Cred
CONSULTING

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Greening our city Engagement Report

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Community, engagement, research

Report Title: Fairfield City Trees Online Workshops- Engagement Report

Client: Fairfield City Council

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Introduction

This report provides a summary of community engagement undertaken by Cred Consulting on behalf of Fairfield City Council to inform the development of the Fairfield Open Space and Recreation Strategy.

About the open space and recreation Strategy

The Fairfield City Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2020 is a strategic document that provides a road-map for how Council will deliver, improve and maintain open space and recreation facilities that will meet the needs of the current and future Fairfield City community. One component of the strategy is focused on how we can use our open space network to support greening our city for a cooler and shadier environment.

Purpose of the workshop

We know that tree-planting can sometimes polarise communities. The purpose of the workshops were to better understand community perspectives around planting trees and other greening opportunities in our parks, streets and backyards. It also sought to provide some context and education around the importance of trees for Fairfield City and the economic, social and environmental value trees bring to the community.

About the Online workshops

The workshop was promoted online via a survey for participants to register their interest in taking part in the sessions. A total of 38 participants took part in the online workshops.

Three workshops were facilitated online, two English only workshops and one Assyrian translated workshop:

- 11 June 2020 at 4pm-5pm
- 16 June 2020 at 4pm-5pm (Assyrian translated)
- 18 June 2020 at 11am-12pm.

Overview of Workshop Activities

Poll - Would you like to see less, the same, or more trees across Fairfield City?
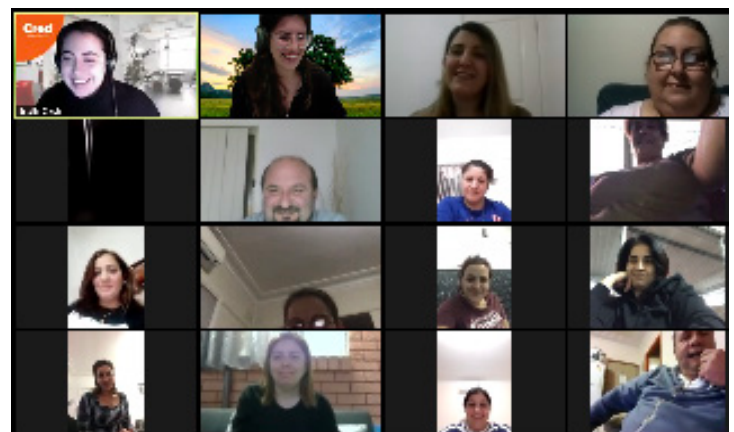
Participants were asked to fill out an online poll, and indicate whether they would like to see less, the same, or more trees across Fairfield City, as well as their streets, and front or backyards.

Activity 1 - Your values about trees and landscaping

In this activity, participants are shown a series of before and after pictures of streets in Fairfield City. Before photos show the current nature of streets with after photos showing a variation of the street including tree renders. Each participant is asked to write down one they associate with each photo, and why they chose that word.

Activity 2 - Hot or Not

In this activity, participants are shown a series of images in order to prompt discussion around what they would like to see across creeks in Fairfield City. Participants were asked to indicate whether they agree, disagree, or somewhat agree for each idea shown in the scenario card, and to tell us 'what', 'why' and 'where' they would like these ideas to take place in Fairfield City.

Participants from the online Assyrian translated workshop. Source: Cred Consulting

Key findings

Across the three workshops, the key themes that emerged include:

Planting the right trees in the right spaces in partnership with the community

Theme1

Participants were highly receptive to increasing trees and tree canopy along streets and across open spaces in Fairfield City. Majority of respondents indicated community consultation and collaboration will play an important role in effectively and successfully planting trees in Fairfield City, but most importantly planting of trees along streets and in front and backyards.

Some participants indicated tree poisoning and removal was an issue within the community, and would like to be consulted on the different types and sizes of trees that would be suitable for streets. The location of street tree planting also matters, with some participants highlighting cultural reasons and other beliefs (such as feng shui) influencing the desired location of trees.

Participants would also like to be informed of the maintenance of various trees and species prior to installment along streets and in front and/or backyards to ensure plants are appropriate and feasible in terms of maintenance.

Participants also recognised Fairfield City as a culturally diverse community, and would like to be consulted in the process of tree planting to ensure cultural beliefs are respected, particularly in Chinese communities where Feng Shui plays an important role in surroundings.

Across all workshops there was a mixed consensus between uniform and mixed species along streets across Fairfield City. Some participants preferred uniformed tree lined streets and noted they are more aesthetically pleasing to look at and are more inviting. Other participants preferred a mix of species, due to the diversity in look and opportunity for diverse habitats for wildlife in the area.

Communicating the value of diverse species when street planting was seen by participants as a good way for council to have greater success when seeking to green the city.

Increasing tree canopy to provide cooling and comfort

Theme 2

Participants identified the need for increased tree canopy cover to provide shade, cooling and comfort particularly during hot summer months, reflecting Fairfield City's relatively low tree canopy.

Participants referred to Fairfield City as an urban heat island, and would like to see more trees to improve heat in the LGA, as well as to increase and protect native species, wildlife and habitats.

Additional native species in Fairfield City

Theme 3

Participants value Indigenous species, native to the LGA, and acknowledge the various benefits of having these species within the community, including supporting natural habitats and wildlife, as well as improved and ease of maintenance particularly as native roots grow downwards rather than outwards.

There was a strong consensus amongst participants around sustainability, preservation and retaining natural assets of the area as the key priority when planning for trees in the future.

Increased flowering shrubs and bushes and fruit trees

Theme 4

Participants would like to see more flowering shrubs and bushes, and fruit trees along streets and in open spaces across Fairfield City. In particular, the Assyrian workshop was highly receptive to the idea of more vibrant coloured, scented and organically grown flowering bushes and fruit trees across Fairfield City.

Flowering shrubs and bushes that have colour, scented, native and are also relatively low maintenance were a highly preferred option of bushes along streets in Fairfield City. Participants also indicated the aesthetics these bushes add to the area, as well as the opportunity for social connection and gathering.

Participants would also like to see more fruit trees across Fairfield City, and made reference to Smithfield suburb as an example of how fruit trees work well within the community. Participants indicated fruit trees would be more suitable in areas where there is high foot traffic, such as shopping centres, or in open spaces across Fairfiled City, rather than along streets.

However, participants also recognised the maintenance associated with these shrubs and bushes and suggested residents should be consulted prior to planting these types of trees along streets, as maintenance and cleaning would most likely become the responsibility of residents.
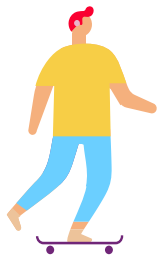
Increased education and awareness around trees and tree planting

Theme 5

Participants indicated a need for increased community education around trees and tree planting in Fairfield City. Particularity, participants would like to see increased awareness around different tree types, sizes and species, and a greater understanding around the value of trees for the environment, homes and the community.

What are your concerns with planting trees across Fairfield City?

Throughout discussion, participants discussed their concerns with planting trees along streets and across sopen spaces oon Fairfield City. Selected verbatim quotes from the online community engagement workshops

"My main concern about more trees in my street is safety. With a lot of townhouses comes more parked cars, and trees aren't trimmed regularly enough which means the trees end up blocking vision to the road, especially when backing out of a drive way"

"Most families are running to work and are busy with their life, and they don't have time to mow the lawns. I, for one, am a single mum, and it's hard for me to mow the lawns and if I hire someone, it costs an arm and a leg. It comes to a stage where I have swollen muscles and can't even hold a pen. And I have no choice but to hire someone to mow the lawns. I have young kids and none of them can help me."

"Council could help educate the community on the types of trees that can grow in a smaller kind of backyard"

"Sometimes there's no thinking. People [who plant trees] don't live in that area, and don't know how that space is used and they put the tree there with the best of intentions and it becomes a problem. So consulting people and how that spaces used"

"There is a lot of people who poison trees in my street. I don't know whether people need education on the value of trees, or understand different alternatives like trimming it pruning it, whatever it might be. I think that we live in a highly multicultural area I am multicultural myself. So I think, we might need education around the value of trees and what they bring to the environment."

"The trees within Fairfield, we are cutting down far too many. It was late last year I walking my dog in a certain area in Fairfield and we came across a goanna and he went up a tree, and if we don't have trees then we don't have these animals, we don't have birds, we don't have the air we breathe. We need these trees and we are cutting down far too many"
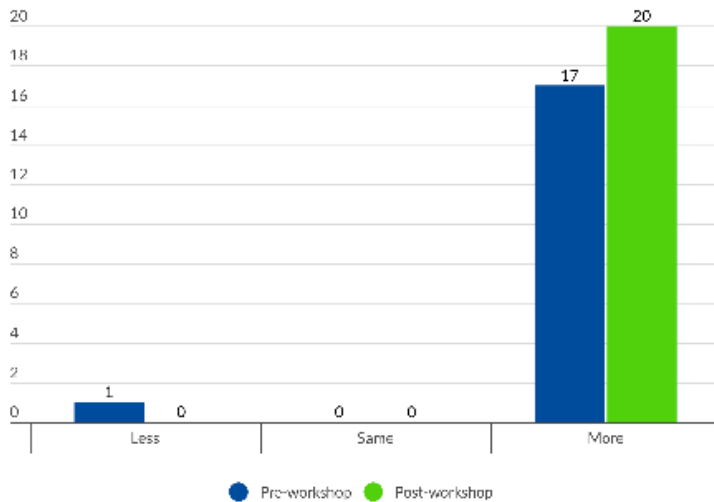
"It might be nice for residents of the street to have a choice of trees."

Poll - Would you like to see less, the same, or more trees across Fairfield City, your street and your yard?
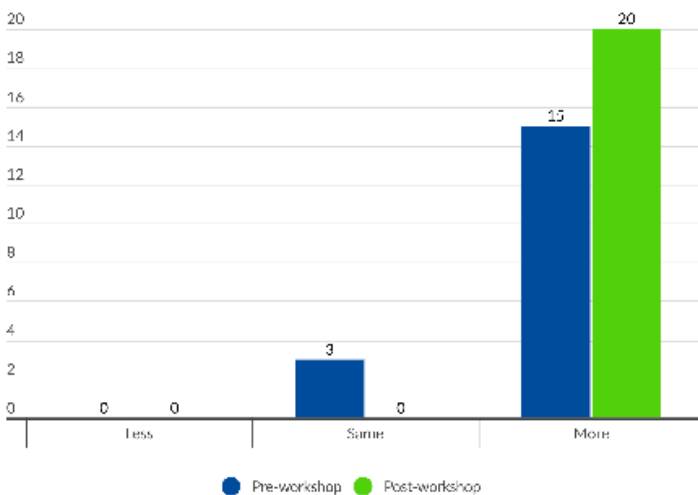
Would you like to see less, the same or more trees....
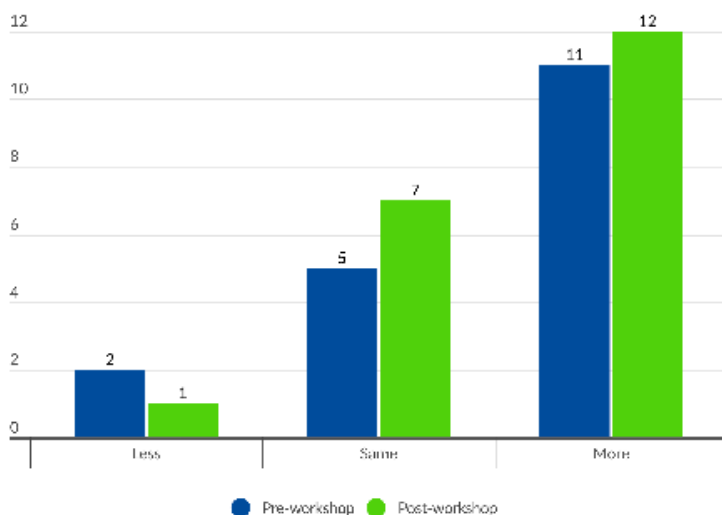
In Fairfield City?

In your street?

In your yard?

At the beginning and of the workshop, participants were asked the 3 questions. The intent of this activity was to measure whether the 1 hour workshop would change people's mind about wanting to have more trees and greening across Fairfield City. The pattern that emerged from this exercise was that after participating in the workshop, most people wanted to see more trees in their city, streets and backyard.

Another finding was that while there was consensus on everyone wanting more trees in their city and streets by the end of the workshop, there was less consensus around more trees in people's yards. This is likely due to differing circumstances around people's yard size or the fear of trees growing too close to people's houses.

Please note: N = 20, participants in the Assyrian translated workshop did not participate in this activity due to technical difficulties.

Activity 1 - Your values about trees and landscaping

In this activity, participants are shown a series of before and after pictures of streets in Fairfield City. Before photos show the current nature of streets with after photos showing a variation of the street including tree renders. Each participant is asked to write down one they associate with each photo, and why they chose that word.

Allambie road, Edensor Park

Current street view of Allambie Road , Edensor Park

Allambie Road, Edensor Park - Trees option 1

Allambie Road, Edensor Park - Trees option 2

Key words participants used to describe the current street view of Allambie Road, Edensor Park include:

- Hot (4), particularly because there is no shade
- Very dry like a desert (4)
- Urban heat island and ecological desert (2)
- Bare (2)
- Isolated
- Concrete jungle

Other comments include:
- Households should be consulted and notified where the trees will be planted, to give residents a say before work happens, it will receive much more agreement, particularly in culturally diverse communities (Feng Shui)

Key words participants used to describe the view of Allambie Road, Edensor Park with trees option 1 include:

- It would increase the value of properties (2)
- Looks much better than the streets current state (2)
- Shady and cooler (2)
- More natural
- Supports wildlife

Other comments include:
- Give options, ownership of the tree and consult residents so they are more on board with tree planting and maintenance (2)

Some key differences mentioned by the Assyrian group include:

- These trees look like old trees, there's not much green
- Trees look nice but it is not colourful

Key suggestions commented by participants to describe the street view of Allambie Road, Edensor Park with trees option 2 include:

- Mixed species and diverse plants are preferred more (9)
- More Indigenous and native trees and plants (2)
- Perfect spacing between trees
- It becomes difficult to see the road when backing out of driveways
- Not as much shade but better than no trees, and may be better under power lines

Interestingly, majority of participants from the Assyrian workshop preferred uniform tree planting along streets.

Pritchard Street, Mount Pritchard

Current street view of Pritchard Street, Mount Pritchard

One participant from the first online workshop discussed his experience growing up in Pritchard Street and the change in trees from the 1970's to now. The removal of trees was largely due to the placement of trees on properties that would intervene with tasks such as mowing the lawn, or increasing cars in the area leaving no space to park on the roads, therefore people would park their cars on the footpaths.

Pritchard Street, Mount Pritchard - Trees option 1

Key words participants used to describe the view of Pritchard Street, Mount Pritchard with trees option 1 include:

- Very pretty flowering tree (2)
- Great to look at
- It looks more Australian

Other comments include:

- We like the taller trees, more shade value
- The natural environment has a mix of trees, our streets should have a mix too
- Must consider repercussions of flowering trees including petals dropping on the ground, roads and yards, and the attraction of bees
- Larger trees should only be planted where there are larger nature strips
- A tree strategy could identify areas that specific trees can be planted in

Pritchard Street, Mount Pritchard - Trees option 2

Key suggestions commented by participants to describe the street view of Pritchard Street, Mount Pritchard with trees option 2 were mixed, with positive comments including:

- Flowering trees are beautiful (3)
- They add value to homes
- Uniform, beautiful streets look elegant and attract people to the area

Some concerns raised by participants include:

- Floral trees are high maintenance (2)
- Residents should be consulted prior to flowering trees being placed in streets as the maintenance might be an issue

Interestingly, participants in the Assyrian workshop had no concerns with flowering trees, and would like to see more trees with different coloured flowers.

Station Street, Fairfield

Current street view of Station Street, Fairfield

One participant from the first online workshop discussed his experience as a resident in Station Street, Fairfield. He commented on the increasing development and removal of trees, and particularly his concerns of no trees being replaced once they are removed.

Station Street, Fairfield - Trees option 1

Some concerns raised by participants across all workshops for Station Street, Fairfield with trees option one include:

- High trees getting in the way and damaging power lines
- In cases of extreme weather such as storms, large trees could become a danger hazards particularly if branches fall and damage property, cars, or roads
- Single species in streets are not preferable, as they are not good for the environment, species, or wildlife
- Trees are not uniform and do not match

Station Street, Fairfield - Trees option 2

Key suggestions commented by participants to describe the street view of Station Street, Fairfield with trees option 2 include:

- Local Indigenous species are important for tree planting
- Medium trees are a good option
- Diversity of trees is good

Activity 2 - Hot or Not

In this activity, participants are shown a series of images in order to prompt discussion around what they would like to see across creeks in Fairfield City. Participants were asked to indicate whether they agree, disagree, or somewhat agree for each idea shown in the scenario card, and to tell us 'what', 'why' and 'where' they would like these ideas to take place in Fairfield City.

Fruiting trees

Across all workshops, there was an evenly distributed consensus between participants that would like to see fruiting trees in Fairfield City, as well as participants who raised concerns around fruiting trees particularly in some areas across Fairfield City.

Participants in the Assyrian workshop were the only group to all agree on fruiting trees in Fairfield City, in part due to their colour and providing fresh fruit for the community.

Hot

Participants who would like to see fruiting trees across streets in Fairfield City said:

- Would be a good opportunity for people to have them in their backyards (2)
- Easy way for the community to access fresh fruit
- They would be more suitable for specific places – maybe in a little hub where you have edible trees, fruiting trees, not on a narrow nature strip
- Good to have it not so close to the road so if fruit does fall it doesn't go on the road
- One or two fruiting trees might work, but not uniform along streets

Not

Participants who would not like to see fruiting trees across streets in Fairfield City said:

- Bats need to be taken into consideration (4)
- It could make a mess when no one picks the fruit (2)
- People might damage trees trying to pick the fruit
- Children might sustain an injury trying to pick fruits

"I could just be walking down the street and grab an apple"

"If we do go down the route of having fruit trees, it should be in an allocated space for a community garden. I'm not keen on having them on the side of streets"

Footpath farmers

Across all workshops, majority of participants would prefer to see community gardens in open spaces and parks within Fairfield City, rather than footpath farmers along streets.

Hot

Participants who indicated they would like to see community gardens across Fairfield City, including:

- This would require a volunteer group or a community member to drive this initiative (2)
- Residents would prefer having community gardens in streets
- Some residents are already doing this, so more would be great
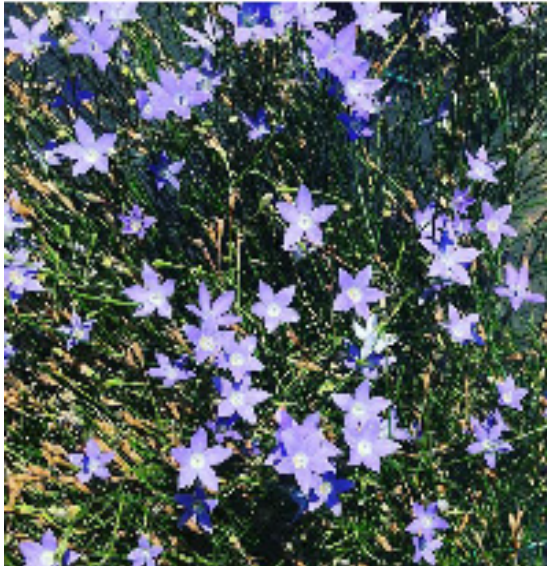
Not

Participants who would not like to see footpath farmer strips across streets in Fairfield City, were concerned about:

- People coming through and destroying something that could be nice and beneficial for the community (2)
- Run off of fruits and vegetables in streets
- Don't like it because anyone can take from it
- Community gardens are good in higher density areas but not in areas with backyards

Other comments include:
- There should be an option to have a community garden in certain parks, rather than front yards
- More "no mow" zones
- We haven't seen this type of panting before in Fairfield

"People don't want to mow their lawns, so they're not going to work on a footpath for a garden"

"Growing something like that in a community space needs a driver, a person that is keen and someone to interact with the people around them"

Flowering shrubs

Across all workshops, majority of participants would like to see more flowering shrubs along streets in Fairfield City. Responses reflect opportunities for flowering shrubs as well as communal gardens.

Hot

Participants who would like to see flowering shrubs across Fairfield City said:

- Looks great (4)
- Native plants are great (2), most are lower maintenance as well
- Encourage young students that Indigenous fauna is available, edible and can be fused into local produce, especially looking at sustainability
- Very nice, bright colours
- This would be a good idea as it makes the street look more diverse and presentable, although it would create work for other people to maintain these plants
- These are an incredible plant that are sorely undervalued and self-sow easily

Not

Participants who were concerned about flowering shrubs along streets in Fairfield City said:

- People coming through and destroying something that could be nice and beneficial for the community (2)

Other comments include:
- I'm sure there are a lot of older residents that would enjoy socialising and gardening
- In the garden near the playground where the swimming pool is [in Fairfield City], you could have a community garden there and then have people go and barbecue and use the garden as fresh produce
- Opportunity near the Crescent Plaza in Fairfield for fruit trees or some kind of decorated trees, that would be great

"Plants like the native bluebells in the picture should be propagated and promoted to the community to bring about appreciation and awareness."

"If we've got these local gyms now in our parks, why wouldn't we have a beautiful little veggie garden in the local park? It would be great area where people could congregate and meet, and we have many people walking recently in Covid-19."

Medium to large

Many participants across all workshops identified the medium to large tree in the picture is nice in itself, however, there were mainly concerns about the height and size of the tree being in close proximity to the house.

Hot

Participants who would like to see medium to large tees across Fairfield City said:

- This tree is like an umbrella providing shade, reduce temperatures and can save energy (2)
- Beautiful but not safe next to the house
- Medium size trees might be more appropriate closer to homes
- Gives you a nice breeze

Not

Participants who were concerned about medium to large trees along streets in Fairfield City said:

- Too big and close to the property (9)
- Blocks the sun and view (3)
- Falling branches would damage property and cars (3)
- Leaf accumulation (2)

"This is a good idea but if the tree falls down for some odd reason, it would destroy the house."

Medium flowering bush/tree

Across all workshops, majority of participants would like to see more medium sized flowering bushes/ trees along streets in Fairfield City.

Hot

Participants who would like to see medium sized flowering bushes/trees along streets in Fairfield City said:

- Beautiful (5)
- Love both types of trees shown in the photo (4)
- These types of trees make you feel relaxed (2)
- Makes the streets colourful
- Brings bees and lorikeets into your backyard

Not

Participants who were concerned about medium sized flowering bushes/trees along streets in Fairfield City said:

- Could be messy (2)
- Keep away from edges of roads and cars

Other comments include:
- If it smells nice this is good
- This would look great uniform on a street

"I like these trees; I like most trees especially if they're native and bring some colour"

Eucalyptus Trees

Across all workshops, majority of participants would like to see more native eucalyptus trees along streets in Fairfield City.

Overall, Assyrian workshop participants were least likely to choose eucalyptus trees along streets in Fairfield City, particularly because there is not much colour, leaves or fruit, they are thin on top, and concerns around branches falling and damaging cars.

Hot

Participants who would like to see eucalyptus trees along streets in Fairfield City said:

- Native trees are beautiful (2)
- Good for wildlife
- Brings a sense of Australian identity (2)
- Nice to have taller trees around apartments, creates a sense of privacy
- Young eucalypts won't drop branches easily
- I like the height
- You would find a breeze through there with the heat and cooling

Not

Participants who were concerned about eucalyptus trees along streets in Fairfield City said:

- Leaves drop and create issues in gutters (2)
- Falling branches could cause damage to cars (2)
- Too close to the apartments, the trees in the middle strip are better suited
- Issues with trees attracting bats

Other comments include:
- Management of that over a period of time, so pruning the trees sensibly to avoid some of the issues that people really dislike
- This would look great uniform on a street

Mix of exotic, native, evergreen and deciduous

Across all workshops, majority of participants would like to see more native eucalyptus trees along streets in Fairfield City.

Hot

Participants who would like to see eucalyptus trees along streets in Fairfield City said:

- Beautiful (2)
- Trees are sound breaking, particularly useful for houses and apartments
- Creates shade for cars (2)
- Creates privacy between residents
- Leafy green and diverse
- It would be good for majority native and maybe some exotics
- Love the green (2)

Not

Participants who were concerned about eucalyptus trees along streets in Fairfield City said:

- Leaves, branches and birds would create a mess (2)
- This would only be practical for wider streets
- Too many shades of green
- Too close to cars

Other comments include:
- Love Jacarandas, natives of my continent of origin
- May be good for pollinators
- Although native is better a mix with deciduous is good too (maple, gums)
- This seems too populated
- Can potentially cause a lot of mess for residents in the street. Council should have an appropriate more aggressive maintenance regime around this.

Trees in front yard

Across all workshops, majority of participants would like to see more trees in front yards across Fairfield City. Discussions in workshops focussed around types and sizes of trees that would be suited to front yards, as well as how the community can become more involved in tree planting.

Hot

Participants who would like to see more trees in front yards in Fairfield City said:

- It's a nice look (2)
- Beautiful
- Lovely space
- This is a starting point, as long as the trees are maintained, grow and hedged. That's close to a good compromise.

Participants were less likely to disagree with trees in front yards, with discussion focussing on greening initiatives within Fairfield City, including:

- A tree offset should be enforced (2)
- Council should provide trees from nursery to go into yards because I noticed that a lot of people plant palms out on earth and native and all that and they probably cheap and easy and all that, but in the end, after 10-20 years they grow really big and now we have Ibis birds nesting in them
- For a DA to be approved, property developers should have an element of greening commitment
- Council should ask anyone who is building a new house to plant at least one tree in their front yard
- Council should provide trees just for the front pathway. However, if an owner wanted some trees that's up to the individual.
- Opportunity for Fairfield City to work on a Tree Strategy and greening commitment within the community, similar to Oran Park Town's Masterplan in Camden Council local government area
- People need to be more educated on what trees to plant and where

Facebook Post Engagement

Fairfield City Council promoted the online workshops via Facebook which received high levels of engagement, with over 200 comments, 116 likes and 13 shares. Facebook users were asked to vote between two photos; Option 1 - current street view of Allambie Road or Option 2 - Allambie Road with trees.

Fairfield City Council Post. Source: Fairfield City Council Facebook Page

Majority of responses to the Facebook post received positive feedback, with many comments suggesting they would like to see more trees planted in streets across Fairfield City.

53 people voted for option 2 - Allambie Road with trees, while 11 people voted for option 1 - current street view of Allambie Road.

People would like to see more native trees, uniform trees along streets, different tree types and sizes that are suitable for different areas and take into consideration the surroundings, and people would also like to be consulted on where and what types of trees will be planted in Fairfield City.

Many comments also mentioned current issues with trees in Fairfield City, including tall trees damaging power lines, tree roots damaging footpaths, poor maintenance of trees and costs associated with maintenance, weather causing branches and trees to fall and damage cars, property and roads and people would like to have assistance from Council with maintenance of trees across Fairfield City.

Selected verbatim comments from Fairfield City
    Council Facebook post for Online trees workshop.

Number 1. We have trees like this out the front of my place and it has destroyed the foot path and also damaged my storm water drains. Plus the amount of mess they drop is terrible. Looks great but no good.

⬧ Top fan

Our region is getting warmer, hotter each year we need trees to cool down, shade , oxygen! Esthetically they make the place look better! Increase property value its a win, win! Great for the environment ! Provides a place to rest/ cool down for humans, birds! Its a no brainer lets make Fairfield green please!

I think it's already been mentioned in most if not all comments, trees of course, but the right kind and consult the experts as opposed to residents.

Plus the Council needs to be responsible for the life of the tree by maintaining it, cutting branches where it becomes a tad too dangerous or if the roots cause problems for the home owners. It should be a shared responsibility including costs born by the Council and home owners.

Tree's/branches break and fall on power lines, houses, cars in storms and sometimes it happens with no weather elements. If you have to plant tree's the people in homes should be asked first as they are the one's who suffer and are put out when these occurrences happen. And if council plants these tree's then they should be the one's paying for the damage it does to our homes, and cars when they break and put us up in housing until it is safe for us to move back home not our insurance companies. Put tree's where we are safe from their destruction

⬧ Top fan

Love trees for obvious reasons. Beauty, oxygen, environment, healthy ecosystem, food, shelter, housing for birds and insects. Please look after the trees that are planted. Need to be mindful of deciduous Trees that lose their leaves in autumn and winter. People might complain.
Love, love this idea

2. Trees reduce the heat island effect and improve the overall look and feel of a suburb. Definitely love a leafy green neighbourhood.

Plant large native trees where they will not obstruct or interfere with powerlines, and medium size natives everywhere else.

Reality is that those trees would have to be butchered to avoid the powerlines above. Plant trees in respect to how tall they can grow or bury powerlines underground.

Trees are great for shade and when maintained make a street look very nice.On the other hand when they block your gutters, constantly or block your flashing around your skylight and floods your sunroom is not a good thing.Council should maintain their trees more regularly.Ive been waitng 5 weeks for a tree to be trimmed back over hanging my property which hasn't been done in 24 years 🤔

Fruit trees might be a better option. I'd be happier with a fruit tree on my front footpath than a tree that loses its leaves and branches that it is over 10 metres clogging up my drains. At the least the fruit can be shared amongst the neighbours too, especially those of us who live in a cul-de-sac

Tree-lined streets are aesthetically pleasing, and I would suggest consulting with an arborist to select the most appropriate trees for the specific area.

Evergreen trees or even fruit trees

2. Natives. Ones that dont need hacking to death due to power lines