



Merri-bek
City Council

Affordable Housing Action Plan

Annual Report 2023



Northumberland Avenue Pascoe Vale- 70 units of social housing by Housing Choices Australia in partnership with Homes Victoria

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Moreland. We pay respect to their Elders past, present, and emerging, as well as to all First Nations communities who significantly contribute to the life of the area.

Introduction

In December 2022, Council adopted the Merri-bek Affordable Action Plan (AHAP) 2022-2026. The AHAP has four Focus Areas under which achievable and effective actions are identified for implementation by officers across Council. These are:

1. Planning
2. Partnerships
3. Research and Advocacy
4. Support service coordination, information provision and advocacy for people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness

Focus Areas 1-3 aim to directly increase the provision of affordable housing in Merri-bek.

The actions under Focus Area 4 are about services for those who do not currently have secure housing.

This report provides a summary of the progress of actions under the AHAP in the 2022/23 financial year and up to November 2023.

Summary of 2023 activities and achievements

Focus Area 1 - Planning

Implementation Branches: City Development & City Strategy and Economy

Action 1.1: Facilitate affordable housing provision in planning permit applications

Officers in the Urban Planning and Strategic Planning Units, supported by the Principal Advisor Social and Affordable Housing, have seen an increase in positive outcomes through negotiated voluntary agreements from developers and landowners to contribute affordable housing in new developments. Agreements are usually secured through an agreement under section 173 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* which places conditions or restrictions on the use or development of the land.

The internal referral protocol was reviewed and updated to include triggers for expert internal and external advice in affordable housing negotiations at multiple points in planning processes.

Notable planning permits with affordable housing contributions include:

- 17-19 Hope St Brunswick
Planning permit- Nightingale Housing- 15-20% of 282 homes to be affordable.
- 699 Park St Brunswick
Planning permit (Minister for Planning). Mirvac apartment development with 10% (minimum 16) affordable homes for purchase through a shared equity scheme.
- 342-348 & 368-370 Victoria St, 13 & 15 Rosser St and 32 Wilkinson St Brunswick
Amended VCAT planning permit for 284 homes, 60% provided as affordable housing through the Assemble Futures rent-to-own model.
- 170 Sydney Rd, Coburg
Planning Permit - Nightingale Housing - 10% (minimum 5) affordable homes to a community housing provider.

Action 1.4 Promote affordable housing opportunities in strategic land use planning

An Activity Centre Zone for the Brunswick Activity Centre was drafted to include a mandatory affordable housing requirement. Pre-amendment community consultation has been undertaken during 2023 and it is proposed to progress a planning scheme amendment to introduce the new zone into the Merri-bek Planning Scheme in 2024.

Action 1.5 Support registered housing providers and other non-profit housing projects

Several community housing providers were provided with advice on potential developments and research and data assistance to support applications for project funding.

Action 1.6 Build councillor, officer and stakeholder capacity, especially with new development models

- Councillors were briefed directly on homelessness, Merri-bek Affordable Housing and Victoria's Housing Statement.
- Four officers from the Urban Planning and Strategic Planning units attended workshops run by the Community Housing Industry Association Victoria on negotiating planning agreements.
- The Principal Advisor Social and Affordable Housing attended the National Housing Conference and the Victorian Community Housing Industry Conference (where they also presented on Merri-bek's affordable housing work).

Focus Area 2 - Partnerships

Implementation branches: City Strategy and Economy, Place Property and Design

Action 2.1 Support Moreland (now Merri-bek) Affordable Housing Ltd (MAH) to develop affordable housing

Officers have worked closely with MAH and its strategic development partner Haven Home Safe to progress the funding and planning of an affordable housing development at 2-12 Wilkinson St Brunswick.

Action 2.2 Consider suitability for affordable housing as a use during strategic assessment of land or property that is undergoing change of use or potential sale

- Officers provided a strategic assessment on 8 land sites for suitability for affordable housing.
- 1/ 6 Sutherland St Coburg. After an EOI process, Council agreed to accept Aboriginal Housing Victoria's offer to purchase at 90% of market price and use as social housing for 20 years.

Action 2.3 Explore partnership opportunities with Homes Victoria, other state agencies, residential developers and housing providers

Officers pro-actively engage to reinforce the message to housing sector players that Merri-bek is a welcoming and facilitative Council in looking at potential new social and affordable housing developments or improving and expanding policy responses.

Action 2.4 Partner with the Homes Victoria to implement the Social and Affordable Housing Compact and Local Agreements

After an extensive program of consultation with Victorian councils in 2022, a draft Social and Affordable Housing Compact was supported by the Municipal Association of Victoria. However, the local government sector is awaiting state government sign-off. Officers contributed to a co-design process for local area agreements with Homes Victoria. Progress has been confirmed on \$210m of investment in new social housing by the state government with 89 homes delivered and a further 483 underway.



Presenting to the Community Housing Industry Conference in April

Focus Area 3 – Research and Advocacy

Implementation Branch: City Strategy and Economy

3.1 Collect data and undertake research to support future policy development

Opportunities to better understand affordable housing need in Merri-bek and provide voice for the perspectives and concerns of community members include:

- Merri-bek Safe and Affordable Housing Forum-What Was Said Report
- Merri-bek Key Worker Research- community consultation on Conversations Merri-bek
- An Age-Friendly Home in Merri-bek- research
- The Coburg Conversation- Theme: “Coburg needs good homes for all”

3.2 Consult the Affordable Housing Reference Group as key community voice on affordable housing matters

The Affordable Housing Reference Group was convened times during 2023. Topics for discussion and feedback included:

- Age-Friendly Housing
- Victoria’s Housing Statement
- Submission to the National Housing and Homelessness Plan
- Planning decisions with affordable housing contributions
- The Coburg Conversation
- Draft Homelessness Strategy

3.3 Work with M9 Group of Councils, Inter-Council Affordable Housing Forum (ICAHF), Municipal Association Victoria (MAV) on relevant campaigns and advocacy

- M9 is an alliance of nine inner Melbourne councils that represent the collective interests of inner Melbourne. It is comprised of the following Councils: Darebin, Hobson’s Bay, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Moonee Valley, Merri-bek, Port Phillip, Stonnington and Yarra. Council is the co-lead (with City of Port Phillip) on affordable housing advocacy and convenes a working group which has met 5 times in 2023 to develop common positions and detailed responses to key housing issues.
- Council officers attend and contribute to bi-monthly ICAHF meetings with 40-60 officers from across Victoria
- Council’s expertise in affordable housing is a key resource for the MAV in its engagement with affordable housing advocacy and engagement
- Submissions were made to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Rental Crisis and the National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

Focus Area 4 – Support service coordination, information provision and advocacy for people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness

Implementation Branch: Community Wellbeing

4.1 Employ best practice service coordination to reduce rough sleeping in Merri-bek

- All Council staff have information for effectively responding to rough sleeping in a manner consistent with Council’s obligations under the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. This information is shared as required with people experiencing rough sleeping, traders, organisations and community members.

- Council officers have continued to work with community organisations and service providers and made significant progress towards implementing a 'Functional Zero' approach to rough sleeping in the municipality.
- In the 2023/24 Council budget \$120,000 per year over two years was allocated to provide deliver a homelessness assertive outreach program that responds to the needs of rough sleepers and homelessness in the City of Merri-bek.

4.2 Active engagement and advocacy with organisations and networks that support rough sleepers

Council officers continue to convene the Moreland Family Violence Network and attend the Northern Local Area Service Networks meetings. They also participate in activities through its membership of the Council to Homeless Persons and National Alliance to End Homelessness.

4.3 Build internal capacity across council units to respond to rough sleepers in a manner that is consistent with respecting their human rights

- Detailed guidance for an appropriate human rights-informed approach to responding to community members who are rough sleeping was provided to staff through communications and online referral information.
- During Homelessness Week in July thirty council officers attended a Q & A session with local homelessness service providers while also creating 163 origami houses that contributed to the thousands of paper homes later placed on the steps of the State Parliament to represent the urgent community need for safe and secure affordable homes.



Homelessness Week - Origami Houses action at State Parliament

Additional actions and activities

Council reporting

Since the AHAP was endorsed by Council in December 2022, ten Council reports and 4 Notices of Motion about affordable housing have been before Council.

Homelessness Strategy

Further to a resolution of Council in May, a Draft Homelessness Strategy was developed and was endorsed by Council for further community engagement in September. The strategy aims to address the multi-faceted issue of homelessness in Merri-bek, encompassing identifying needs and gaps, direct Council responses, and early intervention and prevention measures.

Support for renters

- The Rental and Housing Union (RAHU) were grant-funded to run four Renters Information Nights across Merri-bek.
- Tenants Victoria ran two Q&A forums about rental rights at Coburg and Brunswick Libraries.

Abandoned vehicles income for Moreland Housing Reserve

In 2018 Council resolved to allocate 50% of the funds from the proceeds of the sale of abandoned vehicles by Council to the Housing Reserve. This resulted in a \$71,424 transfer to the Reserve in 2021/22 and \$18,562 in 2022/23.

Short Stay Rental Accommodation

In September Council received a report on short stay accommodation. The report outlined Victorian and Australian examples of regulation introduced for the short stay accommodation sector. Options for a regulatory response in Merri-bek were explored pointing to the limited scope of local government to impact the prevalence of short stay accommodation in their municipalities.

Council resolved that it supports in principle levying a fee and applying a cap on the total number of days per year a property can be used for short stay accommodation and to receive a further report in 2024.



Brunswick West Community Consultative Committee site visit to Harvest Square (previously Gronn Place)