FACE TO FACE with TREES

treenet

23rd NATIONAL STREET TREE SYMPOSIUM
ADELAIDE 2022

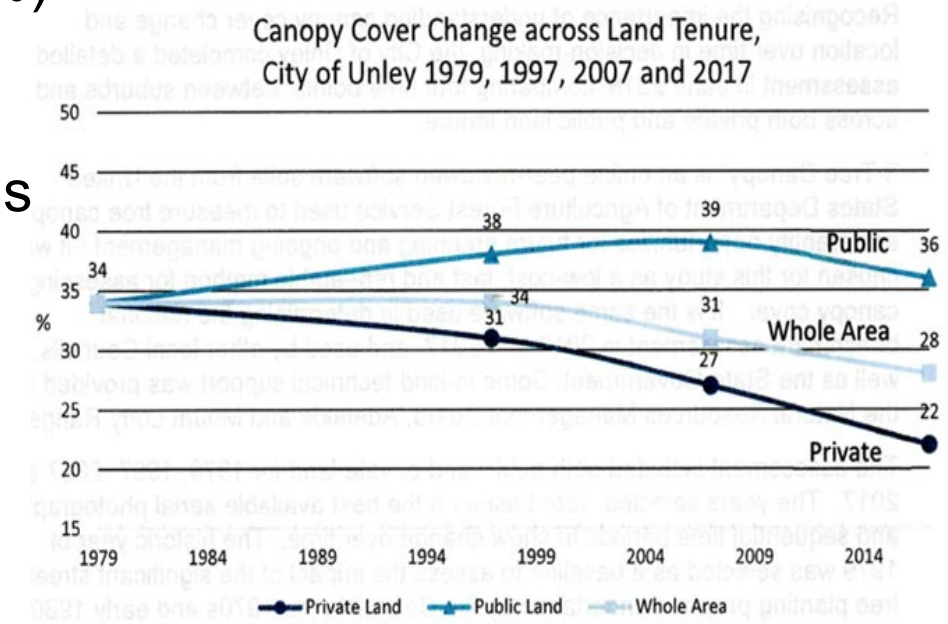
Inner Suburban Unley is The Canary in the Mine

Mayor Michael Hewitson AM

The City of Unley, South Australia

Tree Canopy Cover Loss

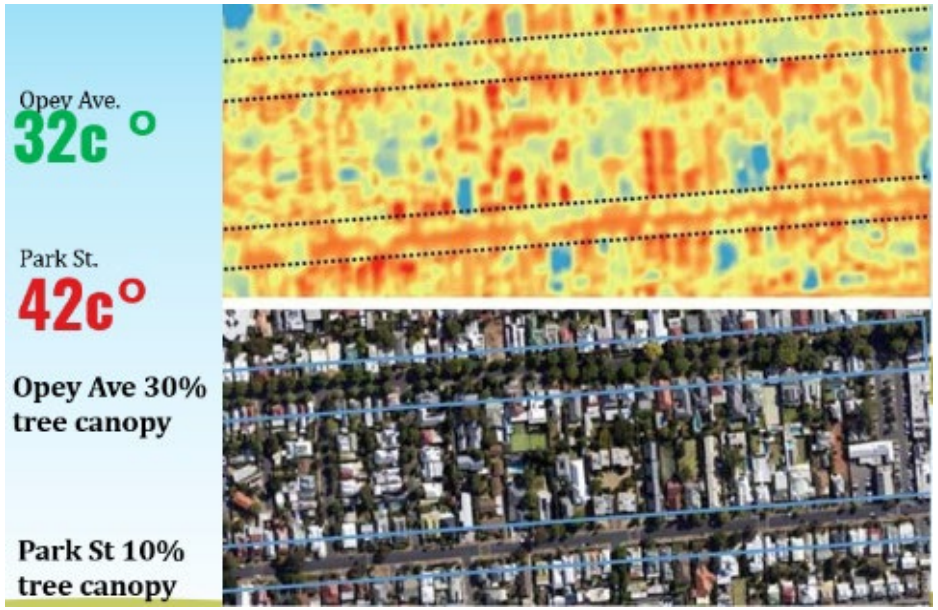
- In 2000, tree canopy in Unley was 574 Ha
- Cover decreased by 8 Ha, 2% p/a (from 31% to 26.6%) between 2007-17
- Target canopy cover is 31.2%
- Unley addressing tree loss through traditional methods
- Tree planting (approx. 500 trees per year), tree giveaways, educational programs
- Council land will exhaust within 5 years
- Tree loss is mostly on private property
- Unley is down to 400 Ha of tree canopy cover
- Needed an innovative approach to address the issue
- Proposal to trial a financial incentive to preserve/increase trees on private property



The Problem for the Canary

- Unley is an inner city, densely populated urban area
- Lowest open space in greater Adelaide (3% or <8m² per person) - not much land to plant trees on
- Greatest loss of trees was on private property – how can Council control this?
- Unley lost a third of tree cover overall
- Heat mapping project showed 10ºc differential on two parallel streets (2018)
- Land is expensive – costly for Council to purchase

Data from 2018



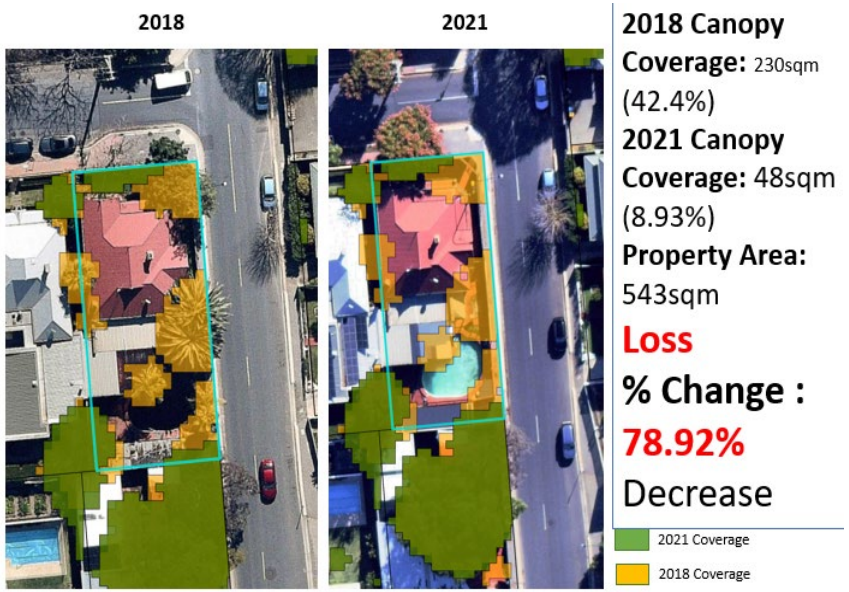
Council action

- New Council and Mayor elected 2018 – immediate action on trees
- Proposal for all DAs to include trees or contribute to offset fund – did not come to fruition at the time
- Significant and regulated tree maintenance assistance
- Acceleration of planting on Council land
- Verge soil replacement program
- Tree voucher giveaway
- Conservation grants

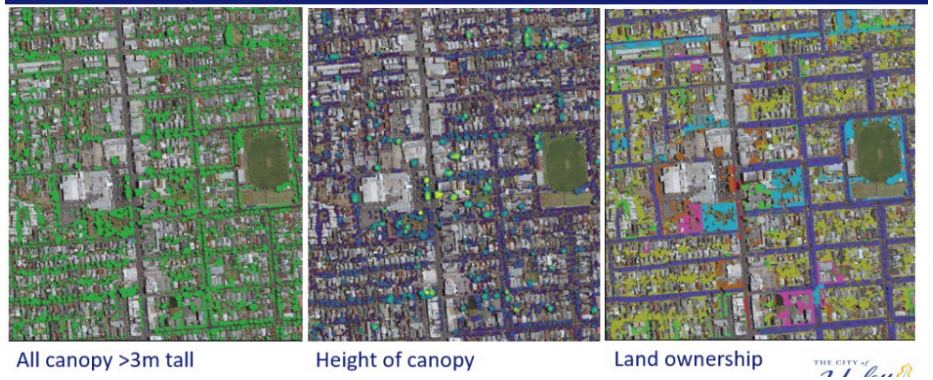
Despite our work we **still** needed to address tree loss on private properties … (4 Ha p/a)

My Canopy

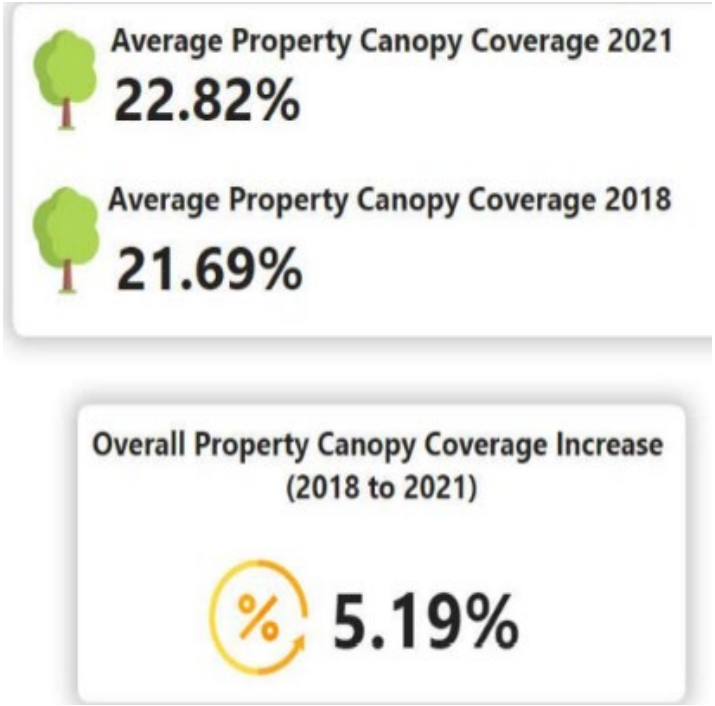
- Project to pinpoint tree loss was initiated to address issue
- Flyovers produced aerial images of properties across Unley - including tree canopy detail
- LiDAR used these images to compare tree changes over three years (accuracy to the nearest 10cm²)
- Data was used to calculate canopy % of each property to include on rates notice (2018/2021 comparison)
- My Canopy app was developed - residents can view canopy from 2018 and 2021 to compare change
- Unley won Local Government Award, 2022 National iTnews Benchmark Awards
- Data showed 50% of loss from just 212 new developments (not all development is bad!)



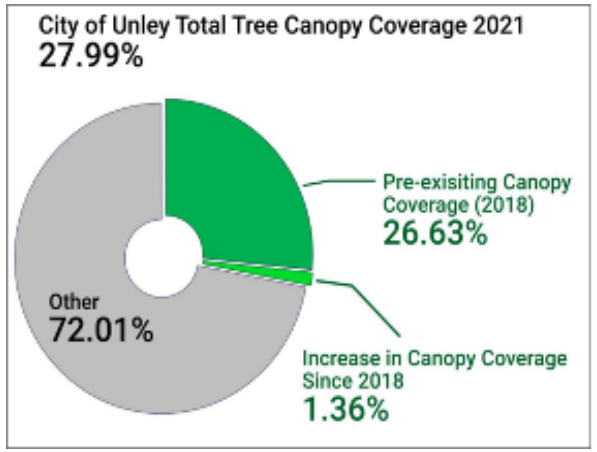
Examples of LiDAR Outputs



On Track to reach target???



- Unley now has the data to accurately address tree canopy cover loss – we know exactly where the loss is occurring
- Despite trend of tree loss on private property, efforts of Unley Council through planting & programs improved cover
- Unley tree canopy cover increased from 21.69% in 2018 to 22.82% in 2021
- Council land is only 6.4% of the 31% target
- Bronze Medal/Fool's Gold Prize



Change Detection

Proposal to address loss

- Unley is looking at an initiative to address tree loss on private property
- Hoping to trial initiative encouraging developers and owners to preserve trees
- Submission to the Minister for Planning
- Proposal involves financial incentive for developers/owners to preserve/plant trees
- DA and/or property would be assessed against 15% tree canopy target
- We are able to use the LiDAR data to assess canopy on properties
- If target is not met, additional 10% rates will be incurred
- Additional rates will contribute to tree offset fund which Council will utilise to purchase more land in order to plant trees
- Such an offset fund requires ministerial approval
- Consistent with new SA Planning Code rules

Planning Code

- New Planning Code in SA (March 2021)
- New criteria including planting/retention of at least one tree per dwelling and minimum 10% soft soil for landscaping
- Combined with LiDAR data and a financial incentive, we can achieve more canopy cover

Planning Code Problems:

1. Impossible to monitor planting/retention of tree – no means of enforcement
2. Observation 6 months after new build – trees removed/died
3. 'One size fits all' approach within the state of SA

Will it be enough…???

Communication is key

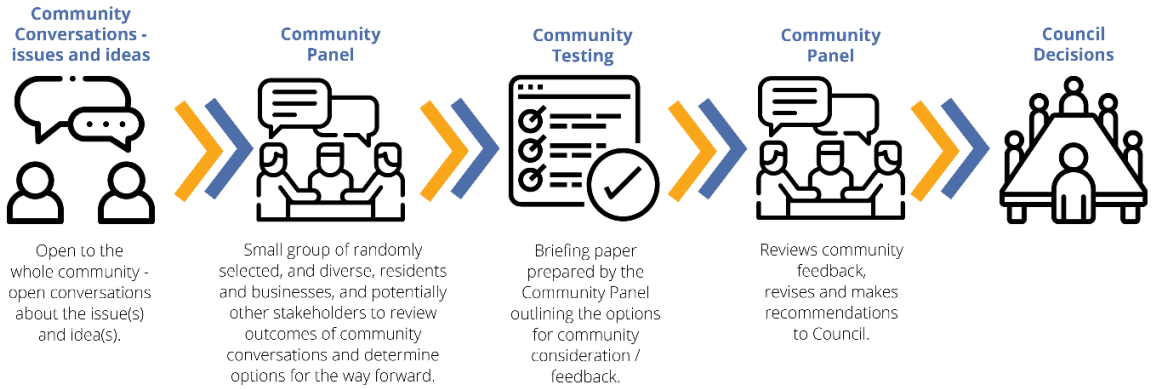
- It's easy to blame someone else for a dead canary
- Politics is "the art of the possible"
- Try not to cause eyes to glaze over: 3,999,771m² tree canopy
- Unley Oval = 2 Ha (people need to be able to visualise it)

City of Unley's land area, canopy area, and annual canopy loss in 2021:

Total area of the City of Unley	1,429 ha
Total tree canopy	400 ha (28%)
Previous decade annual loss	8 ha
Current annual loss	4 ha
Annual loss from new developments (200)	2 ha (50% of all current loss)

Shaping Unley

New model empowering community to be involved in designing policy – not just consult on or provide feedback
Trees are a city-wide problem, just like parking



- Being involved in finding solutions will encourage community to understand why tree loss canopy is everyone's problem
- Wider pool of ideas = better solutions
- People vote on policy ideas (Trikala, Greece)

Conclusion

- Tree loss in Unley seems to be mostly on new developments/private property
- A Financial incentive for property owners to retain/plant trees is the lowest cost way for residents who live in tree-less property to enjoy 31% tree cover – they pay rates (as do tenants through rent)
- Unley will continue planting, education and incentives, but we need to do more to reduce tree loss on private property – Council land will exhaust
- We need the support of the Minister for Planning to trial an offset fund or we will continue to lose 2 Ha per annum
- We want to empower community to assist us in achieving the 31% target so we can all enjoy a greener Unley