

**Combined Residents of Whitehorse
Action Group (CROWAG) Incorporated.**

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CROWAG Submission on the Whitehorse City Council Draft Budget 2024-2025

1. Incorporated of UFS.

That Council allocate full and adequate funding to ensure that the *UFS* is incorporated into the *Planning Scheme*, such that it has the maximum capability to support Council aspirations for the urban forest and especially for it to guide decisions at *VCAT*. In that endeavour, we also urge Council to engage actively with relevant environment and conservation organisations within the community, including *CROWAG*, who have the skills and expertise to assist in this matter so as to affect some economy in its allocation of funds for this project. This is called collaboration.

2. Street Tree Planting

That Council allocate an additional \$100,000 to its previous average \$300,000 street tree planting. \$400,000 would be a fair and reasonable increase to make up for declining expenditure for 16 years. If Council is serious about its tree canopy and *UFS* aspirations, this should be made possible without reducing funding elsewhere in the Parks, Open Space and Streetscapes and Environment components of the Budget.

3. Open Space and Sustainability

That Council demonstrate its advocacy for its own *UFS Implementation Plan* by substantially increasing funding to parks, open space, sustainability and streetscape in other areas of the budget in ways that will contribute to its *UFS* goals.

4. Community Education – Climate Change

That Council allocate resources to ensure an overarching policy is implemented across all divisions of Council that requires decisions that are made at all levels to be made taking account of climate change impacts and innovative and best practice mitigation strategies. There is a ***climate emergency and council's actions must match that degree of urgency***. It should also devote more funds and energy to do more to educate residents to better understand this foundational principle which seems to logically underpin the *Urban Forest Strategy*. The Climate Emergency Plans adopted by (Moreland and Nillumbik Councils might be a good model.

5. Community Education – Value of Trees

That Council significantly increase its budget allocation to public education, to better inform residents about the value of trees, tree maintenance, and also to diminish perceptions of the risks of trees. *Council* should conduct many more environment-based seminars, lecture series, forums and discussion groups for residents and its own staff and developers. In so doing, it might consider forming alliances with sufficiently expert community groups to assist in this work.

6. Active Transport

That Council allocate more funding to upgrade active transport infrastructure. Of particular concern is the lack of an active transport overpass once the Vicinity development commences. Council must commit to a Thurston Street overpass and seek joint funding and cooperation from other interested stakeholders including VicTrack, Vicinity and SRL.

7. Acquisition of Federation Brickworks.

That Council work urgently with other agencies and departments including NEL, SRL, LXR and DEECA to acquire the Federation Brickworks site for public open space to cater for the dramatically increased Box Hill MAC high density resident population.

8. Monitoring and Compliance – Building and Planning.

That Council allocates more ongoing funding for building and planning compliance. Issues of illegal tree removal and developers gaming the VicSmart planning application process have concerned the community for some time along with concerns about compliance and enforcement issues for protected trees on private land. Adequate resources must be provided for council planners, compliance officers, independent arborists and IT systems. A robust monitoring and compliance system will also support council's climate change and UFS tree canopy policy strategies and objectives.

9. Fit for Purpose Tree Management Database.

Funding is required for a 'fit for purpose' tree management database system that allows for individual tree information from planning applications and other sources to be recorded and easily retrieved and publicly available. A tree management database will enable monitoring and compliance processes to be in place to efficiently manage council's tree and urban forest policies.

Ross Gillespie.

President CROWAG.

25th October 2023