

ORDINARY MEETING 16 DECEMBER 2014	6.4
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NOTICE OF MOTION – CR MELCHERT

PRUNING OF DANGEROUS TREE PLANTINGS – COUNCIL ADMINISTRATON BUILDING AND HARPER STREET RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY BOUNDARY

NOTICE OF MOTION

I hereby give notice of my intention to move the following motion at Council's Ordinary Meeting to be held on Tuesday 16 December 2014:-

“That Council move as soon as possible ,and prior to the cyclone season, to arrange for all the large and tall trees planted by Council on the boundary of the Administration Building and residential properties in Harper Street either pruned back to a maximum height of 8 metres, or removed completely.”

BACKGROUND

I have received ongoing complaints (as had Cairns Regional Council) from affected residents that they are concerned the large trees planted by their neighbour the Douglas Shire Council now pose a physical threat to their safety and that of their properties.

The trees were planted to provide a privacy screen and were supposed to be of a species selection which would not grow above 6-8 metres. Some of the trees are now in the order of 20 metres high and if uprooted in a cyclone would easily “reach” into the neighbouring properties and damage them.

Resident concerns are heightened at the moment because of the billion dollar storm damage which occurred in Brisbane recently, much of which involved tree damage.

I have raised this matter with staff and quotes for the pruning/removal work were obtained but not actioned. Staff have though accepted the wrong species had been selected for the screening job.

Instead of actioning the pruning staff advised the trees would not be removed citing a big cost of replanting.

This advice in my opinion was off beam because the residents just want the trees pruned from time to time and they accept the existing under storey of smaller trees will provide all the privacy they require.

At moment it is my view Council is being a very poor and disrespectful neighbour because it refuses to prune the very tall and therefore dangerous trees planted by it on the property boundary.

CEO'S COMMENT:

It is understood that the trees referred to by Cr Melchert in this Notice of Motion were selected and planted under Cr Melchert's direction as CEO of the former Douglas Shire Council.

This issue was raised by Cr Melchert in April 2014 and advice was provided to all Councillors through Council's internal administrative processes as follows:

RE : CRM 1164/2014 Removal of large trees in Administration building rear car park

- An inspection of the trees was initially undertaken by Council's team leader open spaces. The trees identified for removal will not respond favourably to heavy pruning. Pruning these large rainforest species trees to a lower height will result in killing the trees, leaving large dead stumps. Should the trees survive, they will re shoot / coppess, resulting in weak limbs susceptible to failure in high winds. Pruning of the trees apart from dead limbing to remove any potential hazards is not considered an option. Therefore a quote to remove the 12 trees identified was obtained (\$9000) pending a decision.
- A further inspection was undertaken by the Team Leader public spaces and discussed in detail with the General Manager Operations. Results as follows:
 - I. Removal of the 12 identified rainforest trees will result in ongoing maintenance costs to DSC , by opening up the canopy and allowing the succession of further rainforest species to take their place. The current situation will be ongoing for years to come.
 - II. To remove trees because they become too large is totally against council policy on how we manage all tree complaints . Our current response to all customers regardless of location or the customer s " dead , dying and dangerous". We do not remove healthy trees for potential weather events. The identified trees are healthy and did not show any signs of failure in the recent cyclonic event (Cyclone ITA).They are not displaying any signs of being dangerous, that would warrant a formal safety inspection to be carried out by a qualified arborist. We do not cut down trees for "What if's". To do so sets a very bad precedent to the rest of the community that when a tree gets too big you can have it cut down. The situation we have in the council car park boundary is no different than any other council managed trees within our shire. For example: Large trees on our nature strip / streetscape, trees adjacent to property that backs onto council easements, esplanades along our creeks, parks and reserves. If a member of the public requested removal of trees in any location for the same reason, the answer would be straight out NO way.
 - III. I do agree with T C Melchert that the trees are of a species that are not suitable in a boundary planting, let alone an urban area car park. The proposed species to be planted in this location should have been flagged as inappropriate in the planning process prior to construction. Therefore should council insist on removing these trees, a long term solution should be implemented. Estimates have been obtained to remove all the vegetation in the rear car park gardens and replace with suitable landscaped / screening gardens. To do so requires total tree and stump removal, replacement of soil, irrigation , plants and mulch. The job costs have been estimated at \$68,000 and proposed as a capital works project in the forthcoming budget for council consideration.

- Yes council is covered for damage caused to property should the trees fall.

Cr Melchert states correctly that quotes were received but not actioned. This is because Council did not allocate funding in the 2014/2105 budget for this purpose.