Open Space & Roadside Mowing Service Review

Operations Unit
October 2017
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Executive Summary

Background

Moorabool Shire Council is a fast growing, semi-rural municipality, responsible for the provision of maintenance services for a variety of Council assets and seeks to provide clean, safe and fit for purpose recreation spaces for residents and visitors alike. Council also provides a range of services in roads, waste and many other areas.

A Service review has been conducted of Council’s Open Space maintenance delivered through the Council’s Operations Unit to inform the recently drafted Open Space Maintenance Management Plan (OSMMP). The OSMMP identifies responsibilities, maintenance standards and inspection regimes required to manage the Shire’s open space assets into the future.

A review of the provision of services has been prompted by an increased expectation from the community for improvement in service levels and the need to clearly identify maintenance priorities for an ever-increasing asset base. Previously, similar levels of service have been applied across other assets irrespective of need. This type of service provision can be inefficient, unsustainable and does not always reflect community expectation.

Scope of the review

The purpose of this review is to provide an overview of the open space mowing services currently provided by Council and the options for Council in relation to service delivery into the future.

Typically a service review is undertaken to determine whether we wish to provide this particular service to the community, and the associated impacts with changes to service delivery. In this instance, it is widely accepted that Council provide the service of open space and roadside maintenance within the municipality. Given this, a number of options were explored with consideration to current staffing levels and service levels we are providing the community.

Options

The following options were modelled in this service review:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPTIONS</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Option 1</td>
<td>The implementation of peak/off peak maintenance frequencies that would allow amendments to the service levels due to seasonal variation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 2</td>
<td>Consideration of open space maintenance requirements of land that will be gifted to Council in the near future. That is, open space that has been developed and is currently under maintenance control of the developer. A review of current developments has also occurred, including Stonehill and the recently rezoned Underbank Estate that will see significant open space gifted to Council in the coming years. As such, it is imperative staffing requirements are reviewed on an annual basis to ensure there is adequate capacity within the team to undertake maintenance activities and ensure service levels are maintained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 3</td>
<td>Implementation of roadsides ‘fit to principles’ assessment. An assessment of roadside slashing has occurred against the general ‘principles for maintenance’ within road reserves as detailed below;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Council owned/managed land will be maintained
2. All road reserves adjacent to Council owned/managed land will be maintained in conjunction with the reserve
3. All road reserves abutting public authority land will be maintained (urban)
4. Land with no continuous street frontages, adjoining private property, will be maintained (urban)
5. Road reserves where there is residential frontage will not be maintained
6. Avenues of Honour on Council owned/managed land will be maintained
7. Town entrances and centres will be maintained
8. Roadside meeting the principles above will be serviced as per the adopted classification

The assessment of currently maintained road sides against the maintenance principles above would result in 384 roads of the 591 roads removed from the register (equating to 65%).

Consideration was also given to the increased mowing frequencies of entrances to various towns below;
- Blackwood
- Bungaree
- Dunnstown
- Elaine
- Gordon
- Greendale
- Lal Lal
- Mount Egerton
- Myrniong
- Wallace

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option 4</th>
<th>Consideration of slashing roadsides in the Wildfire Management Overlay (WMO). The WMO is a planning control designed to ensure that protection measures are included where new development occurs, to reduce the risk of wildfire threat to people and property.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The areas covered by the Overlay are generally identified by the Country Fire Authority (CFA) as being land capable of supporting a wildfire which would pose a significant threat to life and property. The main factors which determine the level of risk associated with wildfire include contour, orientation, vegetation density and type.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An assessment has been undertaken that identifies an estimated 335km of our road network is within the WMO, of which we currently mow 115km.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Option 5 | Consideration of slashing roadsides based on the road network hierarchy, and consideration to providing an annual amenity mow to our Trunk Collector and Collector roads within the Shire. |
1.0 Scope

1.1 Project Team and resources

Project Owner – Phil Jeffrey, General Manager Infrastructure
Project Manager – Sam Romaszko, Manager Operations (Acting)
Project Contributors:

- Finance Staff
- Parks & Gardens Staff

The review of the service has been undertaken in-house.

1.2 Project Scope

The scope of this review includes:

- Historical and current service provision;
- Analysis of Council’s current position;
- Options for consideration; and
- Financial implications.

2.0 Open Space Maintenance

2.1 Purpose of service

Council is responsible for the provision of maintenance services for a variety of Council assets, and seeks to provide clean, safe and fit for purpose recreation spaces for both residents and visitors. Council also provides a range of services in waste, roads and many other areas.

Open space maintenance generally consists of the following areas;

- Grass mowing (reserves)
- Grass mowing (roadsides)
- Garden Bed Maintenance
- Sanitary Cleaning
- Playground Maintenance
- Furniture Maintenance
- Barbeque Maintenance
- Pest Control
- Weed Treatment
- Active Sportsground Maintenance
- Irrigation System Maintenance

2.2 Open Space Maintenance Management Plan (Draft)

A draft Open Space Maintenance Management Plan (OSMMP) has been developed to define the service levels associated with open space within the Shire where previously a published management plan for the provision of this service to the community had not been in place.
A review of the provision of services has been prompted by an increased expectation from the community for improvement in service levels and the need to clearly identify maintenance priorities for an ever-increasing asset base. Previously, similar levels of service have been applied across other assets irrespective of need. This type of service provision can be inefficient, unsustainable and does not always reflect community expectation.

The OSMMP aims to narrow the gap between current service levels and community expectations, remove ad hoc reactive service provision and provide the community with certainty and predictability in asset servicing. In addition, the plan seeks to provide a level of service that maintains the quality and condition of Council’s assets.

Specifically, the OSMMP defines:
- the assets which Council has maintenance and cleaning responsibilities on behalf of the community
- the responsibilities of Council in relation to management and maintenance of the assets for maintenance purposes
- the standards of performance and frequencies which Council can afford.
- cost effectiveness and best value

The OSMMP has been developed to:
- Define the hierarchy of maintenance services
- Mitigate risk and manage civil liability
- Demonstrate Council is responsibly managing the maintenance service
- Manage community expectations in relation to required maintenance services

2.3 Assessment of current practices

An assessment of our current maintenance activities has occurred throughout the development of the draft OSMMP, with a number of open space land parcels identified as not requiring a mowing service due to topography or lack of vegetation.

An assessment of roadside mowing has also occurred. A number of roadsides not requiring maintenance due to an absence of vegetation has been identified.

Further to this, the review has identified a number of open space areas that have a Committee of Management that we historically maintain and question whether our approach is consistent.

Staffing

Current staffing levels with the Parks team associated with mowing include 9 full time employees (9EFT) and 2 apprentices that provide support to the inhouse teams, along with with contractors who are engaged to perform particular activities that allows the organisation to sustain our current service levels. An estimated $306,000 is spent on external contractors to achieve the current service levels we are providing the community.

Financial Overview - Current
2.4 Documentation of Service Levels

One of the desired outcomes is for the organisation to achieve satisfaction from its community for the service levels and cost of the services it provides. The services provided must be financially sustainable and affordable.

Existing service levels have been reviewed and a hierarchy of open space and roadsides developed. Open Space and roadside assets have been classified based on their asset type and hierarchy, and are detailed below;

Table A.1 Classification of Open Space

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSET TYPE</th>
<th>HIERARCHY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Sports Fields</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear Linkages</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undeveloped Land</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation Land</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B.1 Classification of Roadsides

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSET TYPE</th>
<th>HIERARCHY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town Centres</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town Entrances</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road Reserves</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roadends</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority Access/Egress Roads</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Fire Suppression Roads</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Control Line Roads</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An associated maintenance frequency has then been applied to particular classifications and can be found in appendices to the draft OSMMP.

2.5 Implementation of OSMMP (Draft)

A review of current maintenance frequencies has occurred relating to open space (amenity) mowing and roadside mowing/slashing activities within the Shire.
Of Council’s public land, a total of 214ha (or 32%) of open space is currently maintained by MSC with the internal parks team mowing 125ha and external contractors mowing 89ha.

Of Council’s 1440km road network, a total of 583km (or 41%) currently receive a roadside mowing or slashing service. This equates to 591 individual locations, with a combination of amenity mowing and fire prevention activities occurring.

The draft OSMMP aims to define a classification of open space and roadsides based on their asset type and hierarchy, and apply an associated maintenance frequency to specific classifications.

2.6 Results of the Annual Community Satisfaction Survey 2017

The 2017 Community Satisfaction Survey showed a decline on the measures of appearance of public areas. This result is below both the state-wide and large rural council averages. However, while there is room for improvement on the rural and state-wide scale, appearance of public spaces ranked as the second best performing service that Council provides, behind waste management.

This service is rated as the fourth most important service by residents. There was an 11 point margin where stated importance exceeds rated performance (75 – 64). It was recommended that Council pay particular attention to areas where this margin exceeds 10 points.

![Figure 1. Individual Service Areas Index Score Summary, Importance vs. Performance.](image)

*Source: JWS Summary of Research, Community Satisfaction Survey 2017 – Moorabool Shire Council.*
2.7 Survey of our Customers – Community Engagement

Information obtained from Council’s Community Satisfaction Survey (2017) and a review of historic requests within Council’s Customer Request Management System have been used to inform the current service levels as detailed within the draft OSMMP.

It is proposed that further community engagement on the draft OSMMP be undertaken to ensure community views on proposed service levels are considered.

3.0 Service Delivery Options and Modelling

Development of the draft OSMMP has provided an opportunity to undertake a service review relating to Open Space (amenity mowing) and Roadsides (grass slashing).

Typically a service review is undertaken to determine whether we wish to provide this particular service to the community, and the associated impacts with changes to service delivery. In this instance, it is widely accepted that Council provide the service of open space and roadside maintenance within the municipality. Given this, a number of options were explored in relation to service levels with consideration to current staffing levels and service levels we are providing the community.

The service delivery modelling undertaken includes a range of assumptions as detailed below;

- Estimate of mowing hours per site.
- Estimate of travel time to each site.
- Estimate of staff numbers per site.
- Estimated fleet costings.
- Estimated total workable hours. This is based on a 38 hour week and 52 week working year, less 4 weeks annual leave and 2 weeks sick leave, and a 5% allowance for staff meetings, training and servicing of plant and equipment.

Calibration of the model has occurred to reflect current staffing levels and external contractor usage.

3.1 Open Space

Option 1; Implementation of peak/off peak maintenance frequencies

Consideration has been given to the implementation of a peak and off peak maintenance frequency that would see frequencies amended due to seasonal requirements.

The peak mowing season is typically August-December and April-May (7 months in total). In the event an off peak frequency is introduced, frequencies would be lengthened by 1 week (ie – 2 weeks to 3 weeks) and see activities such as grass mowing and litter collection occur on a less frequent basis.

However, in the event peak and off peak maintenance frequencies were introduced, this would provide additional capacity during the off peak season to undertake activities including mulching,
minor park improvements and tree maintenance activities that are typically undertaken on an infrequent basis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CURRENT</th>
<th>OSMMP</th>
<th>Peak/Off Peak frequencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTE Required (Total)</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Costs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Cost Staff-time (total)</td>
<td>$703,113</td>
<td>$676,038</td>
<td>$598,912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Plant Costs (total)</td>
<td>$453,168</td>
<td>$437,075</td>
<td>$388,637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Contractor Charge</td>
<td>$306,700</td>
<td>$337,192</td>
<td>$332,303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (total)</strong></td>
<td>$1,462,981</td>
<td>$1,450,305</td>
<td>$1,319,852</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures above include reserve mowing, roadside slashing, garden bed maintenance and sports field mowing services.

Although this is the model outcome above, what this demonstrates is that the implementation of off peak frequencies would see capacity built within the team and allow maintenance of open space reserves currently undertaken by contractors, maintained by council staff. This would see the current contractor budget allocation transferred to staff time.

**Recommendation;**

- Option 1 ‘Implementation of peak/off peak maintenance frequencies’ be implemented
- That a business case be developed to investigate undertaking sports field maintenance in house.

**Option 2; Consideration of future development**

Consideration has been given to open space maintenance requirements of land that will be gifted to Council in the near future. That is, open space that has been developed and is currently under maintenance control of the developer. Open space within the following developments is due for handover in the next 12 months;

- Mason Views Development
- Underbank Development
- Riverbend Development
- Essence Development
- Stonehill Development

As assessment has been undertaken that identifies an estimated 0.2EFT staffing requirement is essential following completion of works to maintain this open space.

A review of current developments has also occurred, including Stonehill Estate and the recently rezoned Underbank Estate that will see significant open space gifted to Council in the coming years.
As such, it is imperative staffing requirements are reviewed on an annual basis to ensure there is adequate capacity within the team to undertake maintenance activities and ensure service levels are maintained.

**Recommendation:**

- Additional resources associated with implementation of Option 2 is dependant on the outcome of Option 1.

### 3.2 Roadsides

**Option 3; Implementation of Roadsides ‘Fit to Principles’ assessment**

An assessment has been undertaken of roadsides we currently mow in both rural and urban areas. Upon further discussion with staff as to why we mow various areas, it become apparent an adhoc approach has been applied in the past and activities being undertaken were historical agreements, locations that had multiple complaints from residents or councillor requests. It is viewed by officers that this model is unsustainable moving forward. Given this, officers have developed general principles for maintenance to streamline this process.

An assessment of roadsides has occurred against the proposed ‘principles for maintenance’ within road reserves as detailed below.

**Principles for Maintenance**

1. Council owned/managed land will be maintained
2. All road reserves adjacent to Council owned/managed land will be maintained in conjunction with the reserve
3. All road reserves abutting public authority land will be maintained (urban)
4. Land with no street frontages, adjoining private property, will be maintained (urban)
5. Road reserves where there is residential frontage will not be maintained
6. Avenues of Honour on Council owned/managed land will be maintained
7. Town entrances will be maintained
8. Roadsides meeting the principles above will be serviced as per the adopted classification

The assessment of currently maintained roadsides against the maintenance principles above will see 384 roads of the 591 roads removed from the register (equating to 65%).

As an offset to a significant reduction of roadsides, it is proposed to increase amenity mowing across small towns that will see frequencies increased and various township entrances receive an amenity mowing service. The settlements below are based on the Small Towns Hierarchy within the Small Towns and Settlements Strategy (STS) of 200-2000 population;

- Blackwood
- Bungaree
- Dunnstown
- Elaine
- Gordon
- Greendale
- Lal Lal
- Mount Egerton
- Myrniong
- Wallace
Typically the entrances to various towns above would receive annual maintenance in the form of roadside slashing. This scenario has modelled the small towns above receiving a 6 weekly mow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CURRENT</th>
<th>Implementation of ‘Fit for Principles’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual Cost Staff-time (total)</td>
<td>$275,259</td>
<td>$275,259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Plant Costs (total)</td>
<td>$175,986</td>
<td>$175,986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Contractor Charge</td>
<td>$175,330</td>
<td>$98,387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (total)</strong></td>
<td><strong>$626,575</strong></td>
<td><strong>$549,632</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although this is the model outcome above, what this demonstrates is that the implementation of fit for principles would see all fire management slashing undertaken by contractors (no change), and township amenity mowing undertaken by in house parks crews.

This assessment does not primarily affect staffing numbers given a majority of roadside slashing is currently undertaken by external contractors. Given this, the implementation of this scenario presents a $77,000 external contractor cost saving.

Of this $77,000, it is proposed to reallocate $25,000 of the current contractors budget allocation to a ‘parks furniture maintenance’ budget item that will fund maintenance of park furniture within open space that includes assets such as tables, seating, bollards, drinking fountains. At present, there is no dedicated maintenance budget for assets of this type. The remaining $52,000 contractor budget allocation could be reallocated to the staff budget that would see a transition of mowing services currently undertaken by contractors bought in house and delivered by the internal parks team, as well as provide capacity for maintenance of open space that will be gifted through developments in the coming 12 months (Option 2).

**Recommendation:**

- That Option 3 ‘Roadsides Fit to Principles assessment’ be implemented.
- That Option 2 ‘Consideration of future development’ be implemented, and $52,000 reallocated to the staff budget for this purpose.
- That $25,000 be allocated to a Parks Furniture Maintenance budget.

**Option 4; Consideration of the Bushfire Management Overlay**

The Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO) is a planning control designed to ensure that protection measures are included where new development occurs, to reduce the risk of bushfire threat to people and property. As a result of heightened wildfire awareness municipalities across Victoria appear to be introducing more and more BMOs in areas previously not considered substantial fire risks.

The areas covered by the Overlay are generally identified by the Country Fire Authority (CFA) as being land capable of supporting a bushfire which would pose a significant threat to life and property. The main factors which determine the level of risk associated with wildfire include contour, orientation, vegetation density and type.
An assessment has been undertaken that identifies an estimated 335km of our road network is within the BMO, of which we currently mow 115km. In the event consideration is given to maintain road reserves within the BMO and Municipal Fire Management Plan only, a saving of $45,000 is estimated.

**Recommendation;**

- We do not recommend this option be pursued, as this is not a requirement under our Municipal Fire Management Plan 2014-2017.

**Option 5; Consideration of the road network hierarchy**

A further option has been reviewed that takes into consideration the road network hierarchy. We currently mow 583km of our 1425km road network length.

In the event mowing was undertaken with consideration of the road network hierarchy, and including amenity mowing of our town entrances that would be undertaken by our in house parks team, this would see the relocation of $25,000 to a Parks Furniture Maintenance budget and a present a cost saving of $50,000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROAD HIERARCHY</th>
<th>ROAD NETWORK LENGTH</th>
<th>CURRENTLY MAINTAINING</th>
<th>NOT MAINTAINING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>km</td>
<td>km</td>
<td>km</td>
<td>km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TC</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>9.95</td>
<td>9.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>30.35</td>
<td>18.05</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>274.22</td>
<td>92.79</td>
<td>181.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>553.39</td>
<td>337.28</td>
<td>216.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U1</td>
<td>21.11</td>
<td>8.35</td>
<td>12.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U2</td>
<td>526.43</td>
<td>117.52</td>
<td>408.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>1425.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>583.94</strong></td>
<td><strong>841.16</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Roads within the Municipal Fire Management Plan 2014-2017 would continue to be undertaken by contractors at an estimated cost of $80,000 per annum.

**Recommendation;**

- We do not recommend this option be pursued.
4.0 Recommendations

The primary benefit of the OSMMP is to transparently establish service levels and standards. Two critical aspects to be considered when setting these standards are that they are reasonable and they are always achievable.

Inherent in the notion of reasonable is an acknowledgement that Council does not have unlimited resources or funds. Whilst aspiring to achieve better standards, the primary consideration is that Council sets reasonable standards and is able to meet those commitments.

Given this, a service review has occurred and taken into consideration various scenarios that influence internal staffing and external contractor requirements, with consideration given to current budget limitations and the level of service we provide to the community.

It is recommended that;

- Option 1 ‘Implementation of peak/off peak maintenance frequencies’ be implemented, and current contractor budget allocation transferred to staff time.
- That Option 2 ‘Consideration of future development’ be implemented, using staff time savings in Option 1.
- That Option 3 ‘Roadsides Fit to Principles assessment’ be implemented following community engagement process.
- That $25,000 be allocated to a Parks Furniture Maintenance budget.
- Bring all mowing services in house, other than fire slashing and sports field mowing.
- That a business case be developed to investigate undertaking sports field maintenance in house.

The staff and budget outcome of the above recommendation is;

- Full time equivalent staff will be 10.5EFT
- A reduction in contractor costs to $158,000
- An overall budget saving of $52,813
- Overall budget implication as per the table below

Financial Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Current</th>
<th>Recommended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual Cost Staff-time (total)</td>
<td>$703,113</td>
<td>$744,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Plant Costs (total)</td>
<td>$453,168</td>
<td>$483,168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Contractor Charge</td>
<td>$306,700</td>
<td>$158,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks Furniture Maintenance</td>
<td>$ -</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,462,981</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,410,168</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Option 3
Implementation of Roadsides ‘Fit for Principles’ assessment
Option 4
Consideration of the Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO)
Option 5
Consideration of the road network hierarchy