FUTURE MELBOURNE (ECO-CITY)  
COMMITTEE REPORT  

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE REGULATIONS IN THE MELBOURNE PLANNING SCHEME  

13 September 2011

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Purpose and background

1. The purpose of this report is to inform Council of research into opportunities for regulatory requirements to retain and enhance green space in the municipality and recommend options for implementation.

2. This matter was previously taken to the Future Melbourne Committee on 14 June 2011 at the request of Councillor Oke. At this meeting the Committee resolved to undertake an exceptional tree study, an associated planning scheme amendment to protect them and to produce educative material for owners of exceptional trees, and gardens in the municipality. The Committee also requested that a report be provided on how Seattle’s ‘Green Factor’ planning regulations could be used in Melbourne’s Planning Scheme.

3. The Seattle Green Factor initiative builds on regulations in Sweden and Germany and requires green spaces to be provided in new developments. Green Factor encourages a site-appropriate package of greening possibilities, including trees, shrubs, green roofs and walls, vertical landscaping, permeable paving and rain gardens. The City of Seattle allows developers to install landscape features, either on their site or in nearby public spaces.

Key issues

4. Vegetation and green spaces have long been considered an integral part of Melbourne’s look and feel. Once known as the garden state, Victoria, and Melbourne in particular, is slowly losing its trees and gardens on private land. Development pressure is one of the largest risks to space for vegetation growth and permeability (permeability is the ability of the lands surface to allow water to penetrate. It is a key way of regulating urban temperatures, reducing stormwater runoff, filtering pollutants and allowing vegetation growth).

5. Several projects are currently underway which advocate for an increase in Green space, including through planning scheme amendments. Whilst the completion dates associated with these projects range from three to 30 months, these related projects should go some way to requiring Green Infrastructure in new developments. Attachment 2 provides further information on these projects.

6. Seattle’s Green Factor requirements cannot be readily transferred to Melbourne’s climate, but some principles of Green Factor could be translated for use in Melbourne. One area that could be considered further for use in our municipality is where developers contribute to landscaping in the public realm (refer Attachment 2).

7. During redevelopment street trees are often removed to allow for building construction. This exacerbates the loss of advanced vegetation on both public and private land in the municipality. Contribution by developers to the improvement of public land that allows compensation for the loss of vegetation whilst also enhancing the look and feel of the public realm should be investigated further.

Recommendation from management

8. That the Future Melbourne Committee note the report and that work continues to investigate how developers can contribute to the improvement of streets and other public spaces by increasing the amount of vegetation and/or permeability on public land.
SUPPORTING ATTACHMENT

Legal
1. Legal advice will be provided as required in respect to the matters of the subject of the relevant reports.

Finance
2. The projects referenced that are currently underway have provision in the 2011-12 budget. Any additional work is unbudgeted.

Conflict of interest
3. No member of Council staff, or other person engaged under a contract, involved in advising on or preparing this report has declared a direct or indirect interest in relation to the matter of the report.

Stakeholder consultation
4. Significant external stakeholder consultation would be required as part of this process, including consultation over any proposed regulation/s. Key stakeholders include residents, businesses and relevant residents groups/environmental agencies and the general public.
5. The Parks and Gardens Advisory Committee will be consulted on the appropriate method for community consultation.

Relation to Council policy
6. The provision of Green Infrastructure is closely aligned with Council’s Future Melbourne Eco-City goal; Adapted to climate change and People City goal; Quality public space. This work assists in adapting our city, in particular through Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan actions 2.2 and 2.3. It is anticipated that Council’s Urban Forest Strategy and Open Space Strategy’s which are currently being developed would be highly supportive of the introduction of Green Infrastructure, especially where it provides significant shading.

Environmental sustainability
7. The introduction and retention of green spaces in built up areas has many real benefits and can help cities adapt to extreme weather events, increasing urban density, population increases, reducing excess urban warming and enhancing community health and wellbeing.
Further Information: Green Factor and Green Infrastructure for Melbourne

What is Green Factor?

The Seattle Green Factor initiative builds on regulations in Sweden and Germany and requires green spaces to be provided in new developments.

Green Factor is a flexible alternative to traditional landscaping standards that allows applicants to meet an overall environmental services goal by choosing from a menu of options including tree retention, new planting, green roofs, green walls, and permeable pavement way to provide for vegetation and permeable areas whilst allowing the urban density to increase.

Developers gain credit against open-space requirements when they install more compact or innovative landscape features, either on their site or in nearby public spaces, which improve environmental health and urban liveability.

Where does Green Factor apply?

The municipality of Seattle is 217 sqkm with twice Melbourne’s annual rainfall. By comparison Melbourne’s municipality is 37.6 sq km. The adjoining map shows the areas where Green factor applies. The requirements do not apply to their city centre. The areas in which green factor applies in Seattle would, in many areas be outside of City of Melbourne’s municipality geographically.
What is Green Infrastructure?

Green Infrastructure are the living vegetated systems, which provide important civic functions in our urban environment. It is an important tool to adapt our cities to climate change and reduce the effects of the Urban Heat Island. Green Infrastructure includes our parks, gardens, remnant vegetation, street trees, green roofs and walls etc.

Current projects underway at the City of Melbourne

Opportunities exist in several projects currently underway to include consideration to regulate an increase in green spaces. Whilst the completion dates associated with these projects ranges from 3 to 30 months these related projects should go some way to improving the provision of Green Infrastructure in the public and private realm:

- Open Space developer contributions are being reviewed under KSA 1 this year. This includes consideration of civil and community infrastructure;
- the Growing Green Guide for Melbourne includes an investigation into how green roofs, walls and facades can be regulated through planning schemes in Victoria;
- Planning Scheme Amendment C145, awaiting Ministerial approval requires new to development to include water sensitive urban design features so that water is detained on site. One of the mechanisms developers can opt to use is increased permeability;
- the Urban Heat Island project highlights the importance of vegetation and permeable surfaces in the environment. A planning scheme amendment which introduces a policy with appropriate measures to reduce the effect of new development on the UHI is likely to be considered by Council before the end of the year;
- the Urban Forest Strategy will highlight best practice on provision of an effective urban forest for the city;
- the Biodiversity Strategy will update the existing Biodiversity Action Plan and be expanded to include opportunities to enhance biodiversity in other areas of the municipality, including the private realm to protect and enhance biological diversity;
- The Open Space Strategy, due for completion this year provides key actions around increasing open space requirements for residential developments.