

GEORGE MUNICIPALITY TREE MANAGEMENT POLICY



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TREE POLICY FOR GEORGE MUNICIPALITY

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DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this policy:

“aftercare” means the tree maintenance actions which are implemented once the tree has been planted;

“arboriculture” means the science and practice of cultivation, management, and study of trees, shrubs, vines, and other perennial woody plants which specifically studies how plants grow and respond to cultural practices and to their environment, including the practice of cultural techniques such as selection, planting, training, fertilization, pest and pathogen control, pruning, shaping, and removal;

“blanking” means the replacement planting of trees in gaps where trees have been lost or died, and infill planting has the same meaning;

“champion trees” is a project that aims to list and protect trees in South African that are of national conservation value;

“City” means the City of George

“Council” means the Council of the George;

“Director” means Director of Community Services under which Parks Department falls;

“indigenous species” means any tree that is indigenous to South Africa including the Western Cape;

“landscape plan” means a site-specific plan of the layout of plants to be planted;

“planting” means the placing of sapling trees or seeds in the ground or container in order for them to grow;

“pruning” means the horticultural and silvicultural practice involving the selective removal of parts of a plant, such as branches, buds, or roots;

“Public Open Space” and **“Public Space”** includes –

(a) a public road, parking area, square, park, recreation ground, sports ground, sanitary lane, open space, beach, shopping centre on municipal land, unused or vacant municipal land or cemetery which has –

(i)	been provided, reserved or set apart for use by the public; or been
(ii)	dedicated to the public;

(b) public transportation operated by service providers for the Municipality but does not include public land that has been leased by the Municipality;

“road reserves” means the municipal land set aside and zoned for the development of roadways and related engineering services;

“root barrier” means patented chemical and/or mechanical guides that redirects tree roots down and away from hardscapes, preventing costly root damage;

“tree health” means all factors (biotic and abiotic) that affect the vigour and productivity of a tree;

“Tree Management” means the protection and maintenance of the existing tree asset base in George, as well as the planning, planting and maintenance of future trees;

“way leave” means an approved right of way given for working over or under another ground or property.

ABBREVIATIONS

CG : City of George

CSI : Corporate Social Investment

GSDf : George Spatial Development Framework

DFFE : Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment

IDP : Integrated Development Plan

IRT : Integrated Rapid Transit

ISA : International Society of Arboriculture

NMT : Non-motorised Transport

POS : Public Open Space

SDS : Social Development Strategy

1. BACKGROUND

The tree management policy supports the Council's vision of "City for a sustainable future". Providing trees in urban areas and planning for parks and green spaces are important to create a sense of place and to enhance the social and public environment. Trees transform neighbourhoods into desirable areas to live, work, and play. Trees can be used to transform open spaces into leafy areas where citizens can relax, reduce the carbon footprint, change roadways into scenic drives, demarcate community gateways and become symbols and frames for city landscapes. In the built environment, trees shield undesirable sights by making buildings more "human" in scale and serve to buffer noise, temperature, sun, and wind, while producing oxygen. In the absence of built structures, trees are tangible features in the historic and cultural landscape.

The strategic frameworks and policies of George emphasise sustainable development, environmental protection and the creation of quality living and work environments. Trees play a critical role in achieving these objectives and therefore trees as valuable environmental assets need to be procured and managed in a manner that will optimise the outcomes of key strategies.

The provision and management of trees within the urban environment is an on-going challenge ,because the protection and survival of trees is threatened due to:

- An increasing demand on land for development.
- Competing social needs resulting in trees being considered a nuisance rather than a benefit in some instances.
- Changing environmental laws that redefine how trees are procured and managed.
- Polyphagous Shot-hole Borer infestations which decimate mature trees and target certain species.

Due to increasing urbanisation demands, tree management must be carefully considered to ensure acceptable tree survival rates, whilst reducing potential risks which trees can pose to people, property, infrastructure and the environment in the event of poor selection of planting sites, tree placements or inappropriate choices of species.

The Tree Policy is a living document that will change as the need arises and circumstances require a change in approach to resolve situation.

This Tree Policy will be applied and utilised for the management of all trees growing on Municipal-owned land and can be utilised by all Municipal departments that deal with the provision or management of trees.

2. DESIRED OUTCOMES

Policy objective

- This policy aims to provide a uniform approach to the management of trees on municipal land within the George Municipal area.
- The implementation of a uniform policy for the three key components:
 - Tree planting
 - Tree removal
 - Maintenance of trees

2.1.2 A UNIFORM CITY-WIDE APPROACH TO TREE MANAGEMENT

- Reduce risks related to *ad hoc* approaches to tree maintenance by various internal and external role-players.
- Manage trees in a professional manner under the guidance of skilled arboriculture professionals.
- Regulate the protection, planting and removal of trees by ensuring an integrated city-wide approach based on sound arboriculture practices.
- Integrated spatial development frameworks and service level agreements between Municipal departments in order to prevent unnecessary damage to trees during construction works or related activities.
- Parks and Recreation will research national and international examples of best-management practices.

2.1.3 EMPHASISE THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF TREES

- Improve understanding and awareness of the importance of lifecycles of trees within the habitats and environments found in George, including their contribution to reducing the Municipality's carbon footprint, together with oxygen production.
- Develop partnerships with suppliers, property developers, ratepayers' organizations, environmental groups (and others) to promote tree planting and the importance of trees within the urban context and promote the protection of arboreal landscapes, tree lanes and tree avenues of heritage significance.
- Special attention should be drawn to the calming effect of trees together with the ecosystem services they provide for zoological diversity.

3. STRATEGIC INTENT

The strategic intent of the policy is to give effect and align with the Municipality's approach to management and more importantly to give impetus to the Integrated Development Plan, and the George Spatial Development Framework.

3.1 INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The diverse value of trees makes it a contributor to all the strategic pillars of the IDP but in particular to;

To develop a focused strategy on greening the city.

A greener George - trees contribute to creating quality living and work environments which in turn attracts businesses and skills to the region. Trees as part of urban landscapes and streetscapes contribute significantly to the aesthetic beauty of our city and play a role in the socioeconomics of the urban environment, which is important for the tourism industry.

The management of trees in the urban environment is pivotal to creating improved quality of life for people within the urban context.

Addressing the lack of trees in certain areas of George will reduce the stark contrast between the areas that have, and those that do not have the benefit of trees and contribute towards an environment where people feel included and have a sense of belonging.

3.2 GEORGE SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The George Spatial Development Framework (GSDF) seeks to develop a focused strategy on greening the city (Strategic goal 2; Safe, Clean and Green). This Strategy has implications for the Tree Management Policy, particularly with reference to enhancing the value of heritage resources and scenic routes and promoting city-wide destination places.

4. POLICY PARAMETERS

The core focus of this policy is the management of trees that grow on Municipal-owned land and includes Municipal-owned land that is leased to individuals or groups. This policy excludes the management of trees that grow on private land unless it impacts on public places and public open spaces.

This policy will consider the management requirement related to the full life-cycle of a tree, the conditions for tree removals, trees growing within the urban environment and the appropriateness of the selection of species, planting locations and local contexts.

This policy deals with trees, forest and arboriculture elements, but it does not deal with other horticultural elements such as shrubs, groundcovers and other flowering plants.

5. ROLE-PLAYERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

5.1 INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Parks and Recreation is the lead section responsible for tree management including streetscapes and avenue planting, cluster planting, historic trees and all other occurrences of trees within the city. However, trees occur in various places and therefore the respective landowner Departments in the Municipality must manage the trees within their areas of responsibility in accordance with this policy.

Parks and Recreation may conclude service level agreements with all relevant departments should they need assistance with the management of trees on their properties. The following internal departments are responsible for tree management: -

Parks & Recreation - Planting and maintenance of trees in nature reserves and other nature conservation areas. Inputs into landscape plans submitted by developers and other stakeholders for Municipal approval. Protection and conservation of trees with heritage, cultural and environmental value.

Electrotechnical Services - Maintenance of trees under overhead electrical cables or streetlights.

Civil Engineering Services - Service level agreements with Parks and Recreation with respect to trees planted in road reserves, and the management of trees in rivers and other storm water catchment areas.

Management of trees within water catchment areas. Regulation of the use of water for the management and maintenance of trees.

Sports Development - Maintenance of trees on formal sports fields, and at other recreation facilities.

Human Settlements - Planning to plant trees and create landscapes in human settlements (inclusive of road reserves), and planting and management of trees on municipal housing estates, management of alien vegetation.

Planning and Development- Town Planning applications, OSCA permits, and building permits.

Law Enforcement - Enforcement of by-laws and other legal regulations relating to the environment.

Refuse removal and waste management- To protect the health, well-being of the environment by providing reasonable measures for reducing, re-using, recycling and recovering of waste as per the National Environment Management Waste Act of 2008.

5.2 EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

There are many external stakeholders and role-players, most of who are interested in the provision, availability and benefits of trees and not necessarily in the management and maintenance thereof. The following lists some of the stakeholders and role-players that the municipality will engage with regarding tree management: -

Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries
South African National Biodiversity Institute
Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute
Researchers
General Public
Developers and private companies
Environmental Groups

NGOs and community groupings
Schools and institutions of higher learning
Nursery Traders
Landscaping Industry
Cape Nature

6. LEGISLATION:

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996
Water Services Act, 1997 (Act 108 of 1997)
National Environmental Management Act, 1998 (Act 107 of 1998)
National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, 2004 (Act 10 of 2004)
Conservation of Agricultural Resource Act, 1983 (Act 43 of 1983)
Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act, 2003, (Act 56 of 2003)
Public Open spaces By-law, 2010)
Forest Act, 1998 (Act 84 of 1998)
Western Cape Land Use Planning Ordinance No. 15 of 1985 (LUPO)
National Heritage Resources Act, 1999 (Act 25 of 1999) Input into the management and control of trees on Municipal land as required by the Conservation and Agricultural Resources Act 43 of 1983;

7. POLICY DIRECTIVES

The following are the key elements of this policy and must be considered as a single tree management system, namely:

- Tree planting
- Tree removal
- Tree maintenance

7.1 TREE PLANTING

7.1.1 PLANTING NEW TREES

- Appropriate planting pallets that prioritise the planting of locally indigenous vegetation adapted to local climatic conditions and drought resistant trees in POS, road reserves and within new developments.
- Integrated greening and tree planting programmes in new housing developments.
- Engagement with all stakeholders and role-players responsible for planting trees on Municipal land to ensure alignment and integration of tree planting initiatives.
- Facilitate and encourage the planting of trees by residents and other stakeholders wherever and whenever possible.
- The Municipality shall plan for the planting of new trees.
- When choosing tree species consideration should be given to available planting space and the size of the mature tree.

- The Parks and Recreation Section will facilitate the planting of new trees by any other department and/or residents of George in public spaces.
- Areas prioritised for planting will be based on urban planning proposals, new areas for human settlement, existing residential and business areas, and areas where the tree canopy is very limited or non-existent.
- New tree planting can also take place when developers, residents or other parties request to plant trees within their municipal area on municipal land. These requests will be processed via the Parks and Recreation Department using Indemnity forms for the planting of new trees.
- The planting of new trees does not exclude the use of appropriate exotic species if they are non-invasive and are suited to local conditions and as per the NEMBA regulations.
- It is important to promote effective water resource management and conservation. It is therefore important to promote the planting of indigenous and other drought-tolerant plants to ensure the optimum use of our limited water resources.
- Trees to be planted as per the annexure for the guidelines which is provided by the Parks & Recreation section

7.1.2 REPLACEMENT PLANTING

- Blanking or planting of replacement trees may be done in a planned or an *ad hoc* manner.
- Where trees die or are damaged due to vandalism, lightning or the impact of human activity the individual tree can be removed and recorded in a database and replaced with a new suitably appropriate tree, when the tree planting programme takes place.
- Replacement planting can also take place where existing streetscapes or avenues of trees are ageing, and new trees are inter-planted to ensure that as a tree comes to the end of its natural life-cycle the aesthetic view of the streetscape or avenue is not negatively impacted on.
- Replacement planting will take place when problematic trees must be removed due to the damage caused to the public and private property, in line with the policy.

7.1.4 TREE(S) REQUESTED BY RESIDENTS

- Depending on funds and the availability of suitable material, the Parks and Recreation section shall annually plant trees along sidewalks during suitable planting seasons in residential areas on condition that the requestors accept responsibility for their watering. Pruning of trees will be done by the Parks and Recreation if, and when required.
- Residents may apply for trees to be planted in their neighbourhood. Applications must be made on a prescribed form that can be obtained at the Parks & Recreation section.
- To ensure adequate aftercare of trees, only signed applications received on the prescribed form from individual property owners will be considered. The prescribed form must include

instructions about after care and a maintenance agreement. The contents of this form must be communicated verbally in the event of the applicant not being able to read.

- Tree planting is generally undertaken during the rainy season which has two peaks in George from March to April and from August to October of each year. Planting during warmer summer months is not encouraged.
- Residents may indicate their preference for tree species to be planted from the list added as Annexure A.
- On pavements not wide enough to accommodate trees, a tree donation for adjacent private property may be provided at the discretion of the Director, Community Services or his/her delegated authority. Trees may be donated on request from schools and community greening projects, according to the Municipal policy regarding donations and in accordance with the Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act, 2003.

7.1.5 TREES PLANTED BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

- Owners of properties will be permitted to plant trees on sidewalk or street boundaries after the necessary approval in writing has been obtained from the Director, Community Services or his/her delegated authority.
- The property owner must be informed that such trees, once planted on municipal land, become the property of the Municipality but their maintenance (including root management, tree pruning) remains the responsibility of the property owner.
- In the event of trees being planted on public land without authority, the Parks & Recreation Section will have the tree removed if, in its opinion, it will cause danger to persons or property in the future, or violates the conditions mentioned under "Tree Pruning and Removal".
- Trees on Municipal-owned land that has been leased out, are the responsibility of the lessee or internal municipal departments, but approval for any work on such trees must first be obtained from the Director: Community Services or his/her delegated authority in writing, in accordance with this policy.

7.2 TREE REMOVAL

7.2.1 CIRCUMSTANCES FOR PRUNING AND REMOVAL

- The premise that underpins the management of trees in George is that all trees are valuable and therefore any request or decisions for removal of trees need to be carefully considered on a case by case basis by the Parks and Recreation section.
- No person may prune or remove a tree planted on Municipal land without prior authority from the Parks and Recreation Department. In the event of a person or persons being guilty of such an act, the municipality may impose the necessary fines as a result of contravention.
- The Municipality may undertake planned tree removals for purposes of legislative compliance and/or public safety and where it is in the interest of the environment.

- Trees declared as a protected species in terms of the Forest Act, 1998 (Act 84 of 1998) ,may not be pruned or removed without the permission from the Minister of Forestry Fisheries and the Environment.
- In order to prevent unnecessary damage to trees during construction work, all developers and utility companies/contractors should obtain a way leave from Parks and Recreation prior to commencing construction work.
- Pruning or removal of all trees on municipal property shall be done by Parks and Recreation or its appointed service providers.
- Requests for pruning/removals should be directed to the Director: Community Services or his/her delegated for the particular area where the tree is located.
- Pruning or removal of trees on private property or state-owned land where these trees interfere with overhead or underground services is not the responsibility of Park and Recreation, but Parks and Recreation will give guidance where required.
- Champion Trees will have special protected status in terms of the National Forests Act of 1998. No such trees may be cut, disturbed or damaged without a license. A strict approach will be taken to protection, and licenses will be issued only under exceptional circumstances, such as a tree posing a danger to life or property. Licences for the removal or pruning of champion trees are only obtainable from the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment and not from the Municipality.

Park and Recreation shall consider the following factors before pruning:

- Safety (public, staff, contractors and property);
- Legal factors- upon written request for the removal of any offending branches or roots encroaching upon the complainant's property;

South Africa Road Safety Manual guidelines.

No tree located on Public Open Space or road reserves is to be removed unless it presents a threat to human life or property, or if the tree has died.

Exceptions are:-

Trees classified as "declared weeds" (Category 1) in terms of the Conservation of Agriculture Resources Act, 1983 and the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act,2004;

Trees that are diseased beyond effective arboriculture remedial work.

Trees causing a traffic, electrical or health hazard.

Trees that interfere with essential services where no other suitable alternatives can be found.

Road widening projects where no alternate routes are available.

Where trees need to be removed for reasons mentioned above, suitable replacements shall be considered by Parks and Recreation where applicable.

7.2.2 TREES PRUNED ONLY FOR SOUND ARBORICULTURAL REASONS.

Pruning or removal will be considered where:

- trees cause damage to structures.
- trees obstruct pedestrian and/or vehicular movement or impedes traffic sight lines.
- trees obstructing solar powered electricity and heating devices.

Parks and recreation may refuse to prune or remove trees where complaints received relate to:

- Interference with radio, TV and internet reception.
- Shedding of leaves, fruits, seeds or any other plant material.
- Allergic reactions.
- Causing excessive shade.
- View obstruction (other than reducing visibility of traffic sight lines) including pedestrian movement.
- Obscuring private advertising boards and signs (other than public signage).
- Causing a nuisance in respect of swimming pools.
- Hampering the growth of other plants; or
- Attracting insects, birds or bats and other creatures because of its flowers and/or fruit.

7.2.3 REMOVAL OF TREES ON MUNICIPAL OPEN SPACE AND ROAD RESERVES

- The level to which a tree will be cut may be a subject for dispute. Traditionally trees are cut leaving a stump projecting from the ground where this could be done without hazard to the public or where the stump did not interfere with proposed road works.
- Should the entire stump be removed, this must be disposed of at a Municipal disposal site. It is incumbent upon the Municipality to remove a tree which constitutes a hazard to the public or an obstruction, to a level where such hazard or obstruction is eliminated.
- Where it is not on a public open space, the Parks and Recreation section can facilitate the removals of such tree hazards on behalf of other Municipal departments.
- Trees will be considered for removal on request of adjacent property owners for vehicle access, subject to pre-approval by Parks and Recreation after building plans are submitted. The applicant will be held liable for the cost of removal as well as for the aesthetic loss to the environment.

7.2.4 REMOVAL OF FALLEN TREES

- In the event of a tree falling on Municipal land, emergency department teams will ensure the removal of such a tree/s, within a reasonable time frame.
- The Parks and Recreation Department will respond in the event of fallen trees on public land posing a threat or endangering persons or property. Such tree/s will be removed, if necessary, by the Parks and Recreation Department.
- In an emergency where a tree on private property has fallen, the Parks and Recreation Department, with authorisation from the Director Community Services, may remove the tree in order to ensure the safety of persons and property. This action will be taken in conjunction with the George Disaster Risk Management Section in the Emergency Services Department.

7.3 TREE PROTECTION AND MAINTENANCE

- All trees planted within the Municipality shall have a maintenance plan with a particular focus on the first three years of the trees' life-cycle, to ensure the survival of the newly planted trees.
- The Parks and Recreation section will develop a Tree Work Procedures document for the Municipality of George following the approval of the Tree Management Policy

7.4 AWARENESS AND PROMOTION

- An education and awareness programme shall be developed to create greater awareness with regards to the Environmental and Heritage importance of trees within the urban context and will be implemented by Parks and Recreation.
- As part of awareness-raising, the Municipality will participate in local and national programmes and competitions relating to trees.
- Parks and Recreation to continue consultation with the Heritage authorities, prior to any work conducted on trees listed on any Heritage inventory, in order to ascertain if a heritage process is applicable.
- Building Inspectors must consult with Parks & Recreation prior to authorising the removal of trees on Municipal-owned property.

8. TREE ASSET MAPPING AND VALUATION

For George Municipality to understand the economic, heritage, environmental and social value of its tree asset base, where possible existing trees need to be mapped and a valuation method established. A tree mapping project was started in 2019 on the biology platform iNaturalist. (<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/street-trees-of-the-george-municipality-urban-edge>) Photos of all trees will be uploaded here where current scientific names can be sourced from international experts.

The South African Tree Appraisal Method provides a formula for the valuation of individual trees. The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) guide for plant appraisal is also accepted. The Parks and Recreation section will make use of these approved methods when valuating trees.

9. CHAMPION TREES

- Champion trees are trees of exceptional importance that deserve national protection because of their remarkable size, age, aesthetic, cultural, historic or tourism value. In line with the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment, Champion Trees Project, the Parks and Recreation section will refer to database of Champion Trees within George municipal boundaries.
- The Parks and Recreation will on an annual basis update the list Champion trees.
- Champion Trees will have special protected status in terms of the National Forests Act of 1998. No such trees may be cut, disturbed or damaged without a license.
- A strict approach will be taken to protecting them, and licenses will be issued only under exceptional circumstances, such as a tree posing a danger to life or property. Licences for the removal or pruning of champion trees are only obtainable from the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and the Environment and not from the George Municipality.
- Additional protective measures may be necessary for some Champion trees, such as the erection of fencing enclosures.

10. IMPACT STREETSCAPES AND TREE AVENUES

Parks and Recreation will continue to strive for the development and protection of special streetscapes and tree avenues which have historic significance and positive visual impact.

11. MANAGE EMERGING BIOLOGICAL THREATS

Emerging biological threats like Polyphagous Shot hole Borer will be managed by Parks and Recreation within pre scribed guidelines as per DFFE.

12. TREE COMMITTEE

Parks and Recreation will identify relevant role players in the green sector together with knowledgeable citizens of George and convene to form a tree committee to decide on tree issues within the area covered by the George Municipality.

1. The composition of the committee should comprise:
 - a. 4-5 community members
 - b. Minimum 1 council member
 - c. Minimum 2 administration personnel
2. The committee will consist of one council member representative (nominally Portfolio Councillor Community Services).
3. The composition is not fixed and may be changed as the need arises.
4. The committee will act as an advisory panel.
5. Any decisions taken are to be treated as recommendations of the committee and all decisions are pending the approval of the Director: Community Services or his/her delegated authority. The final decision in any matter shall always reside with George Municipality and its duly appointed representatives.

13. MONITORING AND REVIEW

This policy will be subject to annual monitoring to assess progress and to pick up any emerging issues. A more thorough review of the policy will be undertaken every five years to adjust and incorporate any new changes in legislation, local policy, working practices or technical developments which may arise.

