



*The Indian Society of Landscape Architects (ISOLA) has been keenly following the issue of extensive felling of mature trees, and would like to submit the professional views of the landscape architecture fraternity on this issue for your kind consideration.*

## **ISOLA STAND ON EXTENSIVE FELLING OF DELHI TREES**

We as ISOLA strongly object to the mass tree felling that has happened and is being further planned to make way for redevelopment schemes across the city. Further, we find the lack of due process, in conceptualizing the projects, the lacunae in the approval process and enormity of the ill-considered compensatory planting suggestions in the hasty decision to rob the city of its ecological heritage and green lungs, objectionable.

We would like to highlight the lack of consideration to the landscape heritage of Delhi and its ecological, spatial and qualitative benefits in the lives of its citizens, its land, air, water, vegetation, wildlife and open space networks.

The mature, verdant and diverse canopy (which took between half to nearly a century to be established), the green networks it provides and the critical biodiversity it supports are critical, and must not be eliminated hastily.

### **IN SUMMARY**

#### **1. ACKNOWLEDGE AND EVALUATE ECOLOGICAL / LANDSCAPE HERITAGE**

Delhi is unique in its extensive green cover and integrated landscape planning. Its designed planting has given it character and imageability, and relief from the vagaries of extreme temperatures, global warming and pollution despite burgeoning population pressures. Detailed studies need to be undertaken to determine at what point in its chronological evolution the spatial and ecological pattern should be conserved and the ecological benefits it provides quantified.

#### **2. EVALUATE AND ASSESS SPATIAL CHARACTER AND DESIGN**

The maturity of the landscape and the longevity of planning initiatives need to be assessed, documented and reviewed carefully prior to ad hoc development.

#### **3. BUILD WITH THE LANDSCAPE, NOT INSTEAD OF IT**

Development framework to create the best possible development solutions with and not instead of existing trees.

#### **4. OPEN SPACE NETWORKS & BIODIVERSITY INDEX**

It will be a loss of great magnitude to let go of this landscape heritage of city design, open space character, historic patterns of plantation and unique tree cover. The loss would adversely impact the vast species of fauna that of some hundreds of species of birds that are dependent on this habitat and irreplaceable. The biodiversity index (BI) is important to assess to understand the actual, and not just monetary loss, accumulated by felling large mature trees.

#### **5. MAINTAINING AIR AND WATER QUALITY**

The value of trees in carbon sequestering, absorbing CO<sub>2</sub>, producing oxygen are significant, and with the continued pollution in the city, no amount of vertical planting, indoor planting or traffic schemes can replace this mitigation value. Further, in times of heavy rain, the tree canopies reduce flash flooding, increase transpiration (thereby cooling the environment), and help in ground water recharge.

## **INDIAN SOCIETY OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS**

Registered under Indian Societies Act 1860 Sec. 21 No.: **Guj2557** & Bombay Trust Act 1950 Section 29 No.: **F9417**

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## 6. PARKING AND SERVICES CONCERNS

Creation of basement parking will ensure large trees are replaced with smaller, ornamental species, and natural water percolation is replaced by piped conveyance systems that require regular desilting, a common monsoon complaint. Service networks required to support development, further reduce area available for planting. Alternate transportation solutions and revised numbers required for integrated planning need to be explored.

## 7. MULTI- DISCIPLINARY PROJECT PLANNING AND PHASED DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

In areas of redevelopment, the scale of the development must reflect its relevance at the city level as a multi-use project. These cannot be conceived, designed or developed as standalone gated projects. They have an impact on the neighbourhood and city at large. And require inputs from planners, urban designers, landscape architects, service consultants, stakeholders, environmentalists, engineers and specialists with expertise to assess the impacts on water, services including electricity, sewer, storm water management and connectivity, traffic, parking, ecology, local economies and displacement of people and wildlife. This involvement is required at the conceptualization of the project, to best respond to all the relevant contextual concerns. And also resolve all inter-agency coordination requirements.

In part, the lack of a cohesive structure, which the EIA process should provide, evaluating not only broad based environmental concerns, but all issues related to land, air, water, vegetation and people are addressed, is inadequate at present. One alternative is an independent, multi-stakeholder committee, along the lines of UTTIPEC, to deal with the multitude of issues, stakeholders and public concerns.

### TRANSPLANTATION

Transplanting requires a long period of preparation, transplantation and rehabilitation. Even then large trees have an 80% fatality rate. Smaller ones which have higher success rate are usually cut. This option should be considered based on an assessment of feasibility.

### COMPENSATORY PLANTING

Compensatory planting of 10 saplings anywhere for one mature tree holds no logic as

**Firstly** the ecological value of 10 saplings in no way balance to a mature tree as mature tree canopy cannot be replicated overnight.

**Secondly** if trees are needed in a particular project for better quality of life for the community, planting it elsewhere doesn't help

**Thirdly**, the species of trees matter which are never looked into, new tree planting typically involve palms, exotics and water guzzling plants, in parts due to constricted area available due to limitations of parking , space, basement slabs and time.

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## WAY FORWARD

### ISOLA suggests-

i. Detailed mapping of landscape resources

Map ecological heritage and identify trees of value and those which are replaceable/ transplantable

ii. Quantification of Landscape Heritage –tangible and intangible

Cannot see the debate as one of Development vs Environment, development should not happen at the cost of the environment and vice versa. They must be considered in consonance. Identify best practices and solutions on a case basis and in light of overall ecological services

iii. Development norms and restrictions for the landscape heritage

Exploration of creative options, within a multi-disciplinary framework and single redressal forum to understand the complexity of critical issues at stake for the city is important.

What are the alternatives? We cannot have the same size trees/ so can the development be planned around them? Elsewhere? Is the value of development appropriate or commensurate? What are the traffic impacts? Parking? Can the service networks handle the developments? Compensatory planting /transplantation has to be on an equal basis- size/ form/ age/ quality. Is that possible?

iv. Recognising and shaping a comprehensive vision for the city

Putting in place a larger vision for the city landscape and urbanscape, create a blueprint for development. Challenge designers to build with the landscape and not by cutting trees for a blank slate

v. Re-examine the processes of site assessment, project conceptualisation, design approvals for large scale public projects

Assess sites comprehensively against all parameters: Ecological, cultural, social, urban, transport. Transformation only after due diligence and consideration of all impacts. Impact assessment not only on environment, but livelihoods, local culture and society (Achieving targets and making environment/ society only a legal/ financial exercise is not good governance)

### Sujata Kohli

*Honorary President*

### INDIAN SOCIETY OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

*The Indian Society of Landscape Architects (ISOLA), the professional body of landscape architects, includes over 600 members across India and around the world. The mission of ISOLA, established in 2003, is to nurture and enhance the profession of landscape architecture by providing leadership in the creation of artistic and ecologically sound designs, and in the shaping and management of our human-made, cultural and natural environments. The organisation has also been accorded the status as a member of the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) - a body representing the concerns of the profession worldwide. Details of the organisation can be accessed at [www.isola.org.in](http://www.isola.org.in).*

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