

AUDRC Research Note

Place-based narrative in suburban forest planning



What urban forest scenarios can catch the public imagination?

Background

- Urban forests provide numerous benefits to human health and well-being, the local urban environment, and biodiversity. Despite this, many suburban areas are experiencing declining urban forests due to urban consolidation.

- While numerous urban forest strategies exist, the majority are technical exercises. Generally, there has been a lack of vision to catch the public imagination.

- In response, this project proposed scenarios for improving canopy coverage using an Australian middle-ring suburb as a case study (the City of Bayswater). The scenarios included - The Kid's Forest (tree planting around schools and playgrounds), the Parks Equaliser (tree planting in parks with low canopy cover), the Streets Equaliser (planting in streets with low canopy cover), the Green Stream (tree planting along upgraded drains and foreshores), the Green Micro-grid (tree planting in networks emanating from transit hubs), the Green Funnel (tree planting in designated biodiversity corridors) and the High-Density Forest (tree planting associated with increasing urban density).

A panel of 15 experts was assembled to assess the scenarios regarding their benefits and feasibility through a workshop and an online survey. Panel members included local government strategic planning officers, parks and gardens managers, civil engineers, directors of technical services, community engagement advisors,

sustainability and environment managers, recreation managers, arborists and place managers.

Key findings

- The experts ranked the Kid's Forest and the Streets Equaliser highly regarding the likely benefits provided. In contrast, The Parks Equaliser ranked highly regarding feasibility.

- Respondents noted that the Kid's Forest scenario was 'strong' and 'will protect the most vulnerable members of our community.'

- The High-Density Forest scenario was ranked last because it was regarded that it would elicit adverse community reactions and would be difficult for the City of Bayswater to implement because of potential issues with servicing and space for trees in higher-density areas.

- The results indicate that developing urban forest plans that have a narrative dimension and target the often-vulnerable demographics – such as children and older people – are likely to resonate with experts and communities instead of merely technical exercises in numerical canopy cover provision.

Links to related publications

- Bolleter, J., & Hooper, P. (2020). The importance of place-based narrative in suburban forest planning. *Journal of Urban Design*. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2020.1851594>

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