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PPG is a non-profit organisation devoted to the conservation of the natural environment in the Peel Region of Western Australia

Peel Preservation Group Inc.

To: Mr Dean Unsworth
Chief Executive Officer
Shire of Murray
PO Box 21
PINJARRA WA 62108

12 December 2017

REGARDING: NATURAL LANDSCAPES IN URBAN AREAS
DRAFT LOCAL PLANNING POLICY

Dear Mr Unsworth

I am commenting on the draft Policy on behalf of the Peel Preservation Group (Inc.). We are a non-profit organisation aimed at environmental conservation in the Peel Region which includes the Shire of Murray and therefore have a direct interest in the Policy. Some of our members live within the Shire of Murray and none of us live far from it. Many of us are regular visitors to the Shire and appreciate its natural landscapes.

The Peel Preservation Group is in general very supportive of the proposal to strengthen the protections for trees and remnant vegetation in urban Shire areas. The Shire is to be commended for proactively addressing the issue at the planning stage as well as throughout the development process.

We are pleased to see the Policy's focus on protecting and planting trees along streets and development sites. We encourage the retention and planting of as much vegetation as possible, especially on new development sites. As a last resort when trees must be cleared in one place then we believe it is important to try to compensate for the lost trees. This can be done by planting more trees native to Western Australia close to where the trees were removed.

It is particularly important to prevent the clearing of older trees large enough to have hollows for birds to nest in. We also support the Shire's consideration of the amount of shade they can provide.

We are very concerned that there does not seem to be any consequences for wilful and unauthorised removal of vegetation. Despite what we and the Shire would like to happen, what is to stop individuals and developers from clearing? We suggest that penalties be included severe enough to stop unauthorised clearing. These penalties should be publicised to make sure that any person considering clearing checks what is allowed very carefully. The penalties need to be directed at individuals and company directors, not business entities in their own right which may cease trading or go into administration.

A 50 year old tree cannot just be put back in the ground or replaced with an “advanced tree” of two years age and two metres height, possibly of a different species. In this case prevention is better than the cure.

Some of the main benefits of trees and native vegetation in urban areas have been listed in the Policy. A major benefit of retaining and enhancing the main environmental attributes of the Shire is that current Shire residents will want to stay and new residents will be encouraged to settle there. The Shire is only 80 kilometres from Perth’s Central Business District and closer to its outer suburbs and the growing satellite city of Mandurah with its rail line from Perth. The rail line from Perth to Bunbury runs through the Shire as well as three main highways. The forecast published by the Shire is for approximately 80,000 people – a 360% increase – in about 25 years. The Shire can absorb more population growth but needs to be careful how it is done.

We appreciate the benefits in a residential subdivision of rear-loading lots less than 10 metres wide so that more street planting and street parking can take place at the front. We implore you not to make the rear of tiny 200 – 300 m² lots accessible only by narrow laneways per the current trend seen in many Perth suburbs such as Aubin Grove, Banksia Grove and Yanchep. This could create the same energy inefficient heat islands the Shire is trying hard to prevent with its plan for trees in carparks. From a resident’s perspective the neighbourhood feels “ghetto-like” and unpleasant to live in. The only cars that can fit into the driveways are small ones like a Suzuki Swift. No doubt developers will be keen to build more of this type of housing arrangement in Murray Shire because they can fit more houses onto the same land and earn more money. Also, it is cheaper for them to do what they have already done before.

To some extent smaller lots are becoming more desirable due to lower garden maintenance and home ownership becoming less affordable. There is even an argument that it is the way we have to go (or up into apartments) for economies of services and reducing urban sprawl. But please resist! If buildings are packed in too closely without greenery then urban parts of the Shire become just another “burb”. Why would anyone stay or go there when the same living arrangements with greater facilities can be had in the nearby cities? There is also an associated fire safety risk with houses being very close together.

It is our perception that the *minimum* levels set by the Shire for tree size and tree quantity will become the *actual* levels adhered to by developers as they seek to reduce costs. Therefore these levels must be set with care. We suggest that the Policy specifies particular species to be planted to encourage variety otherwise developers may default to a monoculture of the cheapest fastest-growing tree that complies without considering if it is suitable to the local environment. For example, lots of Blue Gums and no Tuarts.

We are delighted that the Shire is taking into account the need for Green Corridors to connect areas, making them safer and more usable for existing wildlife and wildlife displaced by increasing development.

In conclusion, our thoughts are similar to those expressed in the opening statements of the draft Policy: Murray Shire contains natural landscapes that contribute towards its unique identity. A place with a clean, green feel within easy reach of major population centres will attract a lot of tourism and increased economic activity. Most of the Shire land is currently rural: people come to live in and visit the Shire because they like the street appeal and the attractive small town semi-rural feel. Retaining and enhancing the character of the natural landscape is important. If it ends up the same as the cities then it won’t keep and attract as many people. That which made it special and different will have been lost.

Yours sincerely

Susanne Godden
Secretary
Peel Preservation Group