney strategy that aligns with 'SS2030'. This includes the following draft actions that the City will undertake itself, coupled with actively empowering the community to be involved in the greening of their City.

While some of the components listed below are already being implemented or undertaken on a daily basis, there are also significant policies proposed for development. It is envisaged that the Greening Sydney strategy will provide a systematic framework for the management of all green infrastructure across the local government area.

The Greening Sydney strategy proposes to include the following key policies, strategies and actions:

Urban Forestry Policy

- Measure the City's urban canopy
- Develop Urban Forestry Policy
- Set 2030 targets to increase canopy

Tree Protection

- Strengthen tree protection through the inclusion of canopy coverage targets set in a City Plan DCP
- Review Significant Tree Register

Street Tree Planting

- Review Street Tree Master Plan (which specifies each streets species for planting)
- Plant in all available footpath locations
- Build road blisters and plant trees into roads and lanes, and implement water sensitive urban design (WSUD) opportunities

Greening Sydney's arterial transport and utility corridors

- Landscaping of rail corridors, arterial roads, utility corridors and redundant road reserves

Greening new development

- Develop a Green Roofs Policy and
- Develop a Landscape Policy for inclusion within City Plan DCP

Summary

The City has proven it has sustained its focus, momentum and commitment to best practise tree management.

Is Sydney there yet? And where is there?

We are certainly well on our way. To give an analogy of the family holiday – the City is driving an eco car, driven collectively by our Council, Executive and expert staff. We are towing a caravan behind us, filled with a demanding community, State and Federal Governments, climate change sceptics, and fat possums, on our way to the ultimate holiday destination called the 'Continued Improvement of the Urban Forest.'

Will we ever get there?

As we are managing a living organism, whose life cycle changes and evolves: so too does our management of trees. Ten years ago the City never expected to undergo such a rapid transformation; however it has managed the transition process exceptionally well. The Greening Sydney plan will progress the holistic management of the urban forest, and like the never ending family holiday car trip, will always be on our way.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the City's excellent tree management team (past and present), who work tirelessly in a complex, sensitive and demanding environment. Their hard work and commitment has led to the City's position as the benchmark in NSW, and an industry leader within Australia, for the development and implementation of tree management policies that make a daily difference to residents and visitors in the City of Sydney.

References

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City of Sydney, 2008, '*Sustainable Sydney 2030*'

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