

ADDENDUM

4.1 RESPONSE TO PREVIOUS PUBLIC QUESTIONS TAKEN ON NOTICE

This addendum provides responses to public questions taken on notice at the 25 July 2018 Ordinary Meeting of Council.

Mr Rick Ensley of 32 Merchant Street, Margaret River, asked the following questions at the 25 July 2018 Ordinary Meeting of Council, in relation to land stewardship and operations use:

Q1: How much times does it take to mow this area, including transport of equipment to site, putting up signs, etc.?

A1: It typically takes two full days to mow the entire 15 acres. This time includes transport to site and from site, placement of signs, conducting machine preparation and pre-start checks and maintenance as well as site & machinery safety assessments, completion of all site safety requirements and negotiating around mature roadside vegetation.

Q2: What would the cost be to mow this area, including the labour, backup admin, fuel, equipment, maintenance / depreciation, etc.?

A2: Based on 2017/18 rates, the all-inclusive cost is 2 cents per square metre.

Q3: How many times per year is this area mowed?

A3: Based on inspection and vegetation growth-affecting variations of environmental conditions, the area is mowed up to six times a year.

Q4: How much biomass might have been taken off in this recent mowing?

A4: None, since the area has not been formally mowed since 30 April 2018 and all biomass remained on-site. Shire staff attended the site the other day, but not to actually mow the area. Staff were undergoing an induction process into the Shire's new tractor and attachment. This new tractor uses a flail mower typically designed to deal with heavier grass/scrub. This site was chosen due to the close proximity to the Shire's Operations Centre and the material found on site, containing sticks and small branches in an area with very limited. A trial was undertaken to ascertain whether the mower could successfully break up this material into organic mulch. The remainder of the area was only slashed for a limited time period and over a small area to ensure all operators were successfully inducted into the new machine and attachment.

Q5: I note that this Reserve area drains into a Shire prioritised revegetation project, not a 'Friends of' or Nature Conservation site, so same exact Department. I have previously called attention to the excessive runoff sediment and erosion through the planting caused by this mowing. If, in the CEO's words, the Shire is a "learning organisation", why does it continue to waste money, resources, and soil to wash its own plants into the creek?

A5: During significant rain events, soil permeability becomes insufficient to infiltrate all rainfall into the ground, water pools at the surface and at some point there will be overland flow across land, whether the catchment is vegetated or not. This is a natural occurrence and relates to excess rainfall received in storm events which exceed the infiltration capacity of the soil. Vegetation increases surface roughness and thereby reduces flow velocities, aids in evapotranspiration and assists in maintaining soil permeability via the plant root system. It also improves soil stability, acts as a filter and thereby assists in controlling erosion to a certain degree. However, erosion is also a natural process; yet, undeniable heavily influenced by human activity, making excessive erosion one of the most significant environmental problems worldwide and causing sedimentation of waterways and eutrophication of water bodies.

In this instance, the overland flow across the vegetated portion of the reserve is minimal and is not causing excessive or significant erosion or loss of plants, even in instances where very heavy rains are experienced. As expected, there is some overland along the concrete pathway which has deposited a very small amount of sediment on the edge of the revegetation project. The majority of the erosion and sedimentation affecting the revegetation and Yalgardup Brook is caused by overland flow coming from an incised firebreak on adjoining private property. The Shire cannot undertake restoration works on private land; however, the foreshore revegetation project will assist to improve foreshore health, act as a bio-filter, limit the impacts of erosion and naturally manage transported sediments over time. The Shire's mowing and maintenance operations within the reserve are not adversely contributing to the erosion and sedimentation load.

Q6: Where is the evidence that there is a ratepayer demand for this 'level of service' or are the mowing levels in this and similar Reserves justified by anachronistic European-derived preceptions of tidiness and order?

A6: The Shire's 2016 Community Survey mailed to 4000 residential and business ratepayers (both owner occupiers and absentee owners) randomly selected from the Shire's rate roll confirmed a 88% net satisfaction with the maintenance of parks, gardens and reserves as well as 83% net satisfaction with the general presentation of streets.

Q7: Ignoring Town Centre focal points like Reuther and Memorial Parks where the public may expect this look, how much money could the Department save each year if it reduced mowing frequency by 25% and 50% from current levels? Why are we paying for such unnecessary works at this time of year especially when any taller vegetation and ground cover is good biological filter and prevents erosion?

A7: As indicated above, the Shire did attend to the site for the purpose of a necessary induction and trial of new machinery, not to formally mow the entire area. A reduction in the level of service for streetscape, parks and reserve maintenance, such as via a reduced mowing frequency, is not supported and not justified based on community survey results. Annually the Shire is spending around \$400k on mowing activities, inclusive of all labour, plant costs and overheads. This relates to all mowing, including sporting ovals, signature areas, parks, selected verges, etc. and equates to 15.5% of the total operating budget for the Shire's Parks and Gardens team. In recent years, the Shire has converted large areas of turf in the Shires lower order parks to mulched areas (Hillier Dr, Georgette Dr, Ryans Rd, Chardonnay Ave to name but a few). This has reduced the turfed area in each park by up to a third. Furthermore, under consideration of CPTED principles, we have also planted out large open areas in some parks, returning these areas back to natural bush. This has resulted in reduced areas for mowing, less need for weed control and a better outcome for local habitat, whilst maintaining the amenity of the area and expectations of the community for recreational useability of parks. However, keeping lawns and grassed areas under control on a rotational basis, significantly assists with weed management. This practice keeps the weed growth from maturing to seed and the turf outcompetes weeds due to more rigorous growth. The Shire has have been able to skip numerous herbicide applications as a result of this approach. Reduced mowing frequencies would likely result in an increase of weed infestations, in return requiring more spraying with herbicides. Finally, frequent maintenance also aids in appropriate fire risk management.