

10.4. Trees for Newborns program - update

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PURPOSE:

This report provides an update to Council on the Trees for Newborns program, and seeks Council endorsement for the continuation of the Program.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- The Trees for Newborns program was launched in July 2023 to complement the implementation of Council's Urban Forest Strategy (2019) which aims to increase canopy cover on private land.
- During the 12-month trial, 112 x 25 litre trees were ordered and delivered to residents as part of the Program.
- The Program has resulted in positive feedback and media coverage.
- It is recommended to continue funding the program in perpetuity for a cost of \$6,000 per annum.

RECOMMENDATION:

1.THAT Council adopt the Trees for Newborns program as an ongoing initiative for the residents of North Sydney local government area.

Background

At its meeting of 8 May 2023, Council resolved:

- 1. THAT Council adopts a 12-month trial period of Option 3 of the 'Trees for Newborns' Gift Program'.*
- 2. THAT the program be launched as soon as the webpage is operational and ready to accept requests.*
- 3. THAT a report on the success of the program be presented to Council after the 12-month trial period.*

This report responds to item 3 of the above resolution.

Report

Participants

Originally, the Trees for Newborns programs was advertised for new or expectant parents living in the North Sydney LGA. However, to boost the uptake of trees, the program was expanded in February 2024 to include grandparents residing in the area who wish to celebrate the arrival of their grandchildren.

Tree species on offer

The Trees for Newborns program offers a wide selection of tree species known to thrive in the North Sydney LGA, that are cost-effective to provide and readily available from our suppliers.

To account for the needs of all residents and dwelling types, the species are divided into three categories: Native Trees with Smaller Crowns, Native Trees with Big Crowns, and Exotic Trees. For example, if an applicant prefers flowering trees of medium height, which can be kept in pots on their balconies and pruned, they may select a Lilly Pilly (*Syzygium smithii*, native) or a Camellia (*Camellia sasanqua*, exotic). If an applicant has a large garden, they can request a big native, like a Sydney Red Gum (*Angophora costata*), or an exotic, like a Jacaranda (*Jacaranda mimosifolia*).

Source of Trees

The original plan was to supply tubestock from the Coal Loader nursery however, these required high maintenance for establishment and survival. Therefore, to ensure the success of the program and increase canopy cover on private land, 25L trees were sourced from an external nursery within the budgetary allocation for the Program.

Guides for maintenance of trees

The application for the Trees for Newborns program included two links to guides on choosing the right tree species for different circumstances and maintaining them.

Advertisement

The Trees for Newborns program was advertised via the following methods:

- a) a [page](#) on the North Sydney Council website dedicated to the program, where residents can submit an application requesting a tree of their choice;
- b) a media release sent to numerous magazines and newspapers as well as television and radio stations. Coverage was received by Channel Nine, Network 10, Mosman Collective, Local Government NSW Growing Greener e-Newsletter, North Shore Living, North Side Living, North Sydney Living, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, The Post, and the AKT Engineering and Consulting website;
- c) flyers were distributed around the LGA to early childhood health centres, community centres, and maternity wards at local public and private hospitals;
- d) Council platforms such as the Latest News section on Council's website, the July 2023 edition of Council's e-newsletter, Community notice boards, and Council's social media platforms.

Relevant statistics

Since the first application was submitted on July 10 2023, a total of 116 applications have been received, which has resulted in 112 trees being delivered within the first year of the trial. Of the trees selected, 58 were exotics (including 32 Jacarandas) and 54 were natives (36 small crowns and 18 large crowns). The cost of listed trees ranged between \$28 for a black she-oak (*Allocasuarina littoralis*) to \$83 for an Oyster Bay pine (*Callitris rhomboidea*). The average overall cost per tree is approximately \$50.

Community feedback and updates

The feedback obtained was largely positive and applicants were enthusiastic and pleasantly surprised after being given beautiful, relatively big trees to grow alongside their children. The staff at the local hospitals' maternity wards were delighted with the program and wished the surrounding councils were running a similar program.

Some residents expressed concerns regarding the unavailability of planting locations of those trees on their properties. Another concern raised by the community was the inclusion of exotic species within the lists of trees on offer, and more specifically Jacarandas, as some consider their flower litter a nuisance, potentially creating slippery conditions in wet weather.

At the conclusion of the trial year, applicants who had committed (in their applications) to sending Council updated pictures of their trees were emailed. 13 responses were received with many sending pictures of their growing trees, sometimes alongside their children.

Options

Council has the following options in relation to this matter:

1. Conclude the trial and cancel the Trees for Newborns program.

2. Continue the Trees for Newborns program with an annual budget of \$6,000 per annum increased yearly by CPI (a \$4,000 decrease in the original trial budget).

These options are assessed in the table below.

Option	Finance/Resourcing	Risk/Opportunity	Consultation
1.	No implications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of the opportunity to increase canopy cover on private land and therefore across the whole LGA. - Failure to undertake actions to implement the Urban Forest Strategy (2019) by creating incentive programs to encourage the community members to contribute to the urban forest vision. - Disappointing locals who were thrilled with the program and expecting locals wanting to take part. 	No community consultation required.
2.	Lower the previously allocated budget from \$10,000 per annum to \$6,000 per annum withdrawn from the existing Environmental Levy funding for Tree Canopy Enhancement and provide pamphlet on tree care.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keeping locals motivated to plant trees on their properties and increase canopy cover on private land. - Increasing overall canopy cover in the LGA. - providing locals an avenue to celebrate their newborns. - Maintaining North Sydney Council's position as an industry leader: other councils have asked for notes to recreate it in their LGAs. - Lack of education in establishing a tree can potentially lead to its death. - Residents unable to take part in the program due to constraints of their dwellings. 	No community consultation required.

Option 2 is recommended for the following reasons:

- The Trees for Newborns programs is a way of engaging the community in the benefits of the Urban Forest in the North Sydney LGA, and more specifically on private land.
- The program aligns with our Urban Forest Strategy (2019) actions and goals, and cancelling it would disappoint many locals. The death of the gifted trees could be overcome by attaching a pamphlet to the trees at the time of delivery, detailing the watering schedule for good establishment, as per the Australian standards.

Consultation requirements

No community consultation would be required to extend the program. However, in engaging with the community this past year at the time of delivery and through feedback and updates, we were able to gauge their preferences and concerns, helping Council to tailor the Program's approach to better meet their requirements.

Financial implications

A sum of \$6,000 per annum (increasing with CPI) would be allocated to this program from Environmental Levy should Council adopt the recommendations of this report.

Appendix 1

Trees for Newborns Flyer



The flyer features a green background with a large white title at the top. Below the title is a circular photograph of a woman in a yellow and blue uniform working with plants. To the right of the photo is a question in white text. Below the photo and question are two paragraphs of text. At the bottom, there is a QR code and the North Sydney Council logo.

Trees for Newborns

Are you a parent of a newborn, or expecting one soon?

Do you live in the North Sydney local government area? We want to help you commemorate the birth of your baby with the gift of a tree.

You can request a tree of your choice (native or exotic) from North Sydney Council which we'll deliver to your doorstep for free. Plant it in your garden to celebrate your new arrival, and you'll also help make a positive impact on the environment. With your help, we can increase the total tree canopy cover in our local area.

