

10. WESTBURN RESERVE – TREE REMOVAL REQUEST

General Manager responsible:	General Manager City Environment
Officer responsible:	Greenspace Manager
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PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is present an application to seek approval to remove two Gum/Eucalypt trees (*Eucalyptus* spp.) located in Westburn Reserve (refer attached).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. In July/August 2003, a request was received from Mr G Hubbard of 42 Westburn Terrace to remove two gum/eucalypt trees adjacent to his property and situated in the Westburn Reserve.
3. The reason for the request is due to the threat of property damage due to the size, proximity and lean of the trees towards his property. The trees were subsequently inspected by a Council arborist who advised Mr Hubbard (letter dated 2nd September 2003 – Walter Fielding-Cotterell) that the trees did not appear to be a health and safety issue and hence would not be recommended for removal.
4. The trees had been pruned in 2001 and there is a history of RFS relating to these and other trees in the reserve. Most recently, in July, August and September 2005 a number of RFS were received requesting further pruning and in October, prior to a Community Board tour, a petition of letters (Hubbard and Lewis) was received to once again request the removal of the two trees.
5. Reasons for removal were stated as potential threat and nuisance due to excessive debris (Hubbard) and nuisance due to loss of winter sun (Lewis).
6. The trees were inspected by a council arborist on 7th February 2006. The inspection included a VTA (visual tree assessment) of three gum/eucalypt trees in the southwest corner and a brief overview of the whole reserve.
7. Westburn Reserve is a sports park of just over one hectare, located off Westburn Terrace and connected to Memorial Avenue by walkway. It appears to enjoy good patronage of residents. The landscape planting includes generally perimeter planting of trees and shrubs with the predominant tree species being birch, liquidambar and taxodium. There is one other (fourth) gum/eucalypt tree located towards the centre of the reserve.
8. The three gum/eucalypt trees in question were not identified to their specific name; however, it is evident that the 2 trees adjacent to Mr Hubbard's property are differing to the third tree. These 2 trees are approximately 15 m in height with DBH (@1.4m) of 0.6 m and individual canopy spreads of 12m diameter and, being situated near the road, are therefore dominant in the landscape. It should be noted that these trees are not fully mature at approximately 40 years of age.
9. The trees appeared to be in good health with no apparent defects other than some weak branch attachments which can be typical of gum/eucalypt. The hazard rating for these 2 trees was therefore scored at 6 out of 10.
10. The third, larger, tree (18 in height with DBH 1m and canopy spread of 14m) however, at first appeared to have a potentially serious defect in the trunk as well as similar canopy characteristics. After further testing with Picus Tomograph and increment bore no defect or decay was detected other than a potential 'shake' in the trunk tissue. This could be construed as a 'growth stress' rather than a 'fault'. The hazard rating for this tree therefore scored at 4 out of 10. It should be noted that had this tree been rated as a hazard, its removal would have had an effect upon the 2 other trees due to exposing them to easterly wind.
11. On the basis of the above assessment there is no arboricultural reason to remove any of the three gum/eucalypt trees at present.
12. The reasons for removal are therefore based upon nuisance to neighbours and residents.

13. In the case of nuisance caused by debris (to number 42) it is not unreasonable to expect trees to produce debris during their life cycle and although the trees are in close proximity to the property the tree does not overhang the boundary. It would be expected that maintenance of both trees and property would mitigate any adverse effect from debris.
14. In the case of nuisance caused by loss mid winter sun (to number 39) this could be considered a seasonal event and, albeit ongoing, not a permanent effect. The issue raised of ice forming on the road is of concern, as this would constitute a health and safety issue.
15. In both cases nuisance, and health and safety concerns, could be alleviated by maintenance i.e. pruning of the trees as previously requested and actioned. However, regular monitoring and maintenance in itself is not a guarantee of preventing branch failure, and the risk of injury and/or damage cannot be effectively eliminated or even minimised with trees of this size, nature and proximity to property. Given the location of the tree the target is high and the trees cannot be effectively isolated. In time the risk is likely to increase.
16. Given the hazard and target rating, tree maintenance is potentially excessive and ongoing with its associated costs and risks. Therefore the sustainability of these trees is in question, hence removal and replacement is an option to consider as a long-term solution to this problem.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

17. The cost of monitoring and maintenance of the trees is covered under the existing citywide arboricultural operations budget. However, in the event of removal and replacement this could be considered under capital expenditure that is not budgeted for in the current financial year.
18. These trees are not protected under the City Plan.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board approve the removal of the two gum/eucalypt trees located in the south west of Westburn Reserve, adjacent to number 42 Westburn Terrace, and replace with appropriate planting in consultation with the residents of 42, 33 and 39 Westburn Terrace. (Note: that the third tree is to be retained and pruned).

CHAIRMAN'S RECOMMENDATION

That the staff recommendation be adopted

OPTIONS

19. There are three possible options:

(a) Do nothing or status quo.

This is not considered a viable option as it would leave the Council highly exposed to a negligence claim in relation to any subsequent damage to persons or property given our awareness of the condition of the trees.

(b) Increase level of regular maintenance and implement a regular safety monitoring programme.

This option will not address the key issues (of risk, nuisance and species selection) in the long term and has the effect of simply deferring the cost of the ultimate action to some point in the future. The overall maintenance cost would be increased with this option and there is still the risk of potential failure of, or part of, the tree given its size, location and the susceptibility characteristics of this particular species.

(c) Remove and replace the trees.

This option will address the immediate risk management, nuisance and appropriateness issues. Selection of a more suitable replacement trees for the site will reduce the overall tree maintenance costs and help mitigate for the loss of amenity in the longer term.

PREFERRED OPTION

20. The preferred option is option (C).