

Griffith-Narrabundah Community Association Inc.

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Dear Minister

I am writing to seek your assistance in improving the protection and preservation of one of Canberra's most valuable assets – our street trees. These are an integral part of the ACT's urban forest and make a huge contribution to the well-being of the city.

As you know, street trees provide shade to cars, pedestrians and cyclists, reduce ambient temperatures in residential areas, help offset carbon emissions, and provide habitat for birds and other wildlife. The loss of canopy in Canberra requires a strategic approach if we are to maintain these tree-generated benefits. Unless something is done, our trees will ultimately suffer a fate similar to that of the fish in the Murray-Darling Basin.

Further, street trees can have significant budgetary implications for the ACT Government. Replacing dead or damaged trees is unnecessarily costly if they can instead be maintained in a healthy condition. Moreover, healthy trees can increase revenue collection by the Government because attractive streetscapes tend to command higher house prices and therefore rates.

Because vehicles that park on verges compact the soil, and sometimes even damage trees, the Griffith Narrabundah Community Association (GNCA) for several years provided a report twice a year to City Services personnel about developers and sub-contractors who failed to protect the verge and trees. We have not done so in recent times because personnel shortages among the Rangers appear to have limited any action to force developers to provide adequate verge and tree protection. Parking Operations has also informed us informally that it no longer concerns itself with illegal parking on verges, except in limited circumstances such as the blocking of the view at an intersection.

Over the last year or so, there has been a noticeable rise in builders and developers failing to fully protect the verge. Increasingly, only the immediate area around the tree trunk is protected, rather than fencing off the whole area. Even if the builder/developer refrains from

parking on the unprotected verge at the commencement of construction, sub-contractors and tradespersons later use it for parking.

One reason for not protecting the entire verge appears to be to allow builders to access properties by driving directly across the verge between the street trees. Photos of only two cases are presented below, but the practice has become more the norm than the exception throughout the suburb.

In an ideal world, an education campaign directed at residents and tradespersons might be sufficient to solve most of the problem. However, the number of tradespersons and builders who service Canberra mean that a focused campaign would probably be unrealistic, and may only have a short-term effect as new tradespersons and builders take up employment.

Other approaches that may have a greater impact might include the following:

- Enforcement of verge protection fencing through occasional patrols of the Griffith-Narrabundah area by relevant City Services personnel (Rangers or building inspectors). We understand that there are currently no Rangers assigned to verge protection enforcement. While we appreciate the budgetary exigencies to which governments are subject, the saving in employing an insufficient number of Rangers will be offset by higher expenditures incurred in replacing street trees in future.
- Reinstatement of fines for verge parking by Parking Operations, including strict enforcement in response to complaints by residents. There is no logical policy reason why Parking Operations should limit its enforcement activities to risks related solely to traffic movement. A whole-of-government approach that includes long-term risks to street trees would be more appropriate.
- Employment of more Parking Operations officers, even if only on a temporary or part-time basis. Fines would at least partially cover the budgetary cost, and could even be increased to raise more funds. Even an occasional blitz would be effective in demonstrating intent to preserve trees. Verge parking (including on the verges of neighbouring properties) by a builder on Jansz Crescent ceased immediately (and does not appear to have recurred) after a resident on the opposite side of the street was fined for parking a car with a “for sale” sign on the verge. Because parking by tradies often extends to the verges of neighbouring properties, the enforcement of existing government parking powers would be the most effective and immediate solution.
- Nomination of a dedicated Parking Operations officer who would be easily contactable on a “hotline”, and would respond quickly to community reports of verge parking. Use of Access Canberra, with its 10-day response time, is simply unrealistic in the case of illegal parking.
- Automatic notification by the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate to Transport Canberra and City Services of all Development Applications and Exempt Developments to ensure that Parking Operations and the Rangers have a complete list of construction activity.
- Issue of a stop work notice where a verge protection plan has not been followed. There appears to be a belief among some builders that an Exempt Development is not

required to protect the verge because it is “exempt” from all rules associated with construction.

- Imposition of a condition on certifiers to certify that verges are fully protected throughout the construction process, until issue of a final occupancy certificate.
- Deposits could be required from developers as part of the verge plan that they submit. Failure to protect verges and street trees would involve partial or full loss of deposit.

I would be delighted to host a tour of the Griffith-Narrabundah area at a time convenient to you or your staff.

Yours sincerely,



Leo Dobes
President
6 February 2019



58 Carstensz Street, 8 January 2019. Truck parked across unprotected verge and footpath. One worker was seen to break off a small branch to facilitate the truck’s access. It has been common for utes and other vehicles to park on the verge between the trees during January and early February. Indented wheel tracks have until recently been clearly visible.



Above: 3 Austin Street, 21 December 2018 at an early stage of construction: but see the next picture below, taken on 5 February 2019.



Above: Number 3 Austin Street again on 5 February 2019. Trucks are now accessing the property through the middle of the verge. This is a very common occurrence.



Above: the sign at 3 Austin Street, with its back to the street, on 6 February 2019.