

Why it's important to embrace the humble verge tree

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During the scorching hot summer Perth has endured, I've been very grateful for the large verge trees lining most of my street when I take my dog for a morning walk.

I take refuge from the sun — harsh even in the early morning some days — under the leafy canopies and scurry past the houses without a shady verge tree. So recent events regarding verge trees in the City of Bayswater are disappointing and worrying.

Last month, the council overruled its own policy on verge trees, albeit by a narrow majority of one, to allow a mature, healthy weeping peppermint tree to be chopped down at an adjacent property owners' request.

An arborist assessed the tree and concluded it was a good specimen that didn't warrant removal, leading officers to recommend the request be rejected.

The adjacent property owners, backed by a petition signed by neighbours, argued the tree prevented lawn growing, and that the leaves blocked their gutters.

The councillors who approved the tree's removal may have thought it was the common sense approach, given few, if any, people in the street wanted the tree to stay.

But the decision could have future implications. With a precedent now set, next week the council will be presented with another request to overrule its policy by removing the only other verge tree in this particular Morley street.

This time, other City of Bayswater residents have started a petition urging the council to say no.

I understand trees have their annoyances. There is a magnificent, huge tree on my next door neighbour's verge. When it drops leaves and flowers, they cover my house and garden. I had to get my car's aircon filter replaced because it was blocked with a fluffy blossom from the verge tree on the other side.

I get my gutters cleaned once a year, and fallen leaves don't really bother me. But I'd hate to see those trees gone. They look beautiful and bring birds into the street, as well as shade.

There are concerns the City of Bayswater's recent decision threatens its target of 20 per cent tree canopy by 2025. It currently stands at just 14 per cent — a figure not helped by the many quarter acre block subdivisions that often see trees removed.

On the other side of Perth in the western suburbs, things are heading in a different direction (They're not called the leafy western suburbs for nothing.)

The City of Nedlands has approved in a 12-1 vote an ambitious new policy to increase the area's diminishing tree canopy. It calls for almost all verges and nature strips to be planted with a native tree that will grow a sizeable canopy, with many ornamental species to be restricted from planting.

While this plan still needs to be budgeted for by the council, it is a big step forward. No doubt it will have its opponents too. But, let's think about it for a moment, do we really want to live in even more of a concrete jungle than we already do?