

CJ200-09/08 FUTURE VERGE ENHANCEMENT PROJECTS - [87541]

WARD: All

RESPONSIBLE DIRECTOR: Mr Ian Cowie
Governance and Strategy

PURPOSE/EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To provide Council with an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Heathridge Verge Enhancement Competition and recommendations for future initiatives of this nature.

BACKGROUND

In April 2008 Council resolved (*CJ054-04/08 refers*) to endorse a project that would encourage residents of Heathridge to take part in a verge enhancement competition. The project was finalised in August 2008 and Council was provided with a report on particular aspects of the Heathridge Competition - (*CJ153-08/08 refers*).

DETAILS

It should be noted that the task of developing a competition to encourage residents of Heathridge to tidy up their verges was a challenge for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was important not to offend Heathridge residents by suggesting that their verges were not maintained in a tidy condition. Secondly, it was known that approximately 20% of the properties in the suburb were rented and that tenants might not see verge maintenance as something for which they could, or should, be held responsible. Further, that such maintenance might not be of a high priority for landowners of these properties. Thirdly, there is a broad misconception that 'responsibility' for verges rests with the local government and that the role of residents is limited to reporting deficiencies in verge conditions.

To avoid causing unnecessary offence to residents, the focus of the competition, and all communications associated with it, was one of empowerment. Rather than relying on the financial incentive of prizes, residents needed to understand how they could tidy up or enhance their verges in ways that would increase the amenity of their properties and that of the local area. Additionally, they would become knowledgeable about water-wise and environmentally friendly designs for their gardens and verges.

Successes with the Heathridge Trial

As noted in the previous report on the outcomes of the competition, letters were sent to over 2000 householders in Heathridge telling them about the competition and launch. This ensured direct contact with the target group.

As a vehicle for community engagement and empowerment, the competition launch was conducted by members of the Great Gardens Team at a local community hall. During the launch the City's current Verge Treatment Guidelines were explained in ways that assisted residents in knowing what to do to comply with, and indeed, exceed the guidelines.

Feedback forms were distributed to the participants at the end of the evening. Twenty four were completed and the outcomes are summarised in the table below. This shows that the launch was very successful.

Question	Response
Rating for the workshop	100% positive response from “good” to “excellent.” Format – Excellent (71%); very good (25%) Material/issues - Excellent (71%); very good (21%) Skills/knowledge of presenters – Excellent (91%)
Objective 1 - Understanding value of verges and improvement possibilities	100% positive response from “agree” (37.5%) to “strongly agree” (62.5%)
Objective 2 - Understanding competition categories and how to enter	100% positive response from “agree” (62.5%) to “strongly agree” (37.5%)
Objective 3 – Understanding verge improvements that meet City guidelines	87.5% positive response from “agree” (66.7%) to “strongly agree” (20.8%).
Stage of readiness to participate in the competition indicated by responses to the statement: “I am seriously considering entering the competition.”	79.2% positive response from “agree” (65.2%) to “strongly agree” (16.7%).
Quality of information received indicated by responses to the statement: “I still don’t feel I have the information I need to be able to do something about my verge.”	87.5% negative response to the statement with “disagree” (45.8%) and “strongly disagree” (41.7%).
Determination of whether participant’s personal objectives for attending were met.	95.8% responded positively. The remainder did not indicate their response to the question.

The participation of six Year 10 students from Ocean Reef Senior High School contributed to the success of the launch as they were most courteous and helpful with the following activities:

- setting up the venue
- welcoming and registering attendees
- distributing information
- serving and clearing away supper
- taking down signage, presentation materials and
- clearing the hall

The students were recruited through the Give 20 program which requires that all high school students perform 20 hours of service to their communities to gain the Year 12 Education Certificate on leaving school.

Weaknesses of the Heathridge Trial

Poor response rate

Despite over 2000 letters being sent to every household in Heathridge and posters being placed at local venues about the competition and the launch that preceded it, the overall response from the community was low. The City received only 50 inquiries from Heathridge residents concerning the launch, 35 registered their interest in attending and only 24 people actually attended on the night. Further, only nine competition entries were received. In noting this, direct mail is considered the most effective way of reaching residents and additional promotion and advertising, while possible, is viewed as unlikely to have a dramatic

impact on levels of participation. Other reasons for the poor response rate could have been as anticipated from the outset i.e., responsibility for verges, costs etc.

Verge Treatment Guidelines

The content of the current Verge Treatment Guidelines is somewhat technical and does not provide guidance on the environmental or water-wise issues that should be considered when designing or upgrading a verge. Although the Great Gardens Team members were able to 'interpret' this information for community participants at the launch and provide practical guidance on how they could improve their verges to incorporate environmental and water-wise considerations at the same time, this information was not available to the general public.

The Council decision (*CJ153-08/08 refers*) to use the \$5,000 surplus funds from the Heathridge competition to improve the Verge Treatment Guidelines will provide an opportunity for placing a greater emphasis on water-wise and environmentally friendly verges together with a practical 'how to' approach for residents and ratepayers.

No improvements achieved

Heathridge residents who did enter the competition already had established verges that complied with the City's Verge Treatment Guidelines. However, with one exception, most did not appear to any great extent to be either water-wise or environmentally friendly. Nevertheless, their contribution toward the overall ambience of the suburb in terms of money, time and effort invested has been acknowledged through the competition. Overall there has been no additional enhancement of verges as an outcome of the Verge Enhancement Competition.

Value for money

The cost of the competition (\$20,000) relative to the impact of having run it cannot be said to have provided value for money. Expenses incurred included postage, printing, catering at the launch, the contribution of the Great Gardens Team and prizes, but the competition itself did not result in the desired outcome of improved verges in Heathridge.

Issues and options considered:

The evaluation has shown that the competition as a model for motivating residents to clean up their verges was ineffective. The people who submitted entries already had verges that met the Verge Treatment Guidelines.

While minor amendments to the Heathridge approach could be made for a competition in Greenwood i.e., providing a longer time frame leading up to the competition, greater local publicity and using revised Guidelines, it is concluded that the outcomes may again not be significantly improved.

In the circumstances, three alternative models that may lead to improvements in local streetscapes, provide greater value for money and increase the likelihood of residents and ratepayers developing water-wise and environmentally friendly gardens are presented.

Model 1 Best Garden model

Refocus the competition as a 'best garden' competition rather than concentrating on verges alone. Entrants for the various categories could be nominated by anyone. In Western Australia, the metropolitan Towns of Mosman Park, Vincent and Cambridge have previously held gardening competitions with sponsorship from a number of local businesses and some State Government departments. In country Western Australia, the City of Geraldton-

Greenough has had notable success with categories for Best Public Place and Best Commercial Property. In NSW, Campbelltown City Garden Competition is an annual feature. There are numerous categories and cash prizes are awarded. Rockhampton Regional Council in Queensland has just commenced a Regional Garden Competition in partnership with a local newspaper and radio station. For judging purposes, the region is divided into 4 precincts with 8 categories including “Best Kitchen Garden” and “Best Corporate Garden” considered for each area. In Victoria, the State runs the annual “Victoria in Bloom” competition, again with multiple categories and prizes in the form of vouchers or cash. The emphasis for this competition is that gardens of all categories be water-wise.

The advantages of this model are:

- The concept of a garden competition is well known and widely accepted across Australia.
- As an annual or ongoing event it may encourage residents to compete with one another on a regular basis whether they live in public housing, group homes, residential aged care facilities, rental accommodation or are owner occupiers.

The disadvantages with this model include:

- This model would to a large extent move away from the focus on verges.
- It is also likely that such a program would require greater cost and administration to conduct.

Model 2 Front Verge Blitz model

Council may wish to consider using the popular “Backyard Blitz” styled approach as seen on television. In this case, the City would brand this as the “Front Verge Blitz” whereby a design for a high quality front verge would be developed by the City to a budget of around \$1,000. This design would then be applied to approximately 20 verges in the suburb that are selected randomly from nominated verges in need of improvement. This would equate to the \$20,000 budget. The City would publicise the initiative and encourage residents to also submit their verge or others for the nomination process. Those selected would then receive a free verge enhancement treatment.

The advantages of this model are:

- Resident participation would be limited to nominating verges. (It could be their own or a neighbour’s). Disincentives to enter the competition such as financial outlay or labour required have been removed.
- The outcome of the competition would be the guaranteed improvement of approximately 20 verges.
- Local amenity would be enhanced, perhaps leading to an increase in property values.
- Value for money would be achieved with actual verge upgrades.

The disadvantages with this model include:

- The impact of 20 upgraded verges within a suburb would be minimal given the spread of the works.
- The cost of upgrading verges that are not in close proximity would be greater as economies of scale are lost.

Model 3 Streetscape Verge Enhancement

A streetscape model would involve a street being selected to be enhanced. This enhancement would achieve maximum benefit if it were to occur in conjunction with the City's road resurfacing program. The City currently plans to resurface Karuah Way from Coolibah Drive to Hepburn Avenue and Canham Way from Wanneroo Road to Cockman Road. It would be appropriate to select a street that is being resurfaced to maximise the impact of beautification in a street.

Once a street is selected, all residents in that street would be contacted and invited to nominate their verge for the program. The City would then select a number of those verges that have nominated (up to the \$20,000 budget available). The City would engage a contractor to the value of \$20,000 to upgrade the chosen verges in that street.

The advantages of this model are:

- Resident participation would be limited to nominating verges. Disincentives to enter the competition such as financial outlay or labour required have been removed
- The overall impact of this approach would be maximised given works are confined to a single location within the suburb.
- The outcome of the competition would be the guaranteed improvement of 30 verges.
- Local amenity would be enhanced.
- The greatest amount of value for money would be achieved with actual verge upgrades and economies of scale can be gained by confining works to a single street.

The disadvantage with this model is:

- Participation in the project is limited to a single street and does not engage the entire suburb.

The options available are therefore:

Option One To continue with the Heathridge Verge Competition model in partnership with the Great Gardens Team with a focus on verge enhancement and supported by updated Verge Treatment Guidelines.

Option Two To develop the Front Verge Blitz whereby a model verge is developed to improve verges identified as being in a poor condition within a discrete suburb.

Option Three To develop a Garden Competition with categories similar to those used in other Local Governments. The focus should be on gardens that are environmentally friendly and water-wise.

Option Four To develop the Streetscape Verge Enhancement project whereby a model verge is developed and applied to a single selected street within the suburb. Residents in that street can nominate for their verge to be upgraded and the final decision rests with the City.

Option Four is recommended.

Link to Strategic Plan:

In the section on Sustainability at the City, the requirement to play a key role in sustainable development is noted, in particular with respect to:

- Raising awareness and assisting the community to achieve sustainable practices.
- Providing leadership to positively influence the community.

Legislation – Statutory Provisions:

Not Applicable.

Risk Management considerations:

Selecting the Verge Competition Option without modification or with minor modification for use in Greenwood is likely to yield the same low levels of entry and achieve the same results in terms of verge improvement. Further, improving the guidelines to include environmental and water-wise practices, whilst important and worthwhile, will not be a driver for verge improvement. Currently there is little to no demand for this information and 'push' marketing strategies would be necessary to encourage public take up.

Financial/Budget Implications:

The \$20,000 budget set aside for the Heathridge Verge Competition was in excess of that required due to the low level of entries. The recommended option for a Streetscape Enhancement model would be likely to provide greater value for money.

Should this model be selected it should be noted that the works will be contracted out to a specialised gardening landscaping firm.

Policy Implications:

Not Applicable.

Regional Significance:

Not Applicable.

Sustainability Implications:

Not Applicable.

Consultation:

Not Applicable.

COMMENT

As a vehicle for encouraging sufficient numbers of residents to improve the conditions of their verges the Heathridge Verge Competition was unsuccessful. The only entrants were those who already had established verges, not people whose verges needed to be improved to lift the overall amenity of the suburb. Nevertheless, the partnership with the Great Gardens Team to launch the competition and the involvement of local high school students was successful. The communication and presentation skills of the Team were effective and empowering for the audience who felt they had a better idea of what to do about their verges in the future and had some intention to act.

The Garden Competition model is one that could be used at the level of the whole City rather than on a suburb by suburb basis. This model lifts the focus from compliance with Verge Treatment Guidelines alone to designing 'gardens for the future,' allowing for creativity and self-expression across all types of housing and even extending to the business, commercial or educational sectors.

However, of all the options presented for consideration by Council, the Streetscape Enhancement model is the most likely to provide the greatest value for money. It does not require that householders spend their own money to improve a verge, only that they nominate for the work to be done. By developing a 'model' verge it will be possible to demonstrate best practice in water-wise, environmentally friendly and low maintenance design in selected suburbs.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil.

VOTING REQUIREMENTS

Simple Majority

OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION: That Council:

- 1 NOTES the content of the report, which provides an evaluation of the Heathridge Verge Competition as a vehicle for verge enhancement by residents within a suburb;
- 2 SUPPORTS Option Four, being the development of a Streetscape Verge Enhancement concept to replace of the current Verge Competition model for application in Greenwood.

MOVED Cr Corr, SECONDED Cr Norman that Council:

- 1 **NOTES the content of the report, which provides an evaluation of the Heathridge Verge Competition as a vehicle for verge enhancement by residents within a suburb;**
- 2 **SUPPORTS Option Three, being the development of a Garden competition with the following categories and prizes. The focus should be on gardens that are environmentally friendly and water-wise:**
 - **Best Private Residential Garden** Certificate & \$500 of gardening vouchers
 - **Best Waterwise Garden using Indigenous Plants** Certificate & \$500 of gardening vouchers
 - **Best Shopfront / Business Garden** Certificate & \$500 of gardening vouchers

and certificates for all category runners-up;

3 SUPPORTS a Best Street competition, with the following prize:

- **Best Street Presentation** **Sign at each end of street**
 “Greenwood Best Street 2008”
 And a \$1,000 street party

4 NOTES that for the Garden competitions, people can nominate gardens other than their own and that all streets will be automatically entered into the Best Street competition.

Discussion ensued.

Cr Young foreshadowed her intention to move an alternative Motion should the Motion under consideration not be successful.

The Motion was Put and

TIED (5/5)

In favour of the Motion: Mayor Pickard, Crs Corr, Macdonald, McLean and Norman **Against the Motion:** Crs Amphlett, Hollywood, Jacob, John and Young

There being an equal number of votes, the Presiding Person exercised his casting vote and declared the Motion **LOST**

MOVED Cr Young, SECONDED Cr Jacob that consideration of Future Verge Enhancements be REFERRED to the Policy Committee for further consideration and a report presented to a future Council Meeting.

Discussion ensued.

The Motion was Put and

CARRIED (10/0)

In favour of the Motion: Mayor Pickard, Crs Amphlett, Corr, Hollywood, Jacob, Macdonald, Norman, John, Hollywood and Young