City Gardens, Trees and Street Trees

The City of Melbourne have developed several well thought out policies to progressively ensure our city becomes greener. But can there be a better way to improve the fate of street trees?

You may recall that the State of Victoria was referred to as the garden state. In fact, previous Victorian licence plates proudly displayed the fact. The total area of forest in Victoria is about 7.9 million hectares (35% of the State) across both Crown and private land. If we look closer to our backyard – the City of Melbourne is blessed with a multitude of parks and gardens on its edge and within, including Domain Gardens, Fitzroy Gardens, Carlton Gardens, Flagstaff Gardens and a few smaller ones. And the city will be adding eight new or revitalised parks to the group by 2021. There have even been additions such as the "parks in the sky" in the new Melbourne Quarter precinct.

Plants and trees provide clean air, increased oxygen, clean water (acting as a filter) and increase the city's resilience to the impacts of climate change by cooling the atmosphere. They also provide habitats for animals, birds and insects. (Think - waking up in the morning to the sound of birds chirping!)

The City of Melbourne Council recognize trees and other vegetation as a critical urban infrastructure. They run multiple projects to encourage innovative methods to green the city. The Urban Forest Strategy aims to manage the issues of climate change, population growth and urban heating and to protect the longevity of Melbourne's urban forest. The greening of roofs, walls and facades is yet another means to green the city.

But there are still things that can be improved.

If you are one of the long-term residents of the CBD, you will be able to point to areas around your neighbourhood where there used to be trees, but those trees have never been replaced. Take Russell Street for example (see the photo). Sadly, the trees that were there in the centre strip have gone. All that remains are little patches of grass and a few weeds where once there were quite mature, elegant trees.

The trees have been missing for several years. Were they diseased? Why have they not been replaced? City of Melbourne have developed new techniques to provide technically superior soil wells for street trees, but are they being implemented? Trees are often removed for construction. How can we be sure that they will be replaced? It takes time to return to the mature trees that were removed.

What about new trees planted in the street? There is the issue of "after care". Trees struggle to survive through lack of water, especially in the hot, summer months and unfortunately they are often subjected to vandalism.

RESIDENTS 3000
MELBOURNE

PO Box 197 Flinders Lane Post Office
Melbourne VIC 8009
www.residents3000.com.au

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This is where the City of Melbourne could take the initiative and ask for volunteers - maybe people from the nearby cafés or residents to be "tree mothers". Perhaps equip the "tree mothers" with a watering can and fertilizer. It is just for the first few years that the small, new trees need extra care and attention. Maybe this is a job for the Citizen Foresters?

With all the projects and programmes in effect, residents can easily take an active role close to where they live and work to help develop the tree canopy in their local streets. Just one small part of the greater picture but being responsible for just one or two trees is doable for most people. Maybe the City of Melbourne should think up a new promotion?

"Adopt a tree. Become a tree mother".