Public Realm Greening Program - 5 Year Tree Planting Overview

Strategic Alignment - Our Environment

Public

Tuesday, 17 February 2026

Infrastructure and Public Works Committee

Program Contact:
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Approving Officer:
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to inform the Infrastructure and Public Works Committee on the development of a 5 - Year Public Realm Greening Program associated with tree planting and greening in the City and North Adelaide streets, medians and verges (**Attachment A**).

At its meeting held on 27 May 2025, Council resolved:

'That Council:

1. *Notes the Public Realm Greening Program Update as contained in this report.*
2. *Agrees to develop a 5-Year tree planting plan, with a focus on the coming 2 years, which will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis, to guide budget and business planning, ratepayer awareness raising and stakeholder engagement, which describes using past and current investigations:*
    - *Potential sites for tree planting based on high-level mapping of streets and based on considerations such as location of underground services and urban heat mitigation benefits*
    - *Provides an estimate of how the proposed planting program helps to achieve canopy cover targets in the City, focussing within the CBD and North Adelaide, excluding the Parks Lands*
    - *Describes the current and future species mix and maintenance and requirements for watering*
    - *Reports on trees planted each year, planting locations and species.'*

The first two years of the program has been developed in more detail to inform the Committee on where tree planting is likely to take place in streets between 2025 – 2027.

RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendation will be presented to Council on 24 February 2026 for consideration

THAT THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS TO COUNCIL

THAT COUNCIL

1. Notes the Public Realm Greening Program – 5 Year Tree Planting Overview as contained in Attachment A to Item 7.1 on the Agenda for the meeting of the infrastructure and Public Works Committee held on 17 February 2026.

IMPLICATIONS AND FINANCIALS

City of Adelaide 2024-2028 Strategic Plan	Strategic Alignment – Our Environment Lead and advocate for the environment value, productivity, quality and biodiversity of the Park Lands, squares, open space and streetscapes.
Policy	City Plan – Adelaide 2036: Strategy 1 – A Green City Grid driving the need for greener, cooler streets. The Integrated Climate Strategy 2030: Goal 1 – A Climate Resilient City, and Goal 3 – A City Where Nature Thrives, driving the need to increase urban greening for cooler, more comfortable and resilient city.
Consultation	Residents and external stakeholders / asset owners are consulted in all street designs.
Resource	Resources are currently allocated to this program for 2025/26. Further funding is required for the following years.
Risk / Legal / Legislative	Distance offsets from other assets (utilities and telecommunications) in all streets will need to be adhered to.
Opportunities	The Program, delivers a greener city that can mitigate the impacts of future climate shocks and support the health and wellbeing of residents and visitors to Adelaide.
25/26 Budget Allocation	$4,787,000 Capital Budget.
Proposed 26/27 Budget Allocation	It is anticipated that a capital budget of around $4,000,000 is required annually to deliver the yearly Street Tree Greening program. Further operational budget may also be required for ongoing maintenance works associated with an increase in tree numbers throughout the City and North Adelaide.
Life of Project, Service, Initiative or (Expectancy of) Asset	Subject to ongoing funding, this program could continue until 2031.
25/26 Budget Reconsideration (if applicable)	Not as a result of this report
Ongoing Costs (eg maintenance cost)	With an increase in tree numbers, future operational costs will need to be increased to enable appropriate level of service to maintain these trees.
Other Funding Sources	Opportunities for extra funding will be sought from State and Federal Governments if made available, such as Green Adelaide.

DISCUSSION

Background

1. The Public Realm Greening Program is seeking to increase tree canopy cover in streets across the city and North Adelaide. Trees planted in streets will assist in making the city cooler while contributing to Council's objective of increasing tree canopy cover from 33% currently to 40% by 2035. This target includes trees in streets, squares and Park Lands.

2. Key drivers for the Public Realm Greening Program include:

    2.1. Strategic Plan 2024-2028 – Our Environment – Lead and advocate for the environmental value, productivity, quality and biodiversity of Park Lands, squares, open spaces and streetscapes.

    2.2. The City Plan – Adelaide 2036 in relation to Strategy 1 – A Green City Grid driving the need for greener, cooler streets.

    2.3. The Integrated Climate Strategy 2030 in relation to Goal 1 – A Climate Resilient City, and Goal 3 – A City Where Nature Thrives, driving the need to increase urban greening for a cooler, more comfortable and resilient city.

    2.4. The Integrated Transport Strategy 2025 in relation to Goal 3 – Health & Sustainability driving the need for streets to be cool, calm and connected to support cycling and walking.

3. In line with the above, the City of Adelaide (CoA) has set the following targets:

    3.1. 40% tree canopy cover in streets and parks by 2035.

    3.2. Net increase of 485 trees every year until 2035.

    3.3. 40% of street trees (5,143) have water sensitive urban design (WSUD) providing passive watering by 2030 and 60% by 2035.

Budget

4. To date, the CoA has committed $8,084,582 for the Program with $3,297,582 spent in the 2024/25 financial year and $4,787,000 allocated in the 2025/26 financial year.

5. It is anticipated that an annual figure of approximately $4,000,000 is required for the program to deliver 200 trees per year beyond 2025/26 financial year.

Trees planted to date

6. The 2024/2025 Program delivered 273 trees in 29 streets across the CBD with the average cost per tree of approximately $12,000.

7. For the 2024/25 financial year, the focus was a mixture of planting in streets (mostly north/south streets) with less than 5% tree canopy cover and where tree planting would fit within the timeline, being June 2025. The other key focus was boulevards with an existing central medium big enough for trees to be planted into soil.

8. There were 34 different tree species planted from CoA's preferred tree planting list. Trees planted by contractors are maintained by the contractor for the 12-month defects liability period with the trees being watered weekly over the summer months and monitored through the winter months. After the 12 months defects liability period, the trees are handed over to CoA to maintain.

9. Once CoA takes responsibility the trees are monitored closely in years two and three, with watering occurring every 14 days over the summer months in year two, and then every 21 days over the summer months in year three. After the first three years of maintenance, it is anticipated that trees will have established enough to be placed on CoA's regular maintenance cycle where watering ceases and trees are inspected every two years. From this time on, trees are reliant upon water sensitive urban designed (WSUD) infrastructure in the main for irrigation.

Key Learnings from the 2024/25 planting year

10. Based upon the 273 trees planted in the 2024/25 financial year, the average cost per tree was around $12,000 as a result of a significant number of low-cost plantings in street medians. This figure is anticipated to rise as more trees are planted in roads and footpaths, with the average cost per tree expected to more closely align with the $20,000 per tree estimate.

11. In the smaller streets where available space is limited, consideration and modification of traffic layouts, including one-way vehicle movements and rationalisation of car parking create opportunity for more plantings.

12. Boulevard streets offer more tree planting opportunities due to their width and length and are generally the hottest streets as pavement can be exposed to the sun all day.

13. Green structures, such as green walls, arbours and rooftop gardens, may be required in the future in streets where space is not available for trees.

14. It is estimated that the 273 trees planted in the 2024/25 financial year will increase tree canopy cover by approximately 1%.

Preferred Tree Planting List

15. A resilient tree species list has been prepared by Design and Technical Services within the Infrastructure program, in conjunction with the Arboriculture Team, from which trees are selected for planting, noting that opportunities exist to partner through existing relationships with the Universities to identify tree species that are resilient to pests, drought, and climate change. There are around 80 trees on this list with 49 being exotic and 31 natives. A list of the tree species is included in the 5-Year Plan and can be viewed at **Attachment A**.

16. Tree size ranges from small trees, up to 8m in height, to large trees over 15m. Two important attributes for tree selection contained in the list are shade capacity and biodiversity outcomes.

17. Given the commitment to increase both shade and biodiversity, tree selection focuses on these attributes. This list provides for a range of trees that can be chosen for any situation and is updated regularly to incorporate new trees and to remove trees that appear not to thrive in an urban environment. Diversity of species is important as it assists in preventing a disease impacting a singular type of tree.

18. Further tree trials are recommended with trees that currently grow in hotter, dryer climates, north of Adelaide. If these trials are successful, CoA's urban forest is likely to be more resilient to future heatwaves.

The 2-Year and 5-Year Program

19. A detailed 2-Year Program and a high-level 5-Year Program have been developed and are referenced within **Attachment A**.

20. This program has been structured around planting trees in Streets and Priority Boulevards and is anticipated to deliver around 1,165 trees in total across five years, starting in the 2025/26 financial year.

21. A detailed 2-Year Program lists tree numbers and street names that the Administration has a high level of confidence can be designed, constructed and planted within the two-year window.

22. The 5-Year Program lists the target locations and numbers for plantings in streets and boulevards. Also listed is the anticipated number of streets that will be investigated and designed to ensure tree planting occurs in the following financial year.

23. The data for both the 2-Year and 5-Year Programs has been collated from the initial assessment conducted on 918 streets in 2024/25.

24. Year 1 is the current 2025/2026 financial year and to date, 101 trees have been planted since 1 July 2025. Tree planting in 2026 will resume from March 2026.

25. A dashboard will be developed that tracks where and what type of tree has been planted, and which streets have been assessed and deferred as trees are potentially not viable unless changes are made to street functionality. The dashboard will be made available to the community on CoA's website once finalised.

Tree Vitality and Resilience

26. Two key aspects to support tree vitality and resilience is the provision of WSUD and underground structured soil cells.

27. WSUD is key priority of our City Plan where the aim is to increase WSUD passive watering of street trees from 1.5% to 40% by 2030 and 60% by 2035. WSUD results in all new tree pits in roads having a slotted kerb with gaps where stormwater can drain into the tree pit. This means that whenever it rains, water is filtering down into the root zone of trees.

28. The second aspect is the installation of underground structured soil cells. These are installed to increase the root zone for all trees beyond the hole that the tree is planted in. The cells support the surrounding road and footpath structures while providing greater area for roots to grow in, and for passive irrigation to drain in to. The use of underground cells will require consideration of available budget and costs per tree.

29. From the 273 trees planted in 2024/2025, around 100 received both WSUD and structured cells. The balance of trees has primarily been planted in medians where WSUD and structured cells are not required.

Future Opportunities to expand Tree Canopy Cover

30. The trees planted over the next five years are anticipated to raise tree canopy cover by around 5%. To ensure the 40% target is reached, other greening outcomes are required.

    30.1. One approach is to consider changing the function and layout of streets such as making them one-way in line with the Integrated Transport Strategy. If achievable, this will likely lead to more streets having trees.

    30.2. Alternatively, green structures such as green walls on buildings and/or pergolas in streets could/will be considered.

    30.3. Another approach for consideration is to plant mini urban forests comprising trees and shrubs in parks. This approach would need to ensure that current park functionality would not be affected and that safety is considered when planting a mini forest. In doing these areas, grass would be converted to forest and potentially reduce maintenance requirements.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A – Greening Streets – 5 Year Green Infrastructure Plan

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