



WACRA commends council's budget bids that address the pressing issue of our climate crisis. These include such things as electrifying, conversion to LEDs, improving environmental standards for buildings, education through AdaptWest projects etc. \$200,000, or 4% of the budget bids, has also been proposed for additional tree planting on council land.

But such climate-positive budget bids represent only **11%** of the total budget allocated to new initiatives, and a much smaller percentage of the overall council spend including operational costs. Nearly **90%** of proposed initiatives have **no** positive impact on effects from climate change now and in the future – the most critical task council must address.

WACRA believes that this level of expenditure does not reflect the importance of addressing climate change shown in council's other policies. These include council's 2019 declaration of a Climate Emergency, the Growing Green Tree Canopy Improvement Strategy, Council's Transport Plan, AdaptWest, and council joining the national Cities Power Partnerships. For a greater understanding of our climate emergency, particularly for new councillors, WACRA is happy to collaborate with council in organising a workshop on the 8th or 22nd May, prior to the budget finalisation. This could involve a well-known climate commentator such as Sophie Thomson or Professor Chris Daniels from Green Adelaide.

The budget's proposed bid to purchase \$160,000 of carbon offsets next financial year seems designed for council to be seen to have achieved its net zero target by 2023/24. Spending \$500,000 buying offsets over 3 years is an accounting measure that makes council net zero on paper but does not change Charles Sturt's actual carbon footprint now or in the future.

There is little transparency in the carbon offset scheme to show that high ethical standards are being met and that it is actually doing what we are paying for. And money is taken out of our community rather than being used for our own mitigation strategies.

At the State Government sponsored Industry Climate Change Conference last weekend, Jon Dee, keynote speaker and leading Australian figure in sustainability and the environment, said that carbon offsets should be a **last choice**. His sentiment is echoed in numerous publications on the matter.

Offsets may be a matter of necessity for industries that require huge amounts of reliable electricity, but not for a council. Especially one with just 12% canopy cover and a stated commitment to increase to **25% by 2045**. Clearly offsets should not be pursued, but this funding definitely **SHOULD** be retained and directed to solutions that directly address our own community's carbon emissions problems.

There are a number of creative options. For example, half a million dollars of residents' money could instead be spent on installing a community battery. Federal subsidies are also available for this. Solar panels installed on community buildings could feed electricity into the community battery for use by all constituents. Ratepayers get access to cheap power and our emissions are reduced.

This funding could be used to address the ongoing costs of managing our green spaces under hotter and drier conditions. More realistic budgets are required not only for tree planting but for better maintenance and irrigation of new and established canopy, as well as providing ratepayer incentives for greening, tree retention etc. Under climate modelling, current tree maintenance practices will see massive numbers of tree deaths or restricted tree growth impacting on the size of canopy. WACRA notes that impacts of climate change have not yet been factored into council's long-term financial plan. Given the predictions for the next 10 years this is a serious omission.

We need to focus on so many things that can still be done within our community before using the last resort carbon offsets to address the net zero goal.

There are major flaws in the system of how carbon is measured. The fact that a fully grown tree that takes carbon from the atmosphere is not counted towards emissions reduction is a shortcoming, but not one that should dissuade council from their 25% canopy targets. Trees are our major assets. They not only address climate change but reduce the urban heat profile, increase our amenity, and vastly improve community health.

WACRA would like council to work with key community stakeholders and experts in the field to consider ways to significantly increase tree canopy; for example, using alternatives to council land such as sporting clubs and large manufacturing sites. In addition, more focus could be put on preventing destruction of all significant trees, including those on private land where there has been an increasing loss of canopy. Importantly, ways to ensure that developers adhere to requirements to replace lost vegetation on new development need to be employed.

So, what does this mean for you councilors now?

Council has to prioritise use of our council money so we are more **self-reliant** in climate change action rather than paying someone, somewhere else, to reduce the carbon for us. And the sooner we do this the better. Particularly when it comes to trees and the time it takes to grow canopy.

You still have a chance to change the budget for next year to better deal with the known and anticipated costs of the climate emergency in our local community.