



7.1 Petition – Keep Street Gardening Growing in City of Port Phillip

A Petition containing 5935 signatures was received from via change.org.

The Petition states the following: -

The City of Port Phillip's (CoPP) new draft Nature Strip Guidelines (NSGs) have just been released for community feedback and, if there isn't a strong community response to change them, these would mean the end of street gardening for the vast majority of residents. Not only that, but CoPP declares that gardens which don't adhere to the new guidelines are also subject to removal. This means that, again, the vast majority of street gardens, many of them decades old, would be subject to removal at council's whim.

While there is a definite need for updated, clear and safe guidelines in the City of Port Phillip, CoPP has demonstrated overblown, heavy-handed thinking around the safety of council assets. These new NSGs effectively deny residents the ability to contribute to the natural beauty of our city and also individually respond to climate change and declining urban biodiversity.

Please find the draft Nature Strip Guidelines and Have Your Say (for locals) [here](#).

This petition closes on February 13th 2022, this petition will be submitted soon after and backs up The Heart Gardening Project's submission.

We are asking Mayor Marcus Pearl and the Councillors of City of Port Phillip Council to arrange a rewrite of the new draft nature strip guidelines so that they are inclusive, empowering, researched properly, thought through and not only celebrate current street gardeners (who are out making our city more beautiful) but also encourage others to make a safe, informed and positive difference to their community and their planet.

There are so many problems but here are some of the main issues (that I have double checked in a face to face meeting with the council officers that wrote the document):

- *No tree squares can have plants*
- *No nature strips under 1m wide can be planted on*
- *Enormous clearance areas around trees (20sqm for larger trees!), driveways, kerbs and utilities (1.5m radius around every utility) mean that not even the biggest nature strip can have more than (literally) a couple of plants on it*
- *Renters and business owners have to jump through many more hoops to create a garden (if they can plant a garden at all)*
- *No plants can be planted in these "clearance areas" as CoPP don't want maintenance to be done in these spaces.*

Also confirmed from my meeting with CoPP— no socio-economic research was done (which CoPP admitted was easily found), spatial analysis wasn't carried out (to see who has what public land out the front), First Nations people weren't consulted (this is a large amount of land we are talking about), no edibles (even lavender and rosemary) are allowed to be planted outside raised beds, my consultation with CoPP (the only external consultation they could remember) "hasn't been taken on board", the 1m height limit (which can only happen if



your nature strip is wider than 3.5m) includes the raised garden bed (so if you have a 900mm raised garden bed you can only have 100mm of plants), CoPP show immense concern about trees dying from street plantings but have no idea how many actually suffer/die and, last but not least, compliance officers are given full power over any issues.

Street gardening is a wonderfully positive way to connect humans to humans, humans to nature and nature to nature. The benefits of street gardening are huge compared to the size of the spaces- they increase biodiversity by creating the much-needed under storey, they help address major urban environmental problems such as the heat island effect and water retention issues and they improve people's mental and physical health.

If this document was to go through in any form, it would be very concerning not only for the residents of the City of Port Phillip but for everyone else as it would set a dangerous precedent, saying that this regressive short sighted ignorance is ok at this tipping point in our planet's history.

2 years ago, after seeing the immense positive impact street gardening was having on myself, my daughter (who is 3), my family and my community, I started [The Heart Gardening Project](#), a community initiative which brings humans and nature together through street gardening. With the help of many awesome volunteers, we have created, or helped to create, about 70 street gardens in South Melbourne turning them from barren pollinator dead zones to gardens full of buzzing wriggling beauty. We are now currently focussing on the Melbourne Pollinator Corridor (MPC), an 8km community-led wildlife corridor linking the Royal Botanic Gardens to Westgate Park, focussing on native bees and other pollinating insects mainly on undernourished public land like nature strips. The Melbourne Pollinator Corridor, which was designed conservatively within current nature strip guidelines with over 30 specialists and scientists, could not go ahead under this new draft document.

In addition, all of the gardens that The Heart Gardening Project has created on public land (along with everyone else's) would be non-compliant and need to be amended to be compliant (ie removed).

Having spoken with thousands of people locally and around Australia about street gardening, I absolutely know for sure that the benefits of street gardening (for both council and residents) outweigh the challenges...BY FAR!

So, if you...

- *love street gardening,*
- *are appreciative of your local street gardener enjoy walking around your local street gardens,*
- *think that street gardening is more beneficial than not for your community,*
- *think we need more beautiful gardens,*
- *believe that increasing biodiversity is important,*
- *think we need to do more to fight climate change,*

...then please sign this petition!

Again, we call on Mayor Marcus Pearl and the City of Port Phillip Councillors to arrange a revision of the draft Nature Strip Guidelines to help our local communities, help our city and help save our planet.



OFFICER COMMENT

Council is reviewing its existing Nature Strip Guidelines (NSG), which were developed in 2013, in response to an action in the *People and Places: Public Space Strategy 2022-32* and to support growing community interest.

These guidelines haven't been updated in nearly a decade and the new guidelines aim to reflect the growing interest in creating gardens on nature strips in tandem with current safety standards.

Council recognises the many benefits of nature strip gardening including community connection and wellbeing; improvements to biodiversity and aesthetics; and flood and urban heat mitigation.

Community consultation was open for the draft NSG between 17 November 2021 and 13 February 2022.

The main feedback we have heard so far has been:

- The guidelines should be more encouraging and facilitate gardening
- Concerns with the proposed clearances are too restrictive
- Planting around trees is too restrictive
- Edible plants are important
- Concerns for removal of existing gardens
- Safe and accessible streets are important

Through the consultation we have identified a number of updates for the draft NSG including:

- Updating the guidelines as a celebratory and encouraging guide
- Shorten the guidelines with more information available online, including information about biodiversity and planting suggestions
- Reassess setbacks and consider differences in parking arrangements to accommodate more planting
- Undertake further review of under tree planting
- Develop a de-paving program to provide more areas for nature strip gardening
- Provide warnings about growing edible plants in contaminated soil

Council are not looking to remove existing non-compliant gardens; removing a garden would be a 'last resort' option if we were unable to make it safe. If a nature strip garden was identified as being unsafe or obstructing accessibility, we will work with the community gardener to develop modifications.

The feedback from the consultation (including the concerns raised in this petition) will inform an update to the draft NSG.

There will be another opportunity for the community to be part of the development of the NSG later this financial year, when face to face community consultation is planned to discuss the updated draft.

MEETING OF THE PORT PHILLIP CITY COUNCIL 2 MARCH 2022



Petitioners are encouraged to register their interest on Council's Have Your Say website to keep updated with this project - [Home | Have Your Say Port Phillip](#)

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Receives and notes the Petition.
2. Thanks the petitioners for their Petition
3. Notes that there has been significant feedback on the original draft Nature Strip Guidelines.
4. Notes that the feedback provided will inform a new draft Nature Strip Guidelines which will be open to community consultation in May/June 2022.
5. Encourages the petitioners to register their interest in future consultation on this topic on the Have Your Say page of the website.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil