**Council MEETING AGENDA**

Wednesday 10 July 2024

Commencing 7 pm

Council Chamber, Merri-bek Civic Centre, 90 Bell Street, Coburg



**Acknowledgement of the traditional custodians of the City of Merri-bek**

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 Merri-bek, and pays 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.

**Information about Council Meetings**

These notes have been developed to help people better understand Council meetings. All meetings are conducted in accordance with Council’s Governance Rules.

**WELCOME** The Mayor, who chairs the meeting, formally opens the meeting.

1. **APOLOGIES** Where a Councillor is not present, their absence is noted in the minutes of the meeting. Council may also approve leaves of absence in this part of the meeting.
2. **DISCLOSURES OF CONFLICTS INTERESTS** A Councillor has a duty to disclose any direct or indirect financial or other interests, they may have in any matter to be considered by Council that evening.
3. **CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES** The minutes of the previous meeting are put before Council to confirm the accuracy and completeness of the record.
4. **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND OTHER MATTERS** At each Council Meeting provision of 10 minutes will be made in the Agenda for the Mayor and Councillors to acknowledge and recognise achievements of local individuals and organisations; and raise matters considered important to Council.
5. **PETITIONS** Council receives petitions from citizens on various issues. Council formally accepts petitions at Council meetings.
6. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME** This is an opportunity (30 minutes), for citizens of Merri-bek to raise questions with Councillors.
7. **COUNCIL REPORTS** Council officers prepare detailed reports, which are considered by Councillors and a Council position is adopted on the matters considered. The Mayor can invite firstly Councillors, secondly Officers, and then citizens in attendance to identify Council reports which should be given priority by the meeting and considered in the early part of the meeting.
8. **NOTICES OF MOTION** A motion which has been submitted to the Chief Executive Officer no later than 12 pm (noon) 10 business days prior to the meeting which is intended to be included in the agenda. The motion should outline the policy, financial and resourcing implications.
9. **NOTICE OF RESCISSION** A Councillor may propose a motion to rescind a resolution of the Council, provided the previous resolution has not been acted on, and a notice is delivered to the CEO or delegate setting out the resolution to be rescinded and the meeting and date when the resolution was carried. If a motion for rescission is lost, a similar motion may not be put before the Council for at least one month from the date it was last lost, unless the Council resolves that the notice of motion be re-listed at a future meeting.
10. **FORESHADOWED ITEMS** This is an opportunity for Councillors to raise items proposed to be submitted as Notices of Motion at future meetings.
11. **URGENT BUSINESS** The Chief Executive Officer or Councillors, with the approval of the meeting, may submit items of Urgent Business (being a matter not listed on the agenda) but requiring a prompt decision by Council.
12. **CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS** Whilst all Council meetings of Council are open to the public, Council has the power under the *Local Government Act 2020* to close its meeting to the public in certain circumstances which are noted where appropriate on the Council Agenda. Where this occurs, members of the public leave the Council Chamber or Meeting room while the matter is being discussed.
13. **CLOSE OF MEETING** The Mayor will formally close the meeting and thank all present.

**NEXT MEETING DATE** The next Council meeting will be held on Wednesday 14 August 2024 commencing at 7 pm, in the Council Chamber, Merri-bek Civic Centre, 90 Bell Street, Coburg. The next Planning and Related Matters meeting will be held on Wednesday 24 July 2024 commencing at 6.30 pm.

**WELCOME**

**1. APOLOGIES/LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**2. DISCLOSURES OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

**3. MINUTE CONFIRMATION**

The minutes of the Council Meeting held on 12 June 2024 and the Special Council Meeting held on 26 June 2024 be confirmed.

**4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND OTHER MATTERS**

**5. Petitions**

5.1 Petition - Brunswick Baths x Saxon Street Precinct 6

**6. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

**7. Council Reports**

7.1 Barrow Street trial road closure at Harding Street, Coburg 7

7.2 Upfield Corridor Urban Design Framework (Brunswick LXRP) - Stage 1 26

7.3 Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands Plan 39

7.4 Bachar Houli Foundation - Islamic College of Sport and Centre of Excellence Proposal 49

7.5 Glenroy Community Hub Cafe - Expression of Interest Update 55

7.6 Land adjacent to Brunswick Baths - Options for future use 61

7.7 Adoption of the Economic Development Action Plan 2024-2027 74

7.8 Improving access to Exercise Programs for Older People in Merri-bek 82

7.9 Improving Community Engagement Policy for older, non-English speaking residents 89

7.10 Rear of 1 to 15 Marks Street, 2 to 16 White Street and 21 Audley Street, Coburg - proposed sale of land from a previously discontinued road 94

7.11 Contract Award: RFT-2023-570 - Dunstan Stormwater Harvesting Project 100

7.12 Contract Award: RFT-2024-574- Supply and Install of Gym Equipment for Council’s Aquatic and Leisure Centres 105

7.13 Friends of Aileu Annual Report 2023 113

7.14 Financial Management Report for the Period Ended 31 May 2024 118

7.15 Governance Report - July 2024 - Cyclical Report 122

**8. Notices of Motion**

8.1 Family Violence Initiatives 131

8.2 Recognition of internationally renowned local artist - Destiny Deacon 1956 to 2024 133

8.3 Art and History at the Brunswick Town Hall 135

**9. Notice of Rescission**

Nil

**10. Foreshadowed Items**

**11. URGENT BUSINESS**

**5. Petitions**

**5.1 Petition - Brunswick Baths x Saxon Street Precinct**

A petition (D24/308652) has been received containing 399 signatures requesting Council expands Brunswick Baths as part of the Saxon Street Precinct.

**Officer Recommendation**

That Council:

1. Receives the petition, requesting Council expands Brunswick Baths as part of the Saxon Street Precinct.

2. Refers the petition requesting Council expands Brunswick Baths as part of the Saxon Street Precinct to the Director Community for consideration and response.

**Attachment/s**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Petition - Brunswick Baths x Saxon Street Precinct - Redacted | D24/308697 |  |

**7. Council Reports**

7.1 Barrow Street trial road closure at Harding Street, Coburg

**Acting Director City Infrastructure Indivar Dhakal**

**Transport**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Considering the report from the Department of Transport and Planning and the written and verbal submissions from the public submitted under Section 223 of the *Local Government Act 1989* (the Act), resolves under Clause 10, Schedule 11 of the Act to block the passage or access of vehicles, other than bicycles and pedestrians, by installing temporary barriers (bollards) to trial a road closure on Barrow Street, Coburg, from the intersection of Harding Street to a point up to 8 metres further south. The trial shall be in place for approximately 12 months starting in December 2024.

2. Following the trial, receives a report from Council officers in early 2026 with a recommendation on whether to proceed with consulting with the community on a permanent road closure under Section 223 of the Act.

3. Schedules installation of trial infrastructure to occur during the 2024/25 Summer School Holidays to allow for local schools and the community to prepare for the closure ahead of the 2025 school year.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

Barrow Street is an important local link for people to walk, ride and drive. The street connects many local destinations that are significant for our local community, and forms part of the East Brunswick Shimmy bike route. It is also a key route for local school students from St Bernard’s Primary School, Coburg High and Primary Schools, Antonine College and Merri-bek Primary School.

On Barrow Street, south of Harding Street, the recorded the average weekday vehicle volumes as 1,243. Whilst this traffic volume is well within the capacity for a local street, it is considered too high for a strategic cycling corridor that is widely used by school children. Council officers are also aware of community concerns that Barrow Street is used as a rat run which has contributed to some people feeling unsafe to walk and ride in the area.

The recent consultation on the proposed trial road closure saw a diversity of views including strong views from the community.

After careful consideration, Council officers are proposing that the trial road closure proceed. The trial road closure would be at the southern intersection of Harding Street which is a key walking and riding corridor, to provide safe access to nearby schools and local destinations.

It is proposed that installation be timed to align with the conclusion of the 2024 school year which is scheduled for 20 December 2024. The intention for this timing will be to allow local traffic to adjust to the new arrangement prior to the school year commencing in 2025. This timing will have several benefits, including minimising the impacts to other local streets while traffic adjusts to the closure in the first month of the trial. Launching the trial during the summer months will also help attract people to test the new walking and riding environment along Barrow Street while the weather is most suitable.

The trial is proposed to run for approximately 12 months, during which Council officers can assess whether a permanent closure is an appropriate and viable option for this location. This assessment would be made by gathering and assessing relevant traffic data, observations and community feedback. This two-stage process has worked well in the recent past as it has allowed Council officers and the community to evaluate the real-life impacts and benefits of the trial road closure before a decision is made to make it permanent.

At the April 2024 Council meeting, it was resolved to commence consultation on the trial road closure. The 28-day consultation ran from the 3 May 2024 to 31 May 2024. The consultation included a circular letter, an advertisement in The Age and the creation of a Barrow Street trial road closure Conversation Merri-bek webpage. The letter drop was sent to all owners and occupiers of properties on Barrow Street and the immediate surrounding street as these residents were considered most impacted by the trial and would therefore provide valuable insight into the use of Barrow Street and possible impacts of the proposal.

The intention of the consultation was to:

 Understand local use of the streets and any issues with the proposal that may not be as visible to Council.

 Identify issues or functions in the area that may not be expected or identified by Council officers ahead of the consultation.

 Gauge the level of community support for the proposal.

Anyone interested in the project was able to submit their feedback via the Conversations Merri-bek website. There was a considerable response to the consultation. 442 responses were received via the Conversations Merri-bek web page and seven submissions were made via email or phone. Of these, 53 per cent of responses were in support of the proposal, 5 per cent were in support with concerns, less than 1 per cent were unsure or neutral and 41 per cent were not in support.

The key concerns received were that the trial road closure:

 May not be as effective as speed humps or other traffic treatments.

 May negatively impact access to St Bernard Primary School.

 May result in increased traffic volumes or issues on surrounding streets.

 May not be necessary as the road operates fine, or that very few people walk and ride along Barrow Street currently.

 Will not address other safety concerns in the area.

Shortly after the consultation began, the Principal of St Bernard’s Primary School circulated a petition to all parents of the school campaigning against the project. Council officers received 111 petitions from 73 properties opposing the proposal, from school parents and children.

As a key stakeholder, Council officers take the concerns of St Bernard’s Primary School seriously and have made efforts to address these concerns. Whilst the school express disappointment in the way that consultation has been carried out, Council officers have made good faith attempts to better understand the concerns of the school which are detailed in this report. This included correspondence with the school in writing, by phone and through in person meetings since the consultation period commenced, which have provided valuable insight into the operations of the school and their concerns with the trial.

The Hearing of Submissions was held on 6 June 2024. Representatives of St Bernard’s Primary School and Coburg High School attended along with 11 other submitters both for and against the proposal. Coburg High School and Merri-bek High School are both supportive of the proposal as they consider their students will benefit from a calmer Barrow Street.

In response to concerns that emergency vehicles would be impacted by the trial road closure, both Ambulance Victoria and the Department of Transport and Planning have confirmed that emergency access would be unaffected.

Following the collation of the community consultation, Council officers’ expectation remains that the trial road closure will:

 Significantly lower traffic volumes on Barrow Street, and an overall safer walking and cycling environment for school children.

 Result in a minor traffic increases to surrounding streets that is still well below the recommended capacity of a local street.

 Trigger a higher uptake of walking and riding along the Barrow Street corridor.

 Have a minimal impact to vehicle access for parents, emergency vehicles, buses and waste trucks.

 After witnessing and experiencing the benefits of the trial closure, expand the rate of community support for the closure treatment.

Blocking the passage of vehicles can be an effective treatment that helps Council achieve the objectives of the Moving Around Merri-bek Strategy and ensure our street network functions optimally. When locations for these treatments are considered thoughtfully, tested with temporary materials and evaluated before permanent installation, they can be highly effective in improving the functionality, safety and quality of streets for all users.

Following Council’s April 2024 resolution to commence consultation, Council officers have concluded the 28 day consultation, and held the Hearing of Submissions. A report was received from the Department of Transport and Planning with no objection on the proposal. Overall, when comparing the benefits of the road closure with the speculative concerns highlighted, it is recommended that Council proceed with the trial to allow the impacts to be addressed and quantified during the trial.

The cost of the trial estimated to be $10,000. If the Council proceed with the permanent road closure, the cost of the entire project including the civil infrastructure may cost up to $150,000 and can be paid for as part of the Transport Road Safety and Amenity capital budget.

Ahead of the installation of the trial infrastructure, council officers will offer support to St Bernard’s Primary School Community to communicate and prepare for the changes to the local road network in the 2025 school year.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Trial Road Closure, Barrow Street, Coburg** – 10 April 2024

*That Council:*

*1. Approves the commencement of the process under Section 207, Schedule 11, Clause 10(1)(c) of the Local Government Act 1989 to erect temporary barriers at Barrow Street, Coburg, at the intersection with Harding Street, from Harding Street to a point up to 8 metres further south, to block the passage of vehicles other than bicycles, for the purpose of a genuine traffic diversion experiment.*

*2. Gives public notice of the traffic diversion experiment proposals and calls for submissions under Section 223 of the Local Government Act 1989 as required by Section 207A of the Act, in The Age, on Council’s website and to owners and occupiers of all properties in the area as shown in Attachment 1.*

*3. Appoints the Mayor as Chair, and Councillors Conlan, Bolton and Pavlidis to a Committee to hear any submitters requesting to be heard in support of their written submission.*

*4. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to set the date and time and location for the Hearing of Submissions Committee meeting following consultation with the appointed Councillors and submitters requesting to be heard.*

*5. Following the consultation process, receives a report outlining any submissions received, including a summary of any Hearing of Submissions Committee meeting held, in relation to the proposed traffic diversion experiment and the report from the Department of Transport and Planning on the proposal, with a recommendation on whether to proceed to the trial.*

## 1. Policy Context

**Moving Around Merri-bek Strategy (2024)**

The Moving Around Merri-bek Strategy was adopted at the March 2024 Council Meeting. The Strategy seeks to ensure all actions impacting the councils transport network contribute to objectives aligned to the values of Safe, Accessible, Sustainable, Healthy, Liveable, and Inclusive. One of the key tools available for council is restricting vehicle movement on local roads to improve safety, liveability, health and accessibility on local roads. The proposed trial road closure contribute to achieving the following specific objectives of the draft Moving Around Merri-bek Strategy (2023).

1. Create streets where everyone feels safe.

2. Reduce the frequency and severity of crashes on our roads.

3. Create a transport system in Merri-bek that allows everyone to meet their daily needs and to fully participate in our community.

4. Reduce air and noise pollution generated from vehicles.

5. Create streets and public spaces that encourage physical activity and socialisation amongst local communities.

6. Improve access to shops, services and employment for our local community.

7. Work collaboratively with our community and stakeholders to improve our transport system.

8. Work to make our streets and public spaces are safe for all people and inclusive of all genders, backgrounds, and abilities.

## 2. Background

**Local Government Act: Road closure process**

Opportunities to undertake road closure treatments are carefully considered due to the resources required to follow the rigorous legislated process for delivering these projects. Council Officers are restricted by the rigorous process required for trialling, consulting, monitoring, evaluating and reporting on these treatments in line with the Local Government Act 1989 (The Act). As such, for Council to propose a permanent road closure, Council officers are required to present a total of four reports to Council to resolve that the proposal progress to each next phase.

This is the second report required which outlines the summary of the consultation and provides a recommendation to proceed with the trial road closure.

The Act grants the power to Council to place barriers on a road temporarily or permanently for a genuine traffic diversion experiment and requires Council to consider a report from the Department of Transport and Planning on the proposal.

**Selection of Potential Road Closure Sites**

Based on community concerns and Council officer suggestions, a short list of potential road closure locations was created to identify opportunities for restricting vehicle movement on streets that meet the following criteria:

 Streets with strong year-on-year growth due to rat-running.

 Local streets on strategic cycling corridors or which will complete ‘missing links’ in the cycling network.

 Areas where lingering and spending time is encouraged.

Based on the alignment to the criteria above, Council officers created a short list of sites and applied a scoring system based on:

 Proximity to a strategic cycling and walking corridor.

 Surrounding land uses.

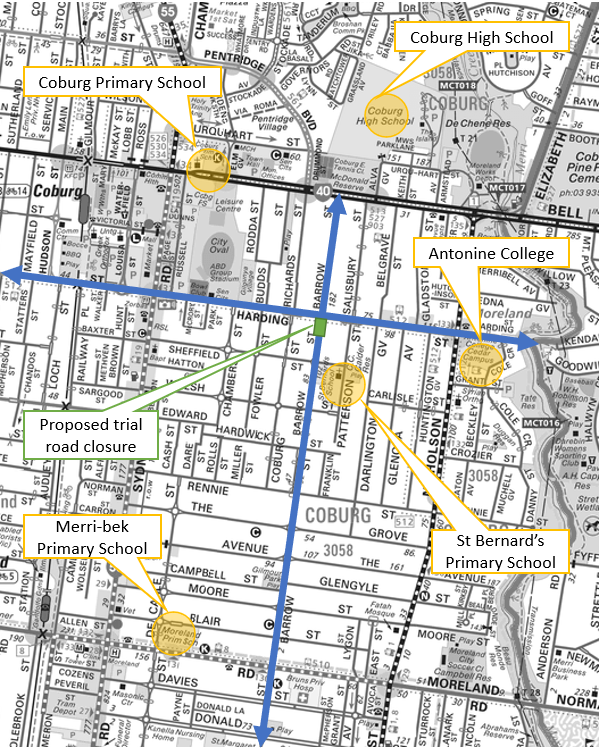
 Anticipated community benefit.

The two sites that were shortlisted were Barrow Street at Harding Street, Coburg and Pearson Street at Albion Street, Brunswick West.

**Trial Road Closure Location**

Barrow Street is an important local link for people to walk, ride and drive. The street connects many local destinations that are significant for our local community, and forms part of the East Brunswick Shimmy bike route. It is also a key route for local school students from St Bernard’s Primary School, Coburg High and Primary Schools, Antonine College and Merri-bek Primary School. Similarly, Harding Street is a key strategic cycling and walking corridor.

Council officers are proposing a trial road closure on Barrow Street at the southern intersection of these two corridors to provide safe access to nearby schools as outlined in Figure 1 below.



*Figure 1 Proposed trial road closure proximity to local schools near Barrow and Harding Streets*

As outlined in Figure 2 below, the road closure is proposed to be located on Barrow Street from the intersection of Harding Street to a point up to 8 metres further south.

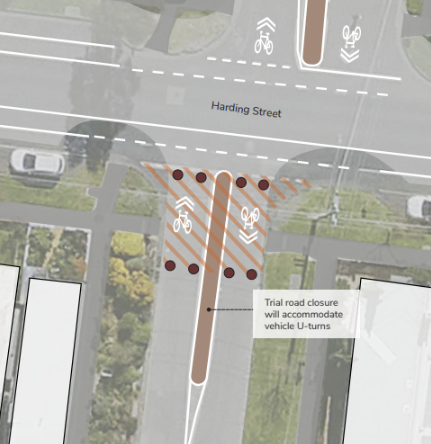


Figure 2 Proposed trial road closure on Barrow Street where it intersects Harding Street, Coburg

The trial infrastructure is expected to reduce rat-running through local roads in this area of Coburg by ensuring that vehicles looking for an alternative to Nicholson Street are deterred from seeking a local street as a short-cut. This outcome is expected to create a safer road environment for the most vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists and school children by reducing vehicle volumes and speeds, while maintaining local access for residents to enjoy a quieter and safer street environment.

Barrow Street is an important local bicycle link that forms part of the East Brunswick Shimmy bike route that helps people get through Coburg and Brunswick East to connect with the Capital City Trail in the south. Helping people ride along this route for access to local shops and services can be significantly improved by minimising its function as a through route for vehicles so that Nicholson Street remains a more appropriate option for vehicles traveling through this area.

There are several reasons why the trial road closure is proposed on Barrow Street at the intersection of Harding Street instead of the intersection with Moreland Road where some submitters have accurately outlined that the existing recorded vehicle volumes are higher:

 There is already an existing road closure on Barrow Street south of the intersection with Moreland Road. It was considered more equitable to provide the trial road closure further north where the trial road closure could benefit a greater number of schools and residents in the vicinity.

 Harding Street is a desirable route for people riding as there are existing on-road cycle lanes. Council officers also have an upcoming proposed “Streets for People” project to improve the Harding Street corridor. The proposed trial road closure location can complement this existing cycling infrastructure on Harding Street.

 Complementing pedestrian infrastructure treatments at the intersections of Rennie/Barrow and Blair/Barrow are proposed to address safety and connectivity issues in the area. Grant funding is being sought to deliver safer pedestrian crossings and speed management treatments at these locations that will further enhance the expected safety benefits of the proposed road closure.

 Given Moreland Road is a Department of Transport (DTP) managed road, the trial road closure would have a greater impact on the arterial road network which may have resulted in concerns from DTP.

**Existing vehicle speed and volume**

In late February 2024, the speed limit on Barrow Street and the surrounding local streets were reduced to 40km/h as part of Merri-bek City Council’s Safer Speed Rollout on local roads. Lower speed limits are proven to decrease crash risk, reduce road trauma and increase survivability for any person involved in such occurrences. By June 2024, all local streets in Merri-bek will have a 40km/h speed limit.

As of March 2024, the average weekday vehicle volumes on Barrow Street south of Harding Street was recorded to be 1,243 vehicles per day. The initial surveys from March 2024 are shown in blue. Following resident concerns that their streets were not included and may be impacted by the project, the surveys were expanded to include most parallel streets between Sydney Road and Nicholson Street as shown in Figure 3 below.



Figure 3 Recorded base line existing vehicle volumes in Coburg

If the Barrow Street trial were to proceed, Council officers would monitor the changing traffic conditions by undertaking a second round of tube count surveys on the surrounding local streets. If there were any concerning traffic impacts to surrounding local streets, Council officers would look to address these before proposing the permanent road closure on Barrow Street.

## 3. Issues

### Key themes

As there was such an overwhelming response to the proposal with almost 450 submissions received, Council officers have reviewed each submission and noted key themes. The feedback to the proposal can be summarised to five key themes which have been addressed below.

#### General expectations of the trial road closure

Many of the community concerns speculated about the impact that the trial road closure would have on their street, or to vehicle speeds and volumes, road safety and other important objectives of the proposal.

Based on experiences of other successful trial road closure projects such as Carlisle Street, Coburg (2021), John Street, Brunswick East (2019) and Wilson Avenue, Brunswick (2013), a road closure is much more effective for calming the street when compared to other potential treatments such as speed humps. Notwithstanding, speed humps may be an effective treatment to compliment the road closure in the future.

In the short term, Council officers expect that some drivers who are unfamiliar with the proposed trial road closure may detour to Coburg Street or the nearby parallel streets to avoid the road closure on Barrow Street at Harding Street. This is expected to be a small portion of the existing traffic volumes on Barrow Street and can be comfortably accommodated. The trial road closure is expected to have marginal impacts to the streets west of Coburg Street and east of Patterson Street. As such, these property owners and occupiers were not sent circular letters during the consultation.

If the road closure trial on Barrow Street proceeds, traffic counts and monitoring will be undertaken on surrounding streets to assess what impact the closure may have on these streets. If the trial infrastructure causes unexpected impacts on surrounding streets, mitigation measures will be considered to address any possible negative impacts on Coburg Street or the surrounding local streets. If the issues cannot be resolved with other measures, and side effects are inappropriate and unexpected, then permanent installation of the road closure will not be recommended, and the trial infrastructure will be removed.

In the long term, once drivers become familiar with the changed road environment, the traffic volumes in this precinct are expected to reduce given the route will become less attractive to drivers wishing to avoid arterial roads such as Nicholson Street or Sydney Road. This outcome is expected to create a safer road environment for the most vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists and school children by reducing vehicle volumes and speeds, while maintaining local access for residents to enjoy a quieter and safer street environment.

From the submissions, it was outlined that many children attending Coburg High School currently avoid Barrow Street as it is considered too dangerous. As Barrow Street becomes calmer and safer, there is an expectation that people riding, especially children will return to the route to access their local schools.

***School access and operational concerns***

St Bernard’s Primary School have highlighted concerns that the trial road closure will impact vehicle access to their school and have unintended consequences for some school operations. The concerns are that the trial road closure will make it much harder for emergency services, waste, bus and parent vehicles to access the school. They are also concerned that as the school is accessed via the local road network, it is already difficult to find.

The proposed timeframe for implementation of the trial in the 2024/25 school holidays will help council officers and the school prepare for the trial and help the school community address the concerns below ahead of the trial commencement.

Each concern has however been detailed and responded to below.

General access

St Bernard’s Primary School is opportunely positioned with three frontages to Barrow Street, Sheffield Street and Patterson Street. The proposed trial road closure is 150 metres north of the school boundary allowing drivers to maintain vehicle access to the school from all frontages. The school’s front gate is located on Patterson Street between Sheffield Street and Walsh Street.

Whilst the proposed road closure will result in drivers being unable to access Barrow Street via Harding Street, there are still at least five convenient vehicle accesses to the school as outlined in the Figure 4 below.

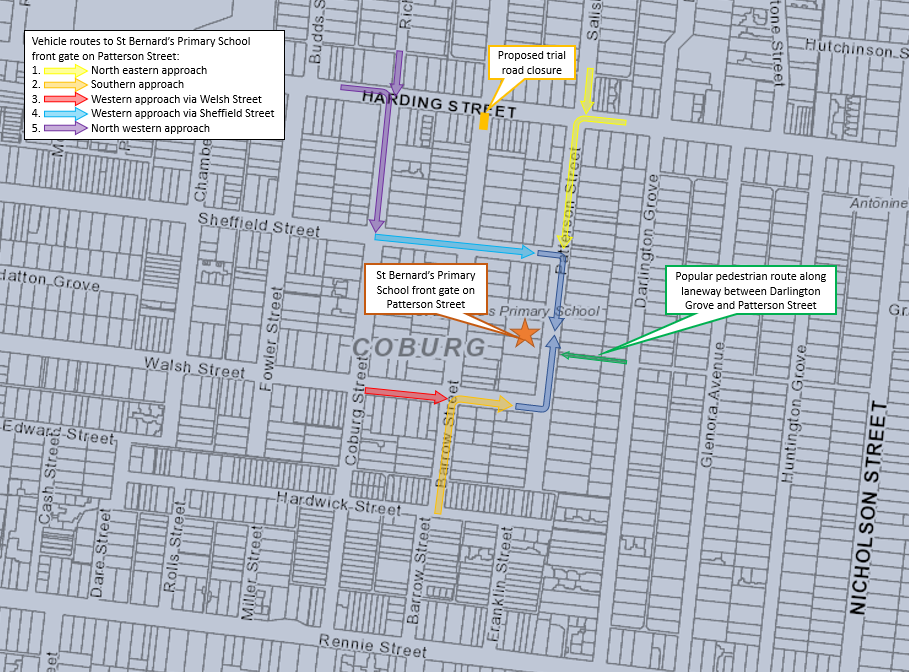


Figure 4 Map indicating at least five convenient routes for drivers to access St Bernard’s Primary School

Emergency services

The travel time for an emergency service vehicle is critical. During the consultation, Council officers sent a letter to Ambulance Victoria, Victoria Police (Fawkner Police Station and Brunswick Police Station) and Fire Rescue Victoria. Initially, no responses were received but note that generally, this indicates that the recipient does not have comments or concerns to make with the proposal. As emergency service access was highlighted as a key concern, a follow up email was then sent to each respective emergency service.

One email response was received from Ambulance Victoria who stated that:

*“The proposal for works in Barrow Street look absolutely fine to me. Given the multiple easy, short detours around to houses blocked off in Barrow (ie accessing them via Coburg/Patterson and Sheffield St), I don’t foresee any issues at all here. Any possible delays to AV crews trying to access addresses in Barrow would be literally seconds, not minutes.”*

In addition, Council have received the report from Department of Transport and Planning where it was outlined that they have no objection to the proposed temporary closure for six months (maximum up to twelve months) on Barrow Street at Harding Street, Coburg. In addition, the following comment was made:

*“Emergency services will not be affected by the proposed trail road closure.”*

As such, Council officers are confident that emergency service vehicles will not be delayed because of the proposed trial road closure. If the trial road closure proceeds, each emergency service will be notified, and traffic signage will be erected to easily redirect any driver. If any issues arise with wayfinding as part of the trial, these can be addressed.

Waste Collection

St Bernard’s Primary School have submitted a letter from the waste collection contractor of the school outlining that the blocking of Barrow Street at Harding Street will be inconvenient as trucks will be required to navigate the roundabout of Barrow Street and Sheffield Street. In addition, the contractor outlined their preference to avoid Patterson Street.

Council officers consulted with the internal stakeholders who would be impacted by the proposal including the waste collection and street cleansing units as these services rely on larger vehicles frequently driving through Barrow Street. No issues were identified with street cleansing. The waste collection unit had some concerns which have been resolved as outlined below.

Opportunities to provide safe access for waste collection vehicles was discussed with the waste collection unit. It was outlined that relying on a waste collection vehicle to U-turn within Barrow Street or reverse the length of Barrow Street from Sheffield Street was not safe or sustainable. If the trial proceeds, a similar approach to the John Street closure can be adopted whereby foldable and lockable bollards will be installed on Barrow Street as outlined in Figure 5 below.

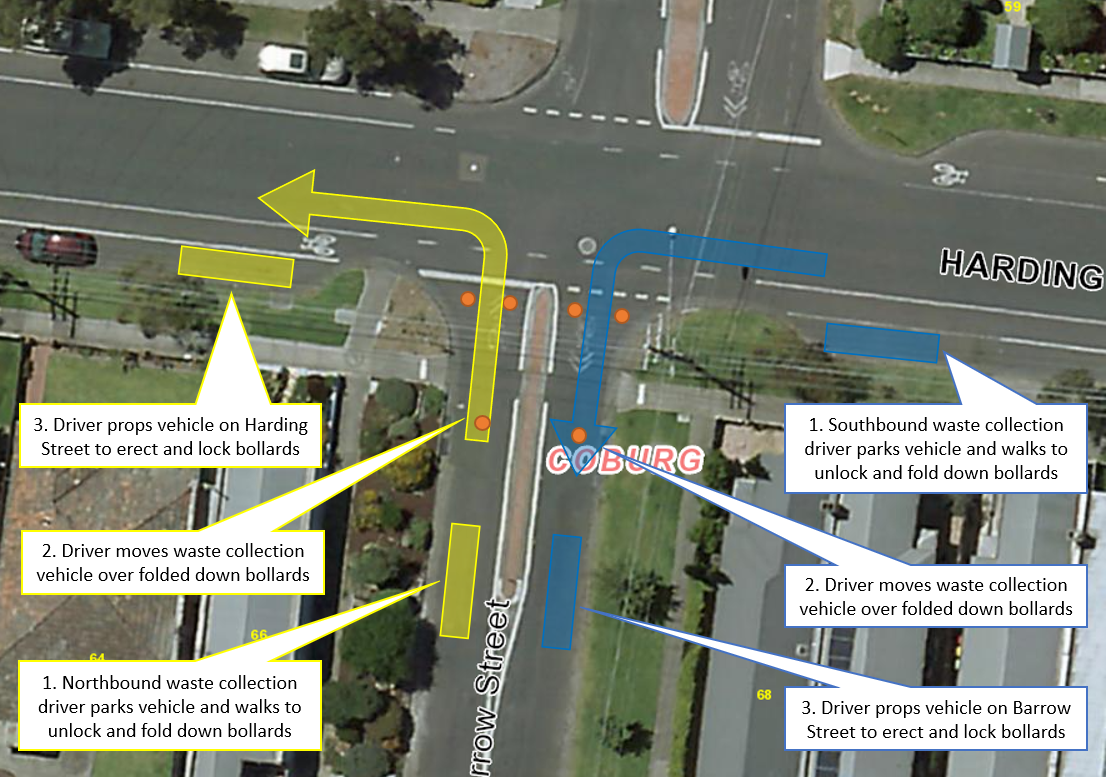


Figure 5 Operation of how a waste collection driver would operate fold down bollards

As outlined in the diagram, a driver will pull up to the intersection, safely park their vehicle and unlock and fold down the bollard. They can then drive through the intersection and park on the other side of the road closure to then re-erect the bollard and lock it in place. This approach was agreed to by the waste collection unit. If the school waste collection contractor has difficulty accessing the school from any of the other local street connections, Council can supply a copy of the key so that they can also adopt this approach.

Council’s waste collection vehicles currently access Patterson Street to collect resident waste without any recorded concerns. It is considered that if waste collection were to occur outside of school drop off and pick up times, this is likely to be an acceptable outcome.

Bus access

Based on the written submission and discussion with the Principal of St Bernard’s Primary School, there are concerns that the trial road closure would negatively impact bus access to the school. Buses are used to transport students to attend camps, excursions, and sporting events. As shown in Figure 6 below, the school has advised that standard charter buses typically stage on Patterson Street which is the preferred pick up and drop off point for busses with access from Walsh Street. However, if buses are arriving in peak times around school start and finish times, the charter bus operators prefer to park on Barrow Street due to parked vehicles hindering ease of access and bus alighting on Patterson Street.



Figure 6 Street view image showing charter bus parked on Patterson Street

In these instances, the school have indicated buses park on Barrow Street adjacent to the school which would still be an option for the bus operators. As outlined in Figure 7 below, there are multiple other streets that a bus driver could use to access the school. If the trial proceeds and the bus access concerns persist, Council officers can collaborate with the school to ensure that bus access is maintained.

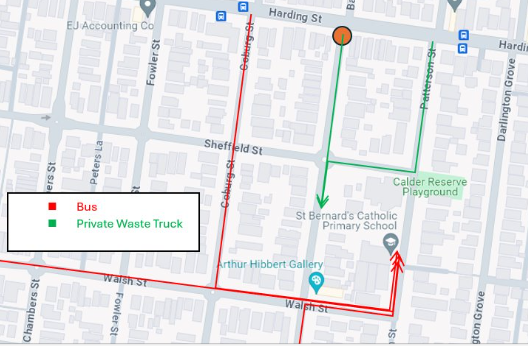


Figure 7 Opportunities for bus and waste collection routes to St Bernard’s Primary School

While council expects bus and waste truck access to the school to be maintained at an appropriate level, the primary concern of the school relates to their ability to acquire the services of private service providers without difficulty in negotiating access requirements. As the school uses private contractors for charter buses and waste collection, there can be difficulty acquiring these services to the school when there are access issues. The primary concern of the school is that the proposed road closure might make negotiations with these private service providers increasingly difficult if accessibility for their larger vehicles becomes more difficult as a result of the road closure.

Church access

There is a parish associated with St Bernard Primary School located on the corner of Sheffield Street and Patterson Street. Vehicle access to the church will be maintained via both Sheffield Street and Patterson Street. Barrow Street will still be accessible to vehicle traffic albeit not through the intersection with Harding Street. The school expressed traffic issues can be prevalent during services such as funerals at the parish occur. Council officers expect reasonable alternative parking and access arrangements to be available for people attending these events. However, the impact on access and traffic from these services will be monitored throughout the trial period to assess the severity of any access impacts reported.

Parent drop off and pick up

The school has expressed concerns regarding access for parents picking up and dropping off students at peak times. The concern relates to impacts on manoeuvrability and potential safety issues if vehicles are forced to use streets that are congested with parked cars and traffic at these times.

Parents who choose to drop off and pick up their children to St Bernard’s Primary School can continue to do so if the trial road closure proceeds but will be unable to drive through the intersection of Barrow Street and Harding Street. The school front entrance is on Patterson Street and reports from residents of the street indicate that most drop-off and pick-up occurs in Patterson Street, as this is where the main entrance and timed parking restrictions (P 2min) is located. Based on resident feedback, it is understood that some parents choose to park in Darlington Grove and allow their children to walk through the laneway to the main school entrance in Patterson Street. The school is concerned about the impact additional through traffic could have during school start and end times when traffic is already busy on Patterson Street.

The proposed trial road closure is seeking to improve the safety for all road users which may encourage more people to walk and ride to school. Council officers will monitor the impact of the trial and expects driver behaviour to adjust throughout the trial period. Longer term it is expected that a safer environment in the area will encourage more walking and riding to school which will reduce traffic impacts while still enabling convenient drop off and pick up access for vehicles.

Traffic report

As St Bernard’s Primary School was concerned the trial road closure would negatively impact their school, they have commissioned a traffic engineer to undertake an assessment. The traffic engineer outlined that speed humps would be more suitable to reduce the speed in the street instead of the proposed trial road closure. Council officers however determine that a road closure will have a more positive impact on the safety and amenity of the street and as such, is the recommended treatment for Barrow Street. Nonetheless, speed humps are still an effective treatment for managing speed and could be used to compliment the road closure in the future.

#### Local Street Impacts

The most common feedback to the proposal is that the trial road closure would result in additional traffic on adjacent streets. In particular, the concerns were that some drivers would avoid the road closure and use Coburg Street or Patterson Street via Sheffield Street. Whilst this may occur, Council officers predict that the modest increase in vehicle volumes expected from local traffic can be accommodated in the local street network. The impact of the trial will be measured through additional tube count surveys and community feedback and the trial will determine exactly how the traffic is redistributed.

Officers expect impacts to the local road network to be similar to other road closures undertaken in Merri-bek. A similar recent closure on John Street in Brunswick that was installed in 2019 recorded

Recent examples indicate that a modest increase in traffic on surrounding streets can be expected as a result of local road closures, however rat-running traffic on all streets significantly near road closures reduces and results in overall traffic in the precinct significantly declining.

While officers expect traffic to adjust to the new local road environment, there is expected to be a higher volume of traffic on surrounding streets in the first few weeks of the trial. This can be mitigated by scheduling the trial to commence during the summer school holidays in December 2024. This will help local road users to adjust to the changes before the area experiences any impacts from school related traffic.

#### Prioritising street for a select user group

The recorded average weekday vehicle volumes on Barrow Street south of Harding Street is 1,243 which is acceptable for most local streets but not for a strategic cycling corridor that is widely used by school children.

A key theme in the feedback was that Council are seeking to make Barrow Street safer at the expense of other streets or other users. The intention is to make Barrow Street safer as it is a reported rat run, an identified cycling route (East Brunswick Shimmy) and that many community members currently feel unsafe on Barrow Street. For these reasons, it is expected the trial road closure would create an environment which looks and feels safer than a typical local street typology. In addition, it is intended that the trial road closure will complement a number of other road safety initiatives that Council officers are proposing which is outlined in the next section of the report.

If the outcome of the trial road closure is that other streets become detrimentally unsafe or congested, Council officers will monitor the street through surveys, inspections and community feedback and potentially introduce additional traffic management devices to address those concerns should they occur. If there remains side effects from the trial that are considered inappropriate or unexpected, officers will recommend the removal of the trial infrastructure.

At the Hearing of Submissions, Coburg High School have shared census data of how students travel to school on a typical morning. Over 50% of students walked or rode to school in 2024, up from 44.7 per cent in 2021. In preparing for their submission for the trial road closure, students have undertaken their own survey. They surveyed their cohort of over 1311 students and found that 187 live in the catchment area south of Bell Street between Sydney Road and Nicholson Street. 102 of those students walk and 42 ride a bike to school. Many of these students currently travel along less convenient routes to avoid Barrow Street. The school are supportive of the project as calmer streets would provide a safer route for these students to attend school.

After witnessing and experiencing the benefits of the trial closure, Council officers expect the trial road closure to create a positive change in community sentiment and trigger a higher uptake of walking and riding along the Barrow Street corridor.

#### Strengthening the Barrow Street corridor

Many respondents were wanting to see safety improvements at other locations in place of the proposed trial road closure. Council officers are looking to strengthen this route for people to safely walk and ride and the proposal will be complemented by the following projects in the vicinity which are currently in development:

 **Harding Street “Streets for People” Project** - aims to improve the safety and amenity of the street. This project will commence for consultation in 2024/2025 financial year and any streetscape improvements are budgeted for 2026/2027 financial year. Part of these works will upgrade the existing school crossing on Harding Street near Patterson Street to a pedestrian operated signal. The design for these signals is currently in development and will be considered in the delivery of the broader streetscape improvement plan for Harding Street.

 **Kendall Street and Harding Street Bridge -** In collaboration with the City of Darebin, construct a new bridge for people to walk and ride across the Merri Creek. Completion is expected in the 2025/2026 financial year.

 **Rennie Street and Barrow Street -** Provide an additional zebra crossing for people to cross Rennie Street just east of Barrow Street. Pending approval from the Department of Transport and Planning, construction could occur in the 2024/2025 financial year.

 **Blair Street & Barrow Street -** A pair of raised zebra crossings (wombat crossings) on both Barrow Street and Blair Street at the intersection pending external grand funding.

Other identified safety concerns can be investigated separate to this project by Council officers.

### Community impact

The proposed road closures will offer various benefits, including a safer walking and riding environment. The strategic closing of Barrow Street will promote the existing bicycle routes and reduce rat-running, contributing to a quieter and more inviting space for the community. Pedestrian-friendly zones not only encourage social interaction but also support sustainable transportation modes, such as walking and cycling, thereby promoting a healthier lifestyle.

It is noted that while road closures can bring about positive outcomes, it will need to be carefully planned and communicated to minimise disruptions and ensure that the benefits outweigh any potential drawback including additional travel times for local traffic and the redistribution of traffic to other surrounding streets. Council will monitor surrounding local roads and is able to deploy additional traffic calming measures such to offset any negative traffic impacts from the trial road closures. The additional travel time experience by local residents as a result of the closures will discourage rat-running as there will no longer be an attractive and direct north-south connection on local streets.

Council has also identified that should a permanent road closure be implemented, that resident access in sections of the road closure will be impacted due to existing medians and kerb-island. Additional infrastructure works will therefore be required to ensure that local resident access directly abutting the closure can be maintained.

### Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. The recommendations for the closure of Barrow Street does not limit or interfere with any Human Rights, in particular ‘section 12 - right to freedom of movement’ as residents will continue to have access to their properties*.* Additionally, the proposed road closures will contribute positively to the freedom of movement by making walking and cycling safer modes of transport.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

**Overview**

Following the April 2024 resolution, Council officers proceeded with the statutory consultation process on the proposed trial road closure. This included an advertisement in The Age, a dedicated project page on our Conversations Merri-bek website and a circular letter to all owners and occupiers of all properties in the area as shown in **Attachment 1**. The consultation area was outlined in the April 2024 Council report.

The purpose of the consultation was to:

 To understand local use of the streets and understand any issues with the proposal that may not be as visible to council.

 To identify issues or functions in the area that may not be expected or identified by officers ahead of the consultation.

 To gauge the level of community support for the proposal.

Anyone interested in the project was able to submit their feedback via the Conversations Merri-bek website. There was a considerable response to the consultation. 442 responses were received via the Conversations Merri-bek page, seven submissions were made via email or phone.

Of the responses received via the Conversations Merri-bek page:

 53% of responses were in support of the proposal.

 5% were in support with concerns.

 Less than 1% were unsure or neutral.

 41% were not in support.

Given the large volume of submissions, each submission was reviewed but Council officers only noted occurrences of key comments or concerns. In order of highest to lowest occurrence, the key 10 key comments from the consultation were:

1. That the trial road closure would have a negative impact on the surrounding streets, namely Coburg Street and Patterson Street (count 106)

2. Submitter was in full support of the trial road closure (count 76)

3. Barrow Street is currently very dangerous for road users (count 50)

4. Barrow Street is a needed safe cycling link (count 39)

5. It is worth trailing the proposal to see the impacts (count 28)

6. The proposal would have a negative impact on St Bernard’s Primary School (Count 28)

7. There are other unsafe intersections that Council should be addressing (Count 21)

8. Speed humps or other treatments would be more appropriate (Count 18)

9. The trial is a waste of money (Count 13). Note that most respondents’ cost estimates of $150,000 to $180,000 which are inaccurate

10. Council have not provided enough data or evidence for the proposal (Count 9)

These comments were then categorised into five key themes which have been address in Section 3 of this report.

**Hearing of Submissions**

The Hearing of Submissions was held on 6 June 2024 and attended by Mayor Pulford, Councillor Pavlidis and Councillor Bolton. Councillor Conlan was an apology. Representatives of St Bernard’s Primary School and Coburg High School attended along with 11 other submitters both for and against the proposal.

The summary or proceedings from the Hearing of Submissions is shown in **Attachment 2.**

**Emergency Services**

During the consultation, Council officers sent a letter to Ambulance Victoria, Victoria Police (Fawkner Police Station and Brunswick Police Station) and Fire Rescue Victoria. Initially, no responses were received but note that generally, this indicates that the recipient does not have comments or concerns to make with the proposal. But as emergency service access was highlighted as a key concern, a follow up email was then sent to each respective emergency service.

One email response was received from Ambulance Victoria who stated that:

*“The proposal for works in Barrow Street look absolutely fine to me. Given the multiple easy, short detours around to houses blocked off in Barrow (ie accessing them via Coburg/Patterson and Sheffield St), I don’t foresee any issues at all here. Any possible delays to AV crews trying to access addresses in Barrow would be literally seconds, not minutes.”*

**Internal stakeholders**

Council officers consulted with the internal stakeholders who would be impacted by the proposal including waste collection and street cleansing as these services rely on larger vehicles frequently driving through Barrow Street. No issues were identified with street cleansing. A resolution to address waste collection vehicle access has been achieved by proposing lockable fold down bollards at the proposed trial road closure location.

**Department of Transport and Planning**

To meet the obligation of the Local Government Act, Council officers requested a report from the Department of Transport and Planning via email on 23 April 2024.

Council received the report from Department of Transport and Planning on 16 May 2024 where it was outlined that they have no objection to the proposed temporary closure for six months (maximum up to twelve months) on Barrow Street at Harding Street, Coburg. In addition, comments were made about the impact to emergency services and public transport being that Barrow Street is not a public transport route. As quoted from the report “Emergency services will not be affected by the proposed trail road closure.”

A copy of the report from the Department of Transport and Planning is provided in **Attachment 3**.

**St Bernard’s Primary School**

Prior to proposing the road closures, Council officers engaged key stake holders at St Bernard’s Catholic Primary School. The school highlighted concerns regarding access during drop-off and pick up times, school bus access, staff parking and reduced exposure from through traffic. At the meeting officers discussed the process of the road closures which included the Section 223 process in accordance with the Road Management Act. The rigorous process would allow the school and community multiple touch points to provide feedback and for Council to work through any issues that may occur as part of the closure.

In the weeks between the April 2024 Council meeting and the consultation commencing on 3 May 2024, Council officers did not inform the school of the April 2024 resolution to commence consultation separately. The school received a consultation letter at the same time as other properties, as such the school were disappointed at this level of engagement. Council officers accept this was not ideal and caused unnecessary confusion for the school. It would have been beneficial to maintain communication with the school ahead of the letters being distributed to enable the school to advise their community ahead of the consultation being launched in May.

Since the consultation period commenced, Council officers have discussed the concerns of the school in writing, by phone and through in person meetings. This has provided Council officers with a detailed understanding of the school’s concerns.

Petition

Following the start of consultation in early May, St Bernard’s Primary School circulated a petition against the proposed trial road closure. Parents of the school were invited to circle a list of populated concerns provided on a petition and provide this to Council. The concerns were that:

1. Insufficient validation from Council.

2. Impedes ability to drop off / pick up children from St Bernard’s school.

3. Insufficient options presented by Council to reduce car speeds to improve pedestrian safety.

4. No evidence from Council that car traffic in Barrow and surrounding street will reduce.

5. Project funds could be better spent on alternative measures.

6. Individuals will be negatively impacted by increased traffic on their street.

7. Access concerns for emergency respondent vehicles and garbage trucks, sweet sweepers.

8. Prefer Council to upgrade lollipop crossing on Harding Street near Patterson / Salisbury Street.

Council received approx 111 submissions from 73 households.

**Coburg High School**

The Principal of Coburg High School made a submission in support of the trial and spoke to this at the Hearing of Submissions. These comments are reflected in page 13 of Section 3 secton of this report.

**Merri-bek Primary School**

Council officers contacted the Principal of Merri-bek Primary School to understand if they had any concerns with the proposal. The Principal responded outlining their support for the proposal and stated that:

“My biggest concern is that Council may not proceed with this trial, and school children and their families will be forced to continue to compete with fast moving, rat running traffic.

Merri-bek Primary has a large cohort of children and families who walk and ride to school. During Council’s Open Streets Trials in 2022, active travel on event day averaged 65.4%, with the highest rate on event day of 70.6%. Many people travel on or across Barrow Street several times each day.

The closure of Barrow Street will help to calm traffic and reduce road danger to children and their families at Merri-bek Primary and Coburg High. Car crashes are the leading cause of death for Australian children. Our school community welcomes infrastructure changes that will protect children and their families from road violence.”

**Affected persons rights and interests**

Before making a decision that affects a person’s rights, Council must identify whose rights may be directly affected and provide an opportunity for that person (or persons) to convey those views regarding the effect on their rights and consider those views.

## 5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

## 6. Financial and Resources Implications

The works to implement this project can be funded from the allocation for Road Safety and Amenity in Council’s capital works program. The full cost of delivering a permanent road closure, inclusive of two stages of consultation and associated infrastructure upgrades, can be up to $150,000.

Note that the trial road closure infrastructure and first round of consultation is estimated to cost $10,000. The main costs associated with the project are the permanent civil infrastructure works required to reinforce a potential future permanent closure. However, the costs of these works will be presented to council following the trial if a higher quality of infrastructure is proposed as a permanent treatment.

## 7. Implementation

After consideration of the written and verbal submissions, and the report from the Department of Transport, Council can decide whether to proceed with the permanent road closures as proposed.

If Council determines to proceed with the trial road closure, officers will proceed to:

 Notify all those who previously received a circular letter in relation to the proposal including emergency services and the Department of Transport and Planning, of Council’s decision.

 Following this, Council officers will arrange to have temporary bollards installed on Barrow Street from the intersection of Harding Street to a point up to 8 metres further south.

 Installation of this treatment will be timed to align with the September/October School Holiday period. This will allow local traffic to adjust to the new arrangement before the school term commences. It will also provide time for the school and local community to prepare for the closure prior to installation.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Consultation area - Barrow Street trial road closure | D24/288836 |  |
| **2** | Hearing of Submissions Committee - Summary of Proceedings - Trial closure Barrow Street - 6 June 2024 - redacted | D24/288839 |  |
| **3** | Department of Transport and Planning report- Barrow Street trial road closure at Harding Street | D24/288842 |  |

**7.2 Upfield Corridor Urban Design Framework (Brunswick LXRP) - Stage 1**

**Acting Director Place and Environment Phillip Priest**

**City Development**

**Officer Recommendation**

That Council:

1. Endorses the Stage 1 of the Upfield Corridor Urban Design Framework (Attachment 1).

2. Notes that the Chief Executive Officer will write to the CEO of the Level Crossing Removal Project to advise of Council’s endorsement of the Stage 1 Upfield Corridor Urban Design Framework and providing them a copy to inform future design considerations for the Brunswick level crossing removals project.

3. Endorses a staged approach to the completion of the Upfield Corridor Urban Design Framework, with work on Stage 2 (the final stage), including further community engagement, to commence once plans for the Brunswick level crossing removals project have been released by the State Government.

4. Notes the community engagement detailed in Section 4 of this report and thanks the community for their participation in this engagement.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

Developing an Upfield Corridor Urban Design Framework (UDF) was a commitment made in Reshaping Brunswick (April 2023), Council’s adopted position paper that outlines the Council and the community’s vision for the Brunswick level crossing removals project (the project).

Through previous engagement, we heard what sort of outcomes the community want for the corridor. The UDF is a first step in planning for broader revitalisation and will support Council’s advocacy to the State Government to extend the project scope outside the narrow rail corridor.

There remains considerable uncertainty about the details of the project, including the number and location of new stations. The recent announcement, in May 2024 of a delay, pushing the removal of level crossings from 2027 to 2030, adds further uncertainty as the surrounding area continues to evolve. To manage these uncertainties, the UDF has been divided into two stages. This approach allows for important input into the project’s preliminary design work now, while remaining adaptable to the evolving physical context and new project details, as they are announced.

Stage 1 of the UDF includes concept plans for reimagining streets that terminate at or run parallel to the rail corridor. The concept plans demonstrate opportunities for increased tree planting to reduce the urban heat island effect, new open spaces for residents and visitors, and active transport connections to the future cycling and pedestrian paths beneath the elevated rail line. These plans are informed by an analysis of existing Council policies, of current urban challenges and opportunities, and public realm design principles derived from community feedback.

Work on Stage 2 of the UDF will begin once initial plans for the project are released. This stage will address changes in movement and access around the new train stations, and potential streetscape upgrades for key east-west streets between the new stations and Sydney Road and other important destinations. It will also update Stage 1, incorporating the new station locations and any additional urban context changes. Stage 2 will include further community engagement and reporting to a future Council meeting for a decision.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Brunswick Level Crossing Removals Position Paper** - 12 April 2023

*That Council:*

*1. Notes the extensive engagement program that has been carried out to seek the views of the local community about the Brunswick Level Crossing Removals Project, and the feedback that has been received through this program which is summarised in this report*

*2. Thanks the community groups, individuals, businesses and agencies that took part in the engagement program, for sharing their valuable perspectives on the project*

*3. Adopts the document titled Reshaping Brunswick (Attachment 1) as Council’s advocacy position on the project subject to the following changes:*

*a) On page 13 of Reshaping Brunswick, at the end of the final paragraph, add the following: The Merri-bek Human Rights Policy also provides flexibility for Council to consider future needs of priority area, groups and issues and the framework of an age and lifespan lens. Older people also constitute a group whose perspective will be included in Council dealings with level Crossing Removal Project team throughout the design and delivery of the project.*

*b) Update Reshaping Brunswick to create an advocacy position that Council believes that three stations should be rebuilt as part of the works to this part of the Upfield Line, whilst also minimising the bulk of the project infrastructure of and any negative impacts on homes adjacent to the rail line, local amenity, sunlight, trees or heritage fabric, including:*

*i. Adding to page 18 under the heading “What we ask of the Department of Transport and Planning” A commitment to the retention of the current number of 3 stations.*

*ii. Adding to page 18 under the heading “What we ask of Level Crossing Removal Project’ two additional dot points: Retention of 3 stations on this section of the Upfield Line and Minimisation of visual bulk of station and platforms.*

*iii. Deleting the diagram on page 19.*

*iv. Making any other updates to the paper to clarify this advocacy position.*

*c) On page 22 of Reshaping Brunswick under the heading “Step 1: Over the next 12 months”, include disability, seniors, and residents’ groups in the list of stakeholders to work with to develop a shared vision and key moves for the revitalisation of Sydney Road.*

*d) On page 25 of Reshaping Brunswick, under the heading “What we ask of the Department of Transport and Planning” include after “long term actions”, with key priorities as below: i. Insert a new dot point as follows: Install temporary separated bike lanes prior to the Upfield bike path being closed for construction. There is no safe or practical north/south alternative, therefore making temporary separated bike lanes a priority for the safety of all cyclists displaced from the Upfield line including school age and younger children in childcare and kindergarten. A higher risk Sydney Rd or backstreets of construction and congestion is not a safe alternative. Separated bike lanes means that solutions will need to be found for delivery for premises without rear access, assessment of needs and strategy for people with restricted mobility reliant on parking access along Sydney Rd, and stops for replacement buses. ii. From “As a minimum, upgrade key Sydney Road tram stops now before the works start so that they are accessible to people with a disability before the only other form of accessible public transport is disrupted.” delete “As a minimum.”*

*e) One page 26 of Reshaping Brunswick under the heading “What we ask of the Level Crossing Removal Project”, add to the end of bullet point 5 Merri-bek Age Friendly Reference Group, Brunswick Residents Network and other community, disability, aged and residents groups.*

*f) On page 29 of Reshaping Brunswick under the heading “What we ask of the Level Crossing Removal Project”, add the following additional dot point: Guarantee that work with higher levels of noise does not occur between 10pm and 7am.*

*g) On page 35 of Reshaping Brunswick:*

*i. Under the heading “What we ask of the Level Crossing Removal Project”, add Consult the council's Disability Reference Group about public transport access during the construction phase, and access to the new stations as part of the design phase.*

*ii. Under the heading “What we ask of the Department of Transport and Planning”, add the dot points Provide a Disability Access Plan and advertise this via disability, seniors groups and State Government and Council media and Provision of free taxi vouchers for those with a disability who are impacted*

*iii. Under the heading “What we ask of Public Transport Victoria”, add a new dot point: Increase service levels of trams on Sydney Road, Lygon Street and Melville Road; East-West bus routes; and Upfield Train Replacement Buses both in evenings as well as daytime, to help accommodate increased passengers and mitigate the impact of traffic delays.*

*h) On page 57 of Reshaping Brunswick add the additional dot points:*

*i. Conduct a safety audit at crossing intersections for pedestrians and cyclists; and*

*ii. Carry out a Safety Audit at pedestrian and cyclist crossings a month after the removal of the boom gates to ensure that the crossings are safe.*

*iii. On page 58 of Reshaping Brunswick add the additional dot point: Increase the frequency of Upfield Services post completion of project, by duplication of Upfield line, not by shunting of trains near Coburg, and increasing the transport disadvantage and car reliance for northern Merri-bek residents.*

*4. Writes to and seeks meetings with the relevant state government Ministers to highlight Council’s position and seek their response to the Council and community aspirations for the project set out in Reshaping Brunswick.*

*5. Endorse the Council commitments set out in Reshaping Brunswick, including the development of a new Urban Design Framework for Brunswick that takes account of the elevated rail, a localised Traffic Impact Assessment, and a partnership approach to the revitalisation of Sydney Road.*

**Elevated Rail Through Brunswick - Council's Response to State Government Project** - 7 December 2022

*That Council:*

*1. Notes the work to identify initial issues and opportunities (captured in Attachment 1) presented by the removal of 8 level crossings and the elevation of the rail line in Brunswick, as announced in September 2022 by the State Government.*

*2. Endorses the approach to community engagement outlined in this paper, to seek the views of the Merri-bek community in relation to this major project, including as stakeholders in the Community Engagement process Disability Advocacy Groups such as Disability Resources Disabled Motorist Australia, Pedestrian Groups Walk on Moreland, and Older Persons Advocacy groups.*

*3. Notes that the findings from this engagement will form the basis for a position paper outlining the community’s vison and priorities for this project, both in its delivery phase, and in its outcomes, and that this position paper will form the basis for advocacy to the State Government throughout their delivery of the project*

*4. Notes the concerns and issues raised by community members at a public meeting held on Sunday 13 November 2022 at Brunswick Town Hall attended by 24 people, as outlined in the document circulated on 7 December 2022.*

*5. Notes the large community meeting held by Brunswick Residents Network on Monday 5 December 2022 attended by over 50 people, demonstrating the significant community interest in this project and the need for meaningful community consultation.*

*6. Acknowledges the growing community concern about the possibility of two new stations instead of three, and seeks information from the Level Crossing Removal Project to assist community understanding and inform Council’s advocacy position.*

*7. Endorses the establishment of a Brunswick – Upfield Rail Corridor Roundtable co-chaired by Cr Panopoulos, Mayor and Cr Tapinos, and a Government MP to be convened as required to address specific thematic needs, with a flexible membership that brings together local community members and relevant experts at key points to explore issues as the development of the Upfield Corridor Community Vision progresses.*

*8. Requires that nominees seeking to participate in the Brunswick – Upfield Rail Corridor Roundtable must be able to demonstrate:*

*a) Strong community networks and linkages or willingness to build these connections;*

*b) An ability to represent a broad range of views that reflect the diversity of the community;*

*c) A willingness to contribute positively to meetings in a fair and unbiased manner;*

*d) An ability to look beyond personal interests for the benefit of the community and residents of the City of Merri-bek;*

*e) A demonstrated commitment to participative and consultative processes; and*

*f) Endorsement by their own organisation (if applicable).*

**Notice of Motion - Brunswick Level Crossings Removal Consultation Process** – 9 November 2022

*That Council:*

*1. Advocates to the State Government that the Brunswick Level Crossing Removal project should proceed under the standard planning process with notification and review and a planning panel which enables members of the community to make submissions.*

*2. Notes it will receive a report in December 2022 responding to a Notice of Motion raised in October 2022 relating to the elevated rail project and the preparation of an Upfield Corridor Vision.*

*3. Receive a further report in early 2023 seeking to address the following issues:*

*a) How Merri-bek Council will liaise with relevant community organisations, the Level Crossing Removal Project and the Department of Transport to ensure effective and ongoing community engagement.*

*b) An outline of timelines, especially for the closure of the Upfield Shared Path and recommendations for alternative routes.*

*c) Implications for movement and safety on Sydney Road in the light of increased numbers of cyclists and an increased number of buses given that the Upfield Shared Path and the Upfield Train Line will be closed.*

*d) Plans for how people with mobility issues will access public transport during the closure of the Upfield Train Line.*

*e) In consideration of safe cycling options, If protected lanes are recommended, proposals around the management of deliveries to businesses and dwellings without rear lane access, and disability access.*

*f) Protection of heritage areas, open space, trees and community gardens.*

*g) Storage of Level Crossing Removal Project and Department of Transport equipment during the construction phase.*

*h) Noise attenuation and noise reduction during construction and the hours during which noisy construction is likely to occur.*

*i) Strategies to maintain reliable public transport service to commuters north of the proposed works, e.g. Will train service still connect between Coburg and Upfield Stations.*

*4. Organises and hosts a public meeting at Brunswick Town Hall, inviting the participation of LXRP and Department of Transport, with the purpose and opportunity for presentation and information by LXRP, Department of Transport and Council, and community questions and comments. A date for the meeting to be proposed in the February 2023 report if not held prior to this.*

**Notice of Motion - Elevated Rail and the Upfield Corridor Vision – Brunswick** – 12 October 2022

*That Council:*

*1. Welcomes the announcement of the elevation of the Upfield line in Brunswick removing 8 level crossings from Albion Street in Brunswick to Park Street in Parkville and write to the Premier Dan Andrews, the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Jacinta Allan thanking them for the investment in Brunswick and offering to collaborate and work together with the LXRP to realise the best possible community outcome from the removal of the crossings.*

*2. Receives a report about developing a Strategic Plan for the Upfield Corridor in consultation with the local community which includes the following:*

*a) An Upfield Corridor Community Vision for the land beneath the elevated rail including opportunities for more open space, cycling paths, tree plantings, urban sports infrastructure, public art, increased amenity, and more pedestrianised spaces. Identification of council and state-owned land within the corridor; and, in particular adjacent to the railway which could be incorporated into the community vision.*

*b) A Strategy to protect and interpret the railway’s cultural and historical objects, materials and buildings of the Upfield line with a focus also on social history, identifying the people who worked on the railway line and finding interpretive methods to tell their story.*

*c) A Strategy to identify the future population needs, including but not limited to community facilities and public realm improvements with more activation, safety-measures, open-space and parklets; where possible, more pedestrianisation and beautification of walkways, laneways, and small streets; including an assessment and costing of streetscape improvements and further pedestrianisation and beautification works on (i) Breese Street and Anstey Precinct (ii) Saxon Street and (iii) Wilson Avenue, when construction works are completed.*

*d) A Strategy to increase street plantings and green open space in the corridor recognising the increased future population growth and high-density development requiring mitigating against the heat island affect –refers the importance of future planning in the corridor to the ‘Open Space Review’ and the review of ‘A Park Close to Home’*

*e) Recommendation for the most effective forms of community engagement to:*

*i. help build Council’s advocacy position in the early stages of the project*

*ii. identify a list of key stakeholders for early engagement*

*iii. consider the establishment of a Reference Group*

*3. Acknowledges that, while the elevation of the railway line Albion Street, Brunswick, to Park Street, Parkville, is welcome, urges the Victorian Government to take the opportunity to duplicate the Upfield Line beyond Gowrie Station, to enable the much needed increased services along the length of the line*

**1. Policy Context**

**Council Plan**

The UDF is guided by the 2021-2025 Council Plan. The relevant themes providing guidance are:

 Moving and living safely

 Vibrant spaces and places

 An environmentally proactive Council

 An empowered and collaborative area

**Moving Around Merri-bek (2024)**

Moving Around Merri-bek is a long-term strategic document that guides the way Council manages and makes changes to Merri-bek’s transport system. It outlines Council’s approach to addressing transport challenges by promoting safety, accessibility, sustainability, health, liveability, and inclusivity within the urban environment. The UDF is aligned with Moving Around Merri-bek in planning for the creation of vibrant, well-designed public spaces that support active and public transport, reduce environmental impact, and improve public health.

**Merri-bek Open Space Strategy (2024)**

This strategy sets out a vision of open spaces that are welcoming and accessible to all, supporting health, well-being, and biodiversity. Key directions include providing parks close to home, ensuring a mix of open space experiences, and creating adaptive, resilient environments. The UDF identifies opportunities to create new open spaces within the focus area and considers existing gaps in the open space network, supporting the vision of the Open Space Strategy.

**Urban Heat Island Effect (UHIE) Action Plan 2016-2025 and Cooling the Upfield Corridor 2018-2029**

This action plan and strategy focus on how increased vegetation cover and water sensitive urban design can directly reduce the amount of heat absorbed into the landscape to improve its cooling capacity. Brunswick is an important gathering place for residents and visitors alike, however the dense urban environment means it has some of the hottest surface temperatures within Merri-bek. This is expected to become more intense in future years due to climate change.

Incorporating heat mitigation strategies into public realm upgrades around the rail corridor can create cooler and greener spaces for residents and visitors to enjoy, offering shelter, refuge, and relief on hot days.

**Urban Forest Strategy 2017-2027**

This strategy aims to protect and enhance Merri-bek’s natural assets on public and private land, including street trees, significant trees, areas of conservation value and habitat corridors. The UDF complements this Strategy by planning for more planting in Council streets surrounding the project.

**Integrated Water Management Plan 2040**

This strategy aims to guide Council’s transition towards becoming a Water Sensitive City – a city with improved water quality, reduced water demand and resilient landscapes that is better prepared for the ongoing effects of climate change. The UDF considers opportunities to include Water Sensitive Urban Design in future public realm upgrades within the focus area.

**2. Background**

In September 2022, the Victorian Government announced plans to remove eight level crossings on the Upfield Rail Line between Park Street, Parkville and Albion Street, Brunswick by 2027. This has recently been revised to 2030. The project will see an elevated train line and new train stations replace the existing ground level train line, with new shared paths and open spaces created below. This new elevated section of the Upfield line will connect with the elevated section between Moreland Road and Bell Street. The project is still at an early stage and no plans have been released.

Council’s role is one of advocacy, seeking to maximise the long-term benefits of the project. The project will be funded, designed, and delivered by the state government, through the Level Crossing Removal Project (LXRP). Council and the LXRP are separate entities. While Council does not design or deliver the project, it can represent community views to the State Government.

In April 2023, Council adopted Reshaping Brunswick, its position paper on the project. Reshaping Brunswick was the result of hundreds of conversations with the people of Brunswick. The Brunswick community described a corridor of leafy, cool, green, biodiverse, usable spaces, precincts and paths that work for people of all ages, stages, backgrounds, abilities and interests. They also want the project to have a galvanising impact on broader revitalisation, to address longstanding local problems, and to create better connected, better managed and more equitable ways of moving around in the broader transport network. Reshaping Brunswick committed Council to developing an integrated set of new or revised policy responses, including a new Urban Design Framework, review of our streetscape upgrade program, and localised traffic changes.

**3. Issues**

**Defining the focus area**

The UDF considers Council-owned land and streets within approximately 50 to 100 metres of the rail corridor. In some cases, this has been extended further east and west to connect key destinations like Sydney Road, parks, and cultural and educational institutions.

This area has been selected to ensure a smooth integration between the existing urban fabric and the new paths and open spaces that will be delivered by the project. It is also the area where Council is most likely to be successful in asking the LXRP to deliver the public realm upgrades, either by extending the scope of the project outside the narrow corridor or when reinstating spaces occupied for construction purposes.

The UDF does not consider Sydney Road or other north-south streets not directly intersecting the rail corridor. Sydney Road is a complex environment with multiple owners and a variety of stakeholders. Council is already separately advocating for improvements to Sydney Road, including accessible tram stops, to be delivered in partnership with the State Government and the many Sydney Road stakeholders. Consequently, these efforts fall outside the outside the scope of the UDF. Other north-south streets, such as Breese Street, have not been included in the focus area as they don't directly interface with the project.

**Unknown future station locations**

The location of the new stations that will be constructed as part of the project is currently unknown. It is possible they won’t be in the same locations they are now. This makes it difficult to plan for how people will access and move around the new station precincts. The Urban Design Framework has been split into two stages to deal with this unknown.

Stage 1 of the UDF:

 Reviews existing Council plans and policies

 Analyses the existing urban context, identifying existing challenges and opportunities for public realm upgrades

 Develops a set of urban design principles for public realm improvements with objectives and strategies for achieving those objectives

 Develops concept plans showing potential upgrades to streets that terminate at or run parallel with the rail corridor.

Once the new station locations are known, Stage 2 of the UDF will:

 Develop station precinct diagrams, mapping changes to movement and access around the new stations.

 Develop streetscape upgrade concept plans for key streets between the new stations and Sydney Road or other key locations

 Make any necessary adjustments to the adjoining site concepts developed in Stage 1, incorporating new station locations, any other new information available at that time, and changes in the urban context such as new developments on private land.

Stage 2 of the UDF will include further community engagement.

**Delay to Brunswick level crossing removals**

In the 2024 State Government budget, the project was delayed, with the crossings now to be removed by 2030 rather than the originally announced 2027.

It is recommended to endorse Stage 1 of the UDF, despite the delay. Providing Stage 1 of the UDF to the LXRP before they have finalised their plans will maximise the opportunity to ensure the project area integrates successfully with adjoining Council land.

When the project recommences, the existing built form context surrounding the concept plans may have changed. Brunswick is a rapidly densifying suburb with remnant industrial uses being converted into higher density mixed use development. These newer developments typically have less intensive loading and vehicle access requirements, which may present additional opportunities for public realm upgrades when the project recommences in a few years. These further opportunities can be explored in Stage 2 of the UDF.

**Community impact**

The project is city shaping and will have a significant community impact. The UDF seeks to expand the benefits of the project into the surrounding area through planning for potential public realm upgrades in surrounding streets.

The public realm urban design principles seek to foster a diverse and inclusive community with a thriving creative ecosystem. Strategies to achieve this include creating inviting spaces for people to spend time in, rest, and socialise, addressing the increasing needs of residents for public open space arising from increasing residential density and apartment living. The UDF also seeks to strengthen the Brunswick creative community by identifying opportunities for public art, supporting the Brunswick Design District. Additionally, the UDF acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung as the Traditional Owners of the land, identifying land that could be used to create spaces with meaning to First Nations people, as informed by engagement

**Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications**

The UDF acknowledges the climate emergency and the need to improve environmental sustainability within the Upfield Corridor. The public realm urban design principles, which guide the development of the concept plans, seek to create a sustainable, cool, green corridor through increased tree canopy, de-paving where possible, expanding open spaces, creating a water sensitive city and increasing biodiversity. Another principle is seeking a safe, connected and accessible corridor by prioritising active transport, which will reduce emissions from vehicles.

**Economic sustainability implications**

The public realm urban design principles in the UDF seek to foster a thriving local economy by creating a high-quality public realm that supports outdoor trading and encourages visitors to spend more time in the activity centre. Concept plans have also been developed considering necessary vehicle access and loading requirements to support the ongoing operation of existing local businesses.

**Legal and risk considerations**

This report and the proposed recommendations do not identify any legal or risk considerations. As the design development and delivery of the concept public realm upgrades advance, each project will be assessed individually for any potential legal and risk factors.

**Human Rights Consideration**

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and they do not limit or interfere with any Human Rights, including the right to take part in public life (Section 18).

**4. Community consultation and engagement**

**Previous engagement – Reshaping Brunswick**

Engagement on the UDF is a continuation of the many discussions with the Brunswick community that took place in the development of the position paper, Reshaping Brunswick. The urban design principles of the UDF are based on this earlier engagement.

**UDF engagement process**

The engagement process for the UDF spanned 4 weeks, from 29 April to 26 May 2024. The approach was specifically tailored to the current early stage of the UDF and the delayed level crossing removal project.

This phase of engagement was intentionally not as extensive as it would be for a project that is ready to commence in the short term. The potential public realm upgrades shown in the concept plans would be delivered as part of or at the completion of the project, which is now many years away following the announced delay. Further detailed design work, informed by additional consultation, would be required before these plans can be delivered.

Despite these challenges, the process has sought to provide an opportunity for early engagement with all affected persons and has provided valuable insights and feedback at this early stage. The communications strategy, engagement activities, summary of feedback, and resulting changes to the concept plans are detailed below.

**Communications**

A robust communication strategy was employed to engage with the community across various platforms.

On Facebook, 2 posts calling for participation were shared with 26,535 page followers on 3 May and 17 May. On Instagram, the project information was shared through static posts twice between 30 April and 29 May. The account, which boasts 9,000 followers and an overall reach of 17,000, saw varying engagement levels. The first post reached 2,063 accounts, garnered 61 engagements, and was shared 6 times. The second post had a reach of 886 accounts, with 10 engagements and 2 shares.

Information about the UDF was shared directly with our 23 Community Connectors via email. Our current Connectors speak many different Merri-bek community languages, including Arabic, Greek, Turkish, Italian, Nepali, Vietnamese, Urdu, Chinese, Pashto, and Hindi.

Details of the engagement were also shared with the Merri-bek Disability Reference Group and Merri-bek Disability Service Providers Network through Council’s Disability Planner.

Digital newsletters also played a crucial role. The "My Merri-bek" newsletter, sent to 4,671 subscribers, featured an article on the UDF which received 25 link clicks, making it the 6th most interacted with piece in that issue. Additionally, the Economic Development e-news shared the content via Campaign Monitor.

For offline communications, A3 posters were printed and displayed at the 5 local libraries leading up to the drop-in session on 18 May. These posters were also distributed to Neighbourhood Houses for wider dissemination. Furthermore, information about the UDF was included in the on-call messaging script for May, ensuring that residents calling the Council for information or services were informed about the project, while on hold and awaiting transfer.

**Engagement activities**

The community was invited to provide their feedback on the UDF via Conversations Merri-bek. Over the engagement period the website had 963 unique visitors and received 17 submissions.

An in-person drop-in session was held at Brunswick Town Hall on Saturday 18 May from 2-5pm. This was promoted online and via a mail out of 573 letters to owners and occupiers of residential and commercial properties surrounding the locations of the concept plans. Relatively few (11) people attended the drop-in session, likely reflecting the delay to the project that had been announced only a few weeks earlier.

Officers also attended local businesses in Tinning Street, Michael Street and Barkly Street to discuss their access and loading requirements in-person.

**Summary of feedback**

Feedback on Stage 1 of the UDF was overwhelmingly positive. The key themes were:

Support for core principles:

 General appreciation for Council’s leadership and the urban design principles of the UDF.

 Strong support for public realm upgrades and improvements.

Enhancement of pedestrian and cycling networks:

 Calls for the inclusion of north-south connections (Saxon, Wilkinson, Ovens, and Breese Streets) in the Principal Pedestrian Network.

 Requests for additional streets to be considered in Stage 1 of the UDF.

 Emphasis on safety and amenity improvements for pedestrian and cyclists.

 Opportunity to leverage the construction of new stations to create "gateways to Sydney Road".

Traffic safety concerns:

 Concerns about increased motor vehicle traffic and speeding after the level crossings have been removed.

 Suggestions for traffic calming measures and better management of east-west streets intersecting the rail line.

Open space design:

 Positive feedback on the creation of more open space and tree planting initiatives.

 Support for more ambitious removal of on-street parking and hard paving, replaced with pocket parks and vibrant public spaces.

 Concern about the inclusion of a playground at Craig and Seeley Park and associated noise impacts on nearby residents.

Local economy:

 Emphasis on how changes to the built environment can support local businesses.

 Concern that central median tree planting in Tinning Street would impact on truck access to existing businesses.

General concerns about the project

 Concern about the long-term closure of the Upfield Bike Path and lack of proper alternative routes.

 Emphasis on the need for detailed planning and consultation to mitigate impact during construction.

 Concern about the design of new shared user paths and how they will intersect with east-west streets.

**Key changes to concept plans**

The following changes were made to the concept plans in response to feedback received during the consultation period:

Tinning Street

 The central median planting in Tinning Street was removed to avoid conflicts with heavy vehicle access to existing warehouses on the southern side. These properties, identified in the Brunswick Structure Plan as core employment areas, are unlikely to be redeveloped for mixed-use development during the lifetime of the project. However, the central median planting in front of Garrong Park has been retained.

 The proposed raised threshold at the intersection of Tinning Street and Colebrook Street was deemed impractical due to its interface with privately-owned parking spaces on the east side of Colebrook Street. It has been replaced with a note indicating traffic calming treatment and signage at this corner, the details of which can be resolved through future detailed design development.

Michael Street

 The concept plan has been updated to note the potential for future "no standing" zones during business hours to facilitate truck movements for existing businesses, while retaining parking for visitors at other times. This change reflects discussions with businesses regarding their vehicle access requirements and confirmation that they do not rely upon the on-street parking for staff or visitors. Notably, these sites are earmarked for housing in the Brunswick Structure Plan, indicating that current vehicle access requirements may change in the future if these sites are redeveloped.

Phoenix Street

 More of Phoenix Street has been shown as closed to vehicle traffic to accommodate increased tree planting and pedestrian space. Bollards are shown at the eastern end to allow delivery vehicle access to the plant room of Brunswick Baths, following discussions with Brunswick Baths management.

Barkly Street

 The concept design has been revised from central median planting with retention of kerbside parking to 90-degree parking in the centre of the street, with trees planted between parking spaces and removal of the existing kerbside parking. This revised concept design provides for new planting in the centre where canopy trees can grow unencumbered by overhead power lines, providing maximum shade and cooling. It also creates more on-street parking spaces than currently exist, which could facilitate the future repurposing of the Council-owned car park at the corner of Barkly Street and Black Street. Additionally, this layout maintains truck access to businesses along Barkly Street, although these sites are identified for mixed-use development in the Brunswick Structure Plan, indicating potential changes in land use and vehicle access requirements over time.

The key suggestion from community feedback that have not been included in the concept plans are:

Additional streets

 Breese Street, Ovens Street, and other north-south streets between Sydney Road and the rail line have not been included in the UDF. These streets are outside the scope of the UDF, which aims to demonstrate potential public realm upgrades to LXRP and advocate for their inclusion in the project. Upgrades to these other north-south streets would be solely Council projects and would be subject to future budget processes that consider funding priorities across the broader municipality. The 2024/25 Council budget includes funding for developing a streetscape masterplan for Breese Street and Hope Street.

Removal of potential playground at Seeley Park

 The potential of a playground is noted on the concept plans as ‘for investigation’ only and aligns with a gap identified in the Open Space Strategy. Concerns regarding noise to nearby residents would be part of that further investigation and consultation.

**Affected persons rights and interests**

Before making a decision that affects a person’s rights, Council must identify whose rights may be directly affected and provide an opportunity for that person (or persons) to convey those views regarding the effect on their rights and consider those views.

The engagement process was designed to reach all those affected by the proposed project, including nearby residents, businesses, and those who currently use and visit the corridor.

**5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest**

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

**6. Financial and Resources Implications**

Funds and resourcing to progress Stage 2 of the UDF will need to be sought through future Council budget processes.

Long term, if public realm upgrades envisaged through the concept plans in the UDF are to be delivered by Council, these would need to be referred to the Capital Works Program and their priority assessed along with all other projects within the Capital Works Program.

**7. Implementation**

Should Council resolve to adopt the Officer recommendation, a final version of the UDF will be placed on Council’s website and shared with the LXRP to inform their early design work. It will then be used as the basis for advocacy throughout the life of the project.

Once the State Government has released plans for the level crossing removals, subject to funding, work will commence on Stage 2 of the UDF.

**Attachment/s**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Upfield Corridor Urban Design Framework Stage 1 | D24/303018 |  |

7.3 Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands Plan

**Acting Director City Infrastructure Indivar Dhakal**

**Open Space and Environment**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Endorses the Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands Plan, at Attachment 1 to this report.

2. Acknowledges the Community Engagement Summary Reports and thanks the community, Friends of Merri Creek, Fawkner Residents Association and Merri Creek Management Committee for their feedback, patience and support for the Plan.

3. Notes that the Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands Plan identifies a total of $1.6105 million in proposed new capital works spending in the Parklands over the next 8 years. These projects will be subject to future Council budget processes, and their priority will be assessed along with all other projects in annual updates of the Capital Works Program.

**REPORT**

## Executive Summary

This report presents the final Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands Plan (**Attachment 1**) for endorsement. The Plan has been prepared to identify, protect and enhance the environmental, cultural heritage and community open space values along the Merri Creek open space corridor in Fawkner and Coburg North. This valuable 71-hectare parkland is five kilometres long and extends from the Western Ring Road and Moomba Park in the north to Parker Reserve and Spry Street, Reserve in Coburg North in the south. It includes mostly open grassland parkland along the, often steep, Merri Creek.

The Plan seeks to balance the role of the creek as a primary waterway biodiversity corridor with the need to maintain drainage and key service easement functionality while meeting the increasing needs of the local community for open space and recreational access. The draft plan has been developed by Merri-bek City Council in consultation with the local community, the Friends of Merri Creek, the Fawkner Residents Association and Merri Creek Management Committee.

Four stages of extensive community engagement were undertaken for the Plan. During Stage 1 between November 2020 and April 2021, ideas and stories were collected from the community and key stakeholders such as the Friends of Merri Creek, Fawkner Resident Association, sporting clubs and the Merri Creek Management Committee. Strengthening the natural values was identified as a key priority but so was improving community connections to the parklands and nature. Council then prepared a draft Plan that was then taken back to the community and stakeholders in Stage 2 for 4 weeks’ engagement in October and November 2021. Community feedback on the draft Plan was very positive and complementary (**Attachment 2**), the suggestions and comments provided informed the development of a revised draft. Stage 3 of engagement ran for 8 weeks from December 2022 through to January 2023. The community feedback informed the final draft which was taken to Council in March 2023 before going out to the community for a final 6 weeks during May and June 2023 (Stage 4). Stages 3 and 4 Feedback (**Attachment 3**) received from both online and during pop-up site meetings was very supportive with the only concerns raised around the location and scale of proposed park activation around Sahara Way Fawkner. Updates to the 5 precinct plans were made to reflect this helpful community feedback.

Following discussion and refinement of priorities and actions in consultation with key stakeholders and the local community the final plan will be used to guide strategic planning and management actions, capital works and implementation priorities over the next nine years along the creek and open space corridor.

The Cost Plan identifies a total of $4.368 million in Council funded works throughout the Parklands (in 2024 dollars) which could be delivered between 2025 and 2032. To deliver the Plan, $893,000 is earmarked in the existing Capital Works Program. It is estimated that $1.61 million in new capital works spending would be required, which would be subject to future Council budget processes. In addition, a further $1.87 million is proposed to be sourced from the Public Resort and Recreation Land Fund (Open Space Fund or PRRLF). More than $1.3 million in external grant funding has been identified to deliver on the Plan to leverage existing or proposed expenditure by Council. Some additional matching funding may be required depending on the grant conditions. This Plan together with Council’s active advocacy and track record on these matters means Merri‑bek is well positioned to realise this funding. All proposed projects will be subject to future Council budget processes, and their priority will be assessed along with all other projects in annual updates of the Capital Works Program.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Draft Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands Plan** – 8 March 2023

*That Council:*

*1. Endorses the draft Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands Plan shown in Attachment 1 to commence Stage 3 of community engagement for 6 weeks from 20 March.*

*2. Notes the implementation of this masterplan is estimated in today's dollars to cost $4.144 million for new works in the Parklands over a decade between 2023-24 and 2032-33, (Attachment 2) and that the allocation of any funding for these works beyond the existing budget of $1.432 million will be part of future budget allocation discussions.*

*3. Notes the Community Engagement Summary (Attachment 3) and thanks the community, Friends of Merri Creek, Fawkner Residents Association and Merri Creek Management Committee for their feedback, patience and support for the draft Plan.*

**Notice of Motion Merri Catchment Visioning** – 9 December 2020

*That Council:*

*1. Receives a report on the community proposal for a Merri Catchment Visioning exercise, which would include a workshop, resource mapping and final report on the outcomes in time for the February 2021 Council meeting;*

*2. Considers funding options for the proposal for a Merri Catchment Visioning exercise and potential partnerships to strengthen and support the goals of this initiative.*

## 1. Policy Context

 Council Vision and Plan:

 Theme 1: An environmentally proactive Merri-bek as a community connected to Country with healthy flora and fauna, through protection of ecosystems.

 Theme 2: Moving and Living Safely in Merri-bek with safe pedestrian and cycling options.

 Theme 3: A healthy and caring Merri-bek with ready opportunities to move and be socially connected.

 Theme 4: Vibrant spaces and places in Merri-bek where our public spaces bring people together with opportunities for art, recreation and events.

 Theme 5: An empowered and collaborative Merri-bek where the community can be involved with, shape and own council activities while trust in decisions and processes.

 Merri-bek Open Space Strategy (2024) recognises the importance of community use of open space, biodiversity and community connections to nature as significant elements in Council’s open space network and in creating a greener, more liveable city. The Strategy provides a direct reference to progressing and implementing the Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands Plan.

 CAP item for 2020-21 budget to develop Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands Plan

 Nature Plan (2020) and Urban Forest Strategy (2017) action items relating to biodiversity and habitat corridors, tree canopy, community connections to nature and vegetation protection along the Merri Creek corridor in Fawkner.

 Merri Creek and Environs Strategy (2009-2014)

 Statement of Commitment to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities of the City of Merri-bek

 Responding to the recommendations of the RU066 Moomba Park Cultural Values Assessment: Place Based Supplementary Report to the Merri Creek Cultural Values Report (2012) and Cultural Heritage Management Plan 17847 and the Merri Creek Aboriginal Cultural Values Report.

 The Merri-bek Planning Scheme recognises and seeks to protect biodiversity though a number of Clauses:

 Strategic Framework Clause 21.03-6 Open Space Network Objective 16 “To protect the biodiversity, amenity and recreational values of the open space network (identified)’ and a number of particularly relevant strategies, including:

o 16.5 Ensure development protects and enhances areas of remnant vegetation and indigenous revegetation as identified in the Merri-bek Open Space Strategy 2024.

o 16.5 Ensure development does not compromise the ecological integrity of the Merri, Moonee Ponds, Edgars, Westbreen and Merlynston Creek corridors.

o 16.6 Create a continuous public open space corridor with a minimum of 50 metres on each side along the Moonee Ponds, Merri and Edgars Creeks. A minimum of 30 metres from the edge of the embankment on each side should be a vegetated buffer.

 Environmental Significance Overlay Clause 42.01 over waterway corridors.

 Moreland Environmental Vegetation Assessment (2011) identifies remnant and significant indigenous vegetation across the municipality provides management priorities for protecting vegetation and responding to threats. The Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands include several high value areas.

 Melbourne Metropolitan Open Space Strategy (2021) guides all levels of government in the planning, management and delivery of a quality open space network over the next 30 years. It aims to achieve this by fostering a coordinated approach by state and local governments, Traditional Owner groups, communities, researchers and businesses to protect existing open space, apply innovation to make use of other types of public land, and create new metropolitan parks and trails.

 Melbourne Water’s Healthy Waterways Strategy (2019) identifies a collaborative approach to waterway management with objectives and actions for improving the health of Melbourne waterways shared across state and local government, water corporations and the community. It identifies a number of priorities for sub-catchments such as the Merri Creek including revegetation and amenity improvement targets.

## 2. Background

The purpose of this report is to present the final Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands Plan prior to commencing implementation.

The Plan delivers on the strategic objectives and outcomes for the Council Plan (2021-2025), the Open Space Strategy 2024, the Nature Plan (2020), Urban Forest Strategy (2018) and Urban Heat Island Effect Action Plan (2016).

Following strong calls from the Fawkner community to protect parklands around McBryde Street and Leonard Street from subdivision, Council purchased several parcels of ‘surplus’ land from VicRoads in 2019. Additional VicRoads land was acquired around Queens Parade as well as private land at Spry Street and Newlands Road (Figure 3). A key rationale for acquiring the nearly five hectares of open space was to protect the waterway habitat corridor and provide a diversity of social and recreation opportunities (Moreland Open Space Strategy 2012).

Earlier plans and actions for the parklands include the Moomba Park Concept Plan (1997), the Management Plan for Remnant Native Grassland at Jukes Road Grasslands (Bababi Djinanang) and the Merri Creek and Environs Strategy (2009). With the exception of the Bababi Djinanang Plan, these other plans have experienced limited success in terms of implementation in Fawkner.

Plans are now underway to improve the management and further enhance connectivity, diversity and resilience of this highly important open space, habitat corridor and nationally significant grasslands. Prior to commencing these works, the community, Friends groups, MCMC and Council agreed that it was an ideal time to engage the community to provide an overarching integrated strategy for activating, investing in, and improving the Fawkner Parklands.

In 2020, Council officers commenced work on developing a long-term plan for the Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands which encourages recreational use and enjoyment of the space, while protecting and enhancing its natural values, and responding to the needs and aspirations of a growing residential population. Council officers led and undertook all four stages of the Plan’s community engagement and development.

The Plan is a well-placed addendum to the recently endorsed Open Space Strategy (2024) by addressing its vision, objectives, directions and priorities. The Plan identifies a range of specific investment and works to ensure that these open spaces become more welcoming and accessible for everyone. It also provides clear direction for future design, planning, provisions and management of the Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands. The Plan also recognises that a resilient, biodiverse and safe open space network is integral to the environment and the health and wellbeing of our community.

The Plan highlights the importance of walking and cycling accessibility and connectivity improvements to the Parklands. This Plan complements Council’s Transport Strategy (2024) and Northern Regional Trails Strategy (2023). Council is currently working on a Plan to improve pedestrian and cycling connections and infrastructure across Fawkner. While this current work focuses on the existing street network, the Parklands Plan provides key links and connections. In addition, some of the identified shared user paths will be explored in the context of the Transport Strategy and subsequent action planning, ultimately belonging in forward capital programs for transport. The community ideas and concerns on these matters will be fed into these processes.

## 3. Issues

### Community impact

The final Plan acknowledges the significant public health and environmental benefits that can be realised through the implementation of the identified works and investments. Many studies show the direct and indirect benefits of quality open space in helping the way we think, work and deal with stress. The research is compelling: open space and urban nature can deliver an incredible range of health and wellbeing benefits. The key variable is the quality of open space and access to this open space. Both of these elements are targeted for improvement through this Plan.

### Open space activation and safety implications

The Plan is an attempt to address a previous gap in Council’s service area that lacked a clear plan and which, until recently, has experienced historic low levels of open space investment, activation and use. Part of the reason for this low level of investment and activation is the poor connectivity and accessibility of paths and trails in the area with the neighbourhood turning its back on the parkland. As such, a priority of developing the Plan was seeking community direction, priorities and ownership of the spaces to ensure a sensitive approach to increasing activation and safety while protecting the critical environmental values.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

The benefits of quality open space can also create cities that are more resilient to climate change. Blue and green interventions into the Parkland as proposed by this Plan covering new wetlands, canopy cover, flood mitigation and stormwater diversions all deliver environmentally sustainable outcomes as well as urban heat island mitigation. Improved and safer path connections and links for pedestrians and cyclists reduce vehicle use and encourage mode shift through active transport.

### Economic sustainability implications

An investigation into the economic benefits of open space in Merri-bek in 2019 quantified the economic benefits arising from improvements to open space covering:

 Property price premiums

 Recreation

 Avoided health costs due to physical inactivity

 Traffic decongestion from active transport.

Based on the four benefits, the report conservatively estimated the value of Council’s open spaces at $94 million per annum and indicated annual economic benefits arising from the proposed park improvements are worth $6.2 million. Long term strategic planning for locations like the Fawkner Merri Parklands ensures that open spaces continue to provide benefit to the community.

### Legal and risk considerations

No major legal risks have been identified. There is however reputational risk for Council by approving this Plan as there is uncertainty over availability and timing of external grant funding to implement some elements of the plan. The Plan sets community expectations regarding delivery of the various design elements, some of which are still subject to future endorsement by Council and subsequent budget allocations for delivery. Council has a strong track record for accessing external grant funding for open space improvements and integrated water management investments. For example, in 2021-22, Merri-bek Council received over $4.5 million in State Government funding for open space related projects.

### Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been considered in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and the consideration has found no significant implications or risks arising from the 12 rights specified. It is noted that the Plan seeks to address issues regarding access to open space and proposes specific works which will improve access to the parklands.

To address our requirements under the Gender Equality Act we will conduct gender impact assessments, where appropriate for specific projects identified within the Plan.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

The lockdowns and social distancing restrictions impacted Council’s ability to undertake initial engagement through its usual approaches. As a consequence, Council officers adjusted the approach to community consultation and extended the engagement period to allow the community sufficient opportunity to engage with this project. Consultation included using the Conversations Merri-bek website, online forums, officer mobile and email contact details, postcards to nearly 3,000 households, pop-up engagement, guided walks, engagement activities and when allowed traditional public meetings. In addition, over 30 posters were erected across the Parklands and updates through community and Council social media platforms were posted.

The following external organisations and Council officers were also consulted:

 Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council

 Melbourne Water

In addition, multiple internal stakeholders within the organisation who may have relevant roles and responsibilities were consulted throughout the development of the plan.

A Communications Plan was prepared to support the engagement process, which outlined an extensive four-stage process of community engagement.

A detailed Community Engagement Report for Stages 2 and Stages 3 and 4 has been prepared (**Attachments 2** and **3**) with a detailed list of feedback, Council responses and any resulting changes to the Plan are also noted. Below is a summary of the key community feedback.

### Conservation and natural values

 Priority is the protection and enhancement of the natural values of the waterway. Most respondents recommended the enhancement of the natural elements of the creek and restorations and improvements of wildlife habitat.

### Litter

 Respondents were concerned about the significant amount of litter distributed throughout the creek especially after heavy rain.

### Active Transport

 Respondents recommended path improvements throughout the creek corridor to make it easier to connect with the shared path and natural spaces. Maintenance of existing informal paths and alternative flooding routes were regularly raised. Additional wayfinding signage was regularly requested. Care was requested to ensure that there was no duplication of the shared trail planned.

### Signage

 Respondents saw opportunity for additional interpretative signage about the history of the creek and park.

### Cultural Heritage

 Respondents called for greater engagement with the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung Traditional Owners on land management, naming, signage and engagement events.

### Dogs

 Some respondents were concerned about conflict between dogs/shared path users, wildlife and park users, with requests for more: fencing to separate users and drinking fountains with dog bowls. Many people acknowledged that majority of dog owners shared the space respectfully which improved overall perceptions of safety.

### Recreation

 Respondents requested more social recreational facilities like basketball halfcourts, cricket pitches, and soccer nets. Many requested access to existing sporting pavilions and toilets for community meeting spaces and events, such as Nature Stewards, nature-based citizen science, and community meetings. Most respondents celebrated the existing sporting facilities and clubs for their positive contribution to the parkland and willingness to share sportsfields with other users. Some concerns were raised about balancing the habitat values of the waterway with sportsfield lighting. All respondents were not supportive of additional sportsfields, in particular, synthetic pitches.

### Anti-social behaviour

 Respondents were very concerned about the trail bikes dangerous and illegal use of the shared path and parklands with incidents reported to VicPol. There were also concerns about hoon and anti-social activities within the existing car parks at Moomba Park and Parker Reserve.

### Integrated water management and wetlands

 Respondents supported the establishment of the wetland in Moomba Park and the increased diversion of stormwater into the parklands to help mitigate urban heat island effect, improve habitat values and reduce local flooding.

### Play Spaces

 Respondents called for improvements to the two playgrounds at Moomba Park and Parker Reserve while acknowledging they were popular and well designed. There were many calls for more opportunities for nature-based play including bush kinders throughout the parklands.

### Lighting and safety

 Some respondents suggested improvements to lighting along the Merri Creek trail whereas the majority were not supportive unless the lighting provided wildlife sensitive lighting for key movement routes such as key bridge crossings to Reservoir and would like to see increased safety measures in car parks.

Key themes arising from Stages 3 and 4 of consultation included:

Stage 3 feedback online and during pop-up site meetings was very supportive with the only concerns raised around the location and scale of proposed park activation around Sahara Way Fawkner.

Changes in the Sahara Way precinct include:

 Removal of the proposed basketball court at Sahara Way / Lorne Street

 Relocation of the proposed nature-based adventure playground, drinking fountain, picnic tables and public toilet away from Sahara Way / Lorne Street towards the eastern edge of the reserve

 Relocation of the proposed exercise station away from Sahara Way / Lorne Street towards the northern boundary of St Basil’s.

 Relocation of the proposed wetland site further south in the reserve to be part of the open habitat enhancement area.

Stage 4 feedback on the Final Plan key areas included:

 Dogs: respondents noted there is missing signage for dogs on lead in various reserves and safety issues with off lead dogs along the Merri Creek trail involving cyclists and pedestrians.

 Dogs: a respondent raised concerns with a proposed investigation for a fenced dog off lead area.

 Connectivity: respondents requested better access for pedestrians/cyclists between surrounding urban areas and Merri Creek trail, including from Newland Road.

 Facilities: a respondent requested instalment of a dog fountain.

Following engagement on the proposed ideas, all feedback received has been reviewed and incorporated into the final Plan.

The plan does not provide detailed designs for many of the proposed projects. If Council was to proceed with a project identified in the plan, then detailed design and community engagement may be required.

### Affected persons rights and interests

The interests of local residents, sporting clubs and adjacent landowners and businesses are the primary focus of the Plan. Officers have also made contact with the following stakeholders:

 Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council

 Fawkner Residents Network

 Friends of Merri Creek

 Merri Creek Management Committee.

 North Coburg Rebels Baseball

 Moreland United Football Club

 Melbourne Water

 Yarra Valley Water

 Growing Farmers Network

 Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action

There have been multiple opportunities for all stakeholders to express their views through a variety of methods during the development of the Plan including a Conversations Merri-bek project page, large scale postcard drops, community survey, on-site pop-up sessions, stakeholder meetings, online Question and Answer forums, and numerous emails from residents requesting information and clarifications on various elements of the Plan.

## 5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

## 6. Financial and Resources Implications

The draft Cost Plan identifies $5.7 million in total estimated costs including $4.368 million in Council funded works with an additional $1.3 million in identified grant opportunities throughout the Parklands. A summary cost plan can be found as Attachment 4 which details the annual proposed spending and funding sources for the project outlined in the Plan (NOTE: All costs referenced in this report and the Plan are in 2024 dollars). The projects could be delivered between 2025 and 2032 subject to budget availability. Key elements of the proposed investment can be broken down as follows:

 **Community infrastructure:** resting places with accessible path, seating, shelter, public toilets, drinking fountains and community market gardens ($970,000)

 **Movement**: Shared **and** pedestrian path connections to the Merri Creek Trail ($974,000)

 **Nature**: conservation management works ($841,500)

 **Recreation**: social sporting opportunities like basketball half courts, multiuse spaces, exercise **equipment** and designs for sportsfield refurbishment ($1,224,500)

 **Land management and maintenance**: new and clearer dog-off leash zoning, investigations into **fenced** dog areas ($283,000)

 **Water**: investigations to divert flood and stormwater into wetlands in the parklands ($75,000)

The Plan includes $893,000 in projects that feature in existing draft budgets, most of which is listed in Council’s 5-year capital works program in 2024/2025. This includes two pavilion projects at Moomba Park: *Convert south side social pavilion to community meeting space and accessible public toilet* and *Provision of gender inclusive changerooms*.

If endorsed by Council, then this Plan will guide the strategic planning and management actions and budget decisions relating to capital works over the next decade along the creek and open space corridor.

Some of the planned projects can be progressed sooner than others due to existing funding sources and stages of project development. In the meantime, the Plan will also be used to inform other current Council projects and ongoing advocacy with key stakeholders.

## 7. Implementation

Following Council endorsement, the Plan, will shift to implementation. Council Officers will proactively advocate for improved public realm outcomes and financial contributions from relevant land developers towards improvements identified in this Plan. At the same time, Council officers will proactively advocate for, and seek, external grant funding to realise the elements of this Plan. Officers from relevant Council units will be required to submit budget bids for specific projects for consideration as part of future budget processes. Should funding opportunities not materialise in the short term, officers will continue to seek opportunities to deliver some elements of the plan over a longer time frame when funding and resources become available.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands Plan Final 2024 | D24/291359 |  |
| **2** | Fawkner Parklands Plan Stage 2 Engagement Summary Report | D24/291360 |  |
| **3** | Fawkner Parklands Plan Stage 3 Engagement Summary September 2023 | D24/291361 |  |
| **4** | Summary Cost Plan | D24/301358 |  |

7.4 Bachar Houli Foundation - Islamic College of Sport and Centre of Excellence Proposal

**Director Community Eamonn Fennessy**

**Community Wellbeing**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes the Bachar Houli Foundation’s proposal (attachment 1) for an Islamic School of Sport and Centre of Excellence at the former Coburg Bowls Club.

2. Supports the intent of the proposal, subject to further detailed investigation and consideration.

3. Notes officers will continue progressing project discussions with the Bachar Houli Foundation.

4. Receives a report in early 2025 setting out the parameters of the project in more detail, including leasing processes, community engagement, project funding strategy, design, planning requirements and timeframes and the conditions of joint community use of the proposed facility.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

The Bachar Houli Foundation (BHF) is a not-for-profit community organisation, whose purpose is to use sport as a platform to empower young Muslim people and promote social cohesion through education and connection.

The vision of BHF is to contribute to building a culturally safe Australia, where young people from all backgrounds are empowered to make the most of their opportunities and contribute to a thriving multicultural nation. BHF use sport as a platform to empower young Muslim people and promote social cohesion through education and connection. Its programs focus on engagement, education, cultural awareness, employment and talent.

BHF has recently established the Islamic College of Sport (ICS), which enables students to complete their senior secondary education at an Islamic school, but in an education program that is better suited to their learning style. The first class of ICS began in 2024 and is located in the pavilion at Coburg City Oval, through an arrangement with the Coburg Football Club.

The BHF have approached Council seeking support to create a new multi-purpose facility within the heartland of the Muslim community in Coburg. The intent of the facility is to create an active and culturally diverse place where boys and girls can feel welcomed and safe, and where Muslim and non-Muslim communities can connect through sport. The facility, (which includes indoor courts and multi-purpose spaces), will be home for BHF’s and ICS’s programs, as well as spaces for local sporting clubs and broader community use. It will be a destination that brings people together, more often, so they form deeper connections and friendships.

BHF has approached Council to seek support for the new facility, by enabling the development of the former Coburg Bowls Club. The proposed arrangement includes making the site available and providing a long-term lease to BHF at a peppercorn rate. Council will retain ownership of the land and the capital improved facility. BHF is seeking funding support for $20 million of investment in the facility from both the Federal and State Governments.

The proposal has significant benefits for the social cohesion and health and wellbeing of Merri-bek community on many levels. This report outlines the proposal, seeks Council’s support for it’s intent and recommends a future report in 2025 on all aspects of the project in detail for Council’s consideration.

**Previous Council Decisions**

There are no previous Council decisions on this matter.

## 1. Policy Context

Relevant themes from the 2021-2025 Council Plan (which integrates the Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan) include:

Theme 3: A healthy and caring Moreland:

• Help residents to be healthier and more active, more often

• Support good mental health and help people connect

Theme 4: Vibrant spaces and places in Moreland - ‘Acknowledging the unique strengths in different areas of Moreland, the council and community support the development of vibrant hubs of arts, businesses and recreation’.

• Provide accessible facilities that meet community needs

• Create engaging spaces for children, young people and families

This proposal also aligns with the intent of the following Council strategies and policies:

• Active Women and Girls Strategy

• Children, Young People and Families Plan 2021-2025

• Human Rights Policy (goal – to advance inclusion and Social Cohesion in the community)

• Social Cohesion Plan

• Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2020 (identifies a lack of indoor multi-purpose facilities across Merri-bek).

## 2. Background

Bachar Houli is a decorated AFL footballer, who developed a high profile because of his football talent, but also as a devout Muslim, a person who promoted community harmony by building awareness and understanding of the values and contributions of Muslims to the Australian community. This led to the establishment of Bachar Houli Foundation (BHF), a not-for-profit community organisation, whose purpose is to use sport as a platform to empower young Muslim people and promote social cohesion through education and connection.

The vision of BHF is to contribute to building a culturally safe Australia, where young people from all backgrounds are empowered to make the most of their opportunities and contribute to a thriving multicultural nation.

The Foundation was officially established in 2019 and now reaches 5,000 participants annually through 16 programs, focussing on engagement, education, cultural awareness, employment and talent. Since its establishment BHF has engaged with over 35,000 participants and developed a strong reputation, supported by Federal and State governments and community minded organisations.

The BHF’s purpose is to use sport as a platform to empower young Muslim people and promote social cohesion through education and connection. Its programs focus on engagement, education, cultural awareness, employment and talent. Consistent with its purpose, BHF has recently established the Islamic College of Sport (ICS), which enables students to complete their senior secondary education at an Islamic school, but in an education program that is better suited to their learning style. The first class of ICS began in 2024 and is located in the pavilion at Coburg City Oval, through an arrangement with the Coburg Football Club.

The work of BHF and ICS is needed given the challenges facing the Muslim community, and the broader connection to social cohesion. BHF takes an evidence-based approach with two key focus areas: firstly, working with and nurturing Muslim youth so they can be the next generation of leaders and role models within the Muslim and wider community, and secondly, changing the negative narrative, by using sport to create intercultural connections and build knowledge and friendships between Muslim and non- Muslim communities. This work is more important than ever with the escalation in the Israel-Palestine situation and its impact on social cohesion within Australian communities.

The BHF have approached Council seeking support to create a new multi-purpose facility within the heartland of the Muslim community. The intent of the facility is to create an active and culturally diverse place where boys and girls can feel welcomed and safe, and where Muslim and non-Muslim communities can connect through sport. The facility, (which includes indoor courts and multi-purpose spaces), will be home for BHF’s and ICS’s programs, as well as spaces for local sporting clubs and broader community use. It will be a destination that brings people together, more often, so they form deeper connections and friendships.

BHF has approached Council to seek support for the new facility, by enabling the development of the former Coburg Bowls Club site adjacent to the pavilion at Coburg City Oval, for an estimated capital cost of up to $20m. The proposed arrangement includes making the site available and providing a long-term lease to BHF at a peppercorn rate. Council will retain ownership of the land and the capital improved facility. BHF is seeking funding support from both the Federal and State Governments and is optimistic of a positive outcome. Nominating a location is an important part of the respective government’s decision.

The proposed use of Council’s land will revitalise a sporting asset within an existing sporting precinct, and with its intended use, enable Council to deliver a number of important outcomes for the Merri-bek community. These include BHF programs and activities within the community, much needed indoor court space for local sporting clubs, sport and recreation facilities for high priority groups, space and activities to help build social cohesion through sport, and additional multi-purpose spaces for broader community use beyond sport.

While further work and a future report to Council outlining the details of such an arrangement are recommended the proposal has significant benefits for the social cohesion and health and wellbeing of Merri-bek community on many levels.

## 3. Issues

### Community impact

The BHF proposal would delivers on numerous Council policy positions but also provides $20 million of investment in sporting and educational facilities in the heart of Coburg. A partnership approach with Council and local sporting codes and organisations would see the facilities available for us in the evenings and on weekends by the wider Merri-bek community.

Benefits the centre would deliver for Council and the community include:

 It will enable Council to revitalise the bowls club site for much greater community benefit with no or minimal capital cost to Council - adding much needed sport and recreation spaces for local sporting clubs and broader community use

 Merri-bek will become the main home for BHF and ICS, and the delivery of their programs

 The BHF and ICS operations, (combined with other sport and community use), will create a vibrant precinct in central Coburg with active and constant use of Council infrastructure

 There will be more opportunities for women, including Muslim girls and women, to be active – with safe spaces for all women and for Muslim women, a space to cater for their faith or cultural needs

 The facility and supporting programs will help build social cohesion through sport, with more opportunities for deeper connections between people of different backgrounds and faith, building knowledge and understanding.

 Creating a main campus for ICS students means they will be active within the Merri-bek community. Student activities can be an additional resource to support recreation for target groups, such as All Ability Schools, public housing, elderly, and new migrants.

 Additional multi-purpose spaces for broader community use, beyond sport

**Coburg Bowls Club site**

The Coburg Bowls Club has not operated at the Harding Street site since 2019, when the club’s allocation ended due to a significant reduction in memberships and an inability to host competition games and maintain the grounds. Since then, the club rooms have been used for a variety of uses including distribution of food relief in 2020, as a Department of Health COVID testing facility in 2021 and 2022, and since late 2023 for short term use (via a user agreement) by the Merri-bek Community Shed (formerly Coburg and Pascoe Vale Men’s Shed). There is some use of the former bowling greens by community gardening groups.

There is no requirement or demand in Merri-bek for this site to remain as a bowling facility. An EOI to seek expression of interest for short term (1-2 year) use of the site by community organisations will be undertaken in late 2024 to ensure the site remains activated.

The Coburg Bowling Club rooms and greens are in very poor condition overall and would require a significant investment from Council to bring a building designed for a specific and now redundant use up to contemporary standards. The site has great potential for renewal for other more contemporary community infrastructure uses given its central Coburg location and proximity within the Coburg City Oval sporting precinct, Bridges Reserve, Coburg Leisure Centre and numerous public transport options.

The Bachar Houli Foundation have indicated the Bowls Club site is ideal for their proposed facility for the following reasons:

 It revitalises a sporting asset in the heart of Coburg, adding much needed sport and recreation spaces for local sporting clubs – especially hard-court sports such as basketball, netball and futsal. There is a significant undersupply of court facilities across Merri-bek and significant growth for sports such as basketball. The current lack of facilities restricts participation

 It leverages land that has been used for sport and recreation, already located within an existing sporting precinct

 It is easily accessible for the community – there are many public transport options and good carparking, with higher use of the car park at times when retail stores are closed

 It will bring a significant capital injection to redevelop existing council infrastructure that is at the end of its useful life

 The footprint is large enough, with opportunities to also connect to the existing Coburg City Pavilion, delivering additional space and more capacity to cater for wide community uses.

Further consideration and a future report by officers is recommended to understand the property, planning and precinct contextual requirements (such as parking) of the proposal as well and community sentiment and potential use agreements.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

There are no direct climate emergency or environmental sustainability implications associated with this report. However, future reports and project design considerations will seek to address climate emergency and best practice ESD outcomes for stadiums and school facilities.

### Economic sustainability implications

The project is expected to deliver up to $20 million of community infrastructure, which will provide benefit in the form of access to community recreation and meeting places in Central Coburg. This is a significant benefit to Council and the Merri-bek community. The location of the both the Bachar Houli Foundation and the Islamic College of Sport in Coburg in the City Oval precinct will also provide significant local economic benefits.

### Legal and risk considerations

There are no legal or risk considerations arising from the recommendations in this report. Future reports will consider and advise on legal and risk matters further where required.

### Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and the proposal supports Sections 12 and 18 of the Human Rights Charter which relate to freedom of movement and taking part in public life.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

To date the BHF have undertaken targeted engagement with local communities as well as the Coburg Football Club and organisations who may benefit from the proposal such as the Coburg Basketball Association. Further community engagement will be required, and the detail of this engagement will be the subject of a future report.

### Communications

A detailed communications plan will be considered as part of future project stages and reports to Council.

## 5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

## 6. Financial and Resources Implications

BHF is seeking Council’s support for the new facility, by enabling the development of the former Coburg Bowls Club site through a long-term peppercorn lease, for an indicative capital cost to BHF of $20 million. Council would retain ownership of the land and the capital improved facility. BHF is seeking funding support from both the Federal and State Governments and is optimistic of a positive outcome. Nominating a location is an important part of the respective government’s decision.

Council’s role in the project is as a partner and landowner that would enable community use of the facility and unlock significant community benefit. Facility maintenance arrangements and funding will require further consideration and agreement between Council and BHF.

## 7. Implementation

Subject to Council’s decision, Council officers will continue to liaise with the BHF as their plans and funding strategy develops.

A further report will be presented to Council in early 2025 setting out the parameters of the project in more detail, including statutory leasing process requirements, community engagement, design detail, timing of key decisions, construction timelines, arrangements and conditions for community use and facility access and maintenance with the BHF.

BHF are working towards a mid-2027 facility opening should the project be supported and approved and funding secured to proceed to construction.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Proposal - Islamic College of Sport and Bachar Houli Foundation | D24/314652 |  |

7.5 Glenroy Community Hub Cafe - Expression of Interest Update

**Acting Director Place and Environment Phillip Priest**

**City Strategy and Economy**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes that it is not required to undertake a statutory process under section 115 of the *Local Government Act 2020* for this lease.

2. Endorses The Onemda Association Inc, a not-for-profit organisation, as the successful proponent to operate and manage the café outlet at the Glenroy Community Hub through a lease, subject to them passing a credit check.

3. Notes the terms of the lease will be for one-year, with two additional three-year options, at a peppercorn rent.

4. Authorises the Director Place and Environment to do all things necessary to negotiate and formalise the café lease at the Glenroy Community Hub.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

This report updates Council on the outcome of a second Expression of Interest (EOI) process, for the café outlet in Bridget Shortell Reserve at the Glenroy Community Hub precinct. The EOI was open to all potential operators, including for-profit commercial businesses, social enterprises and not-for-profits. Following the EOI advertising process, which commenced on 23 March 2024 and closed on 26 April 2024, seven submissions were received. The internal Evaluation Panel conducted an interview with the preferred proponent on 30 May 2024.

This report seeks Council’s endorsement to offer an initial one-year lease, with two additional three-year options, at a peppercorn rent to the preferred proponent, The Onemda Association Inc. This not-for-profit organisation’s proposal was evaluated as having the greatest capacity to deliver a viable business and provide broader social benefits aligned with the vision and purpose of the Glenroy Community Hub.

The Onemda Association delivers hospitality training programs and other initiatives for people with an intellectual disability, and is a registered charity.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Glenroy Community Hub Café – Update and Next Steps** – 6 December 2023

*That Council:*

*1. Notes that the Expression of Interest (EOI) process conducted in October / November 2022 to secure a social enterprise to manage and operate the café outlet at the Glenroy Community Hub was not successful.*

*2. Endorses an EOI process, open to all potential operators including for-profit commercial businesses, social enterprises and not-for-profits to secure an operator to manage the Glenroy Community Hub café outlet.*

*3. Endorses higher weighted selection criteria apply to EOI applicants that meet the social enterprise and/or not-for-profit eligibility.*

*4. Endorses a peppercorn lease if the successful proponent meets the social enterprise and/or not-for-profit eligibility.*

*5. Receives a further report on the outcome of the EOI process with recommendations for next steps to appoint a suitable operator.*

**Glenroy Community Hub Café – Expression of Interest Update** - 8 March 2023

*That Council:*

*1. Notes that it is not required to undertake a statutory process under section 115 of the Local Government Act 2020 for this lease.*

*2. Endorses Kevin Heinze Garden Centre trading as Kevin Heinze Grow as the successful proponent to operate and manage the café outlet at the Glenroy Community Hub.*

*3. Notes the terms of the lease will be 3 x 3-year lease, at a peppercorn rent.*

*4. Authorises the Director Place and Environment to do all things necessary to negotiate and formalise the café lease at the Glenroy Community Hub.*

**Glenroy Community Hub café** – 10 November 2021

*That Council:*

1. *Endorses a public Expression of Interest (EOI) process to procure a social enterprise operator for a café in the repurposed heritage shed on the site of the Glenroy Community Hub.*

2. *Endorses the inclusion of a peppercorn lease with the successful proponent.*

## 1. Policy Context

**Community Vision 2021-2031**

The Community Vision includes within Theme 4 – Vibrant spaces and places: *Moreland’s public and commercial spaces bring people together in diverse ways. Acknowledging the unique strengths in different areas of Moreland, the council and community support the development of vibrant hubs of arts, business and recreation.*

**Council Plan 2021-2025**

The Council Plan includes a Strategic Objective (Theme 3 – A healthy and caring Moreland) *to support Moreland to become more inclusive, connected, healthy and caring.* It includes the Glenroy Community Hub as a priority (No. 13) as providing equitable access to community facilities and health services.

The Strategic Objective under Theme 4 –Vibrant spaces and places is *to create welcoming, unique spaces and places across Moreland that attract and connect everyone.*

**Lease and Licence Policy (2023)**

This Policy provides guidance on maximising the use of Council’s leased assets. Any new lease will be negotiated in line with the Policy.

## 2. Background

At its meeting on 10 November 2021, Council endorsed a public EOI process to procure a social enterprise operator to manage a café in the repurposed heritage shed at the Glenroy Community Hub. Council also endorsed a 3 x 3-year lease, at a peppercorn rent for the successful proponent.

The café outlet has a floor area of approximately 10 square metres and is attached to a small garden storage area. The café has been fully refurbished to meet food and safety standards and features:

 A hatch servery window

 Heating and cooling

 Electricity service entry points; hot and cold water

 Stainless steel benches, including three sinks and preparation areas

 Pest proofing, and

 A lockable screen door.

The provision and installation of all other equipment required to operate the café will be the responsibility of the successful proponent at their own cost.

Council was informed about the unsuccessful attempts to secure a social enterprise operator to manage the café outlet at its meeting on 6 December 2023. As a result, Council sought to broaden the EOI process to increase the likelihood of securing a tenant and endorsed a second EOI process open to all potential operators, including for-profit commercial businesses, social enterprises, and not-for-profits. The assessment process placed greater weighting on submissions from social enterprise and not-for-profit organisations. In addition, a peppercorn rent was able to be negotiated with the successful submitter, if they were a social enterprise or not-for-profit organisation.

An expanded EOI advertising process commenced on 23 March 2024 and closed on 26 April 2024 and seven submissions were received. Each proposal received was evaluated based on specific selection criteria to ensure capacity to deliver a viable business as well as providing wider social community benefits consistent with the vision and purpose of the Hub. These included:

 Demonstrated experience, capacity, and capability to deliver a viable hospitality business at the site.

 Quality of the proponent’s proposal to operate a high quality, good value, and viable café outlet at the Glenroy Community Hub. Proponents that plan to open more than the minimum operating hours were scored more highly (i.e. a minimum of three days a week; and for a minimum of four hours on any of those three days).

 What additional benefits to the local economy and community that a proponent’s operation of the café outlet could offer. For example:

- Proposed plans to source supplies and products from local businesses within Merri-bek, and

- Existing and proposed partnerships with other local organisations within Merri-bek.

 Is the organisation a:

- social enterprise certified with Social Traders; or

- not-for-profit registered with the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission.

 What environmentally sustainable practices (e.g., energy efficient equipment rating, water saving measures, use of recycled / recyclable material, incentives for customers to bring their own reusable cup, etc.) will the organisation apply at the site and when operating the café?

Each proponent was required to specify the terms of their submission (e.g. duration of lease, opening hours, food offerings etc.) and confirm their intention to meet the mandatory opening hours. To enhance the viability of the café, as daily visitor numbers continue to build at the Hub, operators were also advised it may be beneficial to commence operations with a simple food offering and potentially adjust operating hours accordingly, especially in the first year of operation.

In addition, each proponent was required to inspect the premises before submitting their proposal to ensure they have a realistic understanding of the space’s potential, as space limitations had been previously identified as an issue.

As specified in the EOI, a higher weighted score was applied to social enterprise and not-for-profit organisations. In addition Council, at its November 2021 meeting, endorsed offering certified social enterprise and registered not-for-profit organisations:

 A peppercorn rent; and

 No café outgoing costs including Council rates, water rates and service charges such as electricity and water.

The EOI also specified that for-profit businesses would be required to pay a rental fee and associated café outgoings costs.

The internal Evaluation Panel included the Glenroy Community Hub Coordinator, Senior Property Officer and the Economic Development Unit’s Investment Facilitation Officer. Council’s Procurement team was also consulted and involved in the EOI process. Following an assessment of all seven submissions, the Panel determined that the submission from The Onemda Association Inc scored highest in relation to the selection criteria and invited Onemda to discuss their proposal in more detail. As a result, Onemda were confirmed by the Panel as the ‘preferred proponent’.

## 3. Issues

### Community impact

The submission from Onemda was evaluated as having the greatest capacity to deliver a viable business and provide broader social benefits aligned with the vision and purpose of the Hub.

Onemda is a registered charity and for over 50 years its mission has been to support people living with a disability to increase their potential and experience a fulfilled life through learning, therapy, and social connection. Onemda currently operates eight campuses across Melbourne, including two campuses in Glenroy.

The organisation delivers hospitality training programs and other initiatives for people with an intellectual disability. In 2017, Onemda acquired a café trailer to train students in hospitality skills providing hands-on experience in customer service, food preparation, handling money and a general understanding of operating a hospitality business. Onemda employs a café coordinator to oversee the café trailer’s operation. This experience over several years means that the organisation is well versed in developing and running hospitality training programs and work readiness courses that could be extended to the café outlet at the Glenroy Community Hub. A partnership with Millward Aged Care and the Living and Learning Centre allows Onemda participants to volunteer at the café.

### Onemda’s proposal to operate the café outlet

In its first year, the café is intended to operate three days per week from 9.30am to 2.30pm, Monday to Wednesday, as these days are generally considered high-traffic days at the Hub.

At this stage, it is expected that the café will open from February 2025 to allow time for lease negotiations, the recruitment of a café coordinator, the purchase of all equipment, the establishment of processes and procedures, and to ensure all participants are able to complete appropriate food safety and barista training.

Onemda’s management of the café will create job opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities, fostering a sense of identity and self-esteem and contributing to positive health outcomes. The training and experience gained at the café can offer participants a pathway to local employment and greater community inclusion.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

Each proponent was required to address and specifically outline in their proposal the environmentally sustainable practices they would implement at the site and when operating the café. Onemda expressed its commitment to adopting methods that minimise or prevent negative impacts on the natural environment and its ecosystems. They are eager to reduce food waste through composting and explore how to maximise the use of the community garden. Their environmental policy is regularly updated, and they continually seek ways to reduce the consumption of natural resources in daily operations. Such practices are likely to include:

 Biodegradable coffee cups and lids

 Recyclable cutlery, napkins and packaging

 Discounts for reusable cups and sale of reusable cups to minimise waste

 Use of energy efficient equipment.

### Economic sustainability implications

Each proponent was required to demonstrate their experience, capacity, and capability to deliver a viable hospitality business. Similar to the Onemda café trailer, it is proposed to recruit a café coordinator with strong hospitality experience to lead and ensure the success of the café. The coordinator will also provide personalised support to participants working in the café, supervising their training and skill development.

Onemda aims to implement a robust governance, financial and risk framework to oversee the operation of the café initiative. They plan to establish a Project Control Group, which will include the General Manager Client Services to oversee the implementation of the café initiative. This group will be responsible for executing a business plan and a marketing plan for the café. They will regularly update the Executive Team and Onemda Board of progress. In addition, the Onemda Finance Team will review monthly expenditure to ensure it aligns with the business and agreed project plan.

The café coordinator will be supported by the Onemda’s Group Service Program Managers, who both possess extensive experience in program oversight, staff support and successful project management.

Onemda have requested an initial one year lease term to allow assessment of the café’s viability and ensure satisfactory performance before committing to a longer-term lease of two additional, three-year options. A shorter initial lease period was also suggested during previous negotiations by other social enterprise organisations.

### Legal and risk considerations

Solicitors will be engaged to prepare an initial one-year retail lease term (with a further two options, each of three years to renew) for the café outlet at a peppercorn rent. This report seeks to authorise the Director Place and Environment to do all things necessary to negotiate and formalise the lease, including negotiating any financial considerations and annual service delivery KPIs.

A credit check of The Onemda Association Inc entity has been successfully completed.

### Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

Nearby residents were consulted as part of the original planning permit application process for the Hub.

As the current market rental value of the land to be leased (i.e. the café outlet) is less than $100,000 per year, it does not require a statutory community engagement process to be undertaken under section 115 of the *Local Government Act 2020*.

### Communications

A Communication and Promotion Plan was developed as part of this broader EOI process to include for-profit and not-for- profit submitters to increase the likelihood of securing a tenant. It included:

 The Age newspaper

 A notice on Council’s website

 Regular social media posts

 Notices in the fortnightly Business Merri-bek e-newsletters and a notice in Environmental Health’s e-newsletter

 Targeted emails to hospitality business in Merri-bek

 Targeted emails to known social enterprise hospitality organisations and others who previously expressed an interest.

## 5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

## 6. Financial and Resources Implications

There are no additional financial or resource implications. Associated electricity or water charges for the café outlet are already budgeted for and incorporated into the Hub’s operational costs.

## 7. Implementation

Subject to Council’s endorsement, the Director Place and Environment will do all things necessary to negotiate and formalise the café lease at the Glenroy Community Hub with The Onemda Association Inc. for an initial one year lease term with two additional three-year options, at a peppercorn rent.

In accordance with Council’s Community Engagement Policy 2020, the community will be informed of the lease through an update on Council’s website.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Glenroy Cafe EOI Panel Consensus Evaluation Scoring Sheet  *Pursuant to section 3(1)(g(ii)) of the Local Government Act 2020 this attachment has been designated as confidential because it relates to private commercial information, being information provided by a business, commercial or financial undertaking that if released, would unreasonably expose the business, commercial or financial undertaking to disadvantage.* | D24/290267 |  |

**7.6 Land adjacent to Brunswick Baths - Options for future use**

**Director Community Eamonn Fennessy**

**Community Wellbeing**

**Officer Recommendation**

That Council:

1. Notes the information provided in this report which outlines the comparative benefits, risks, costs and community impact of use options including:

a) Expansion of Brunswick Baths Health Club

b) Destination arts venue

c) Making space (affordable arts)

2. Recommends that the land adjacent to Brunswick Baths (North West building) be allocated for affordable arts usage that expand the activities of the broader Saxon Street cultural precinct, for a period of five years until longer term scoping and planning is undertaken.

3. Seeks an agreement with the operators of the Saxon Street precinct, These Are the Projects We Do Together (TPT) to incorporate the management and programming of the North West building into its management of the broader Saxon Street cultural precinct for a period of five years.

4. Delegates the Director Place and Environment to do all things necessary to negotiate and finalise the details of this agreement with TPT and updating the User and Tenancy Framework to reflect the inclusion of the North West Building into the management contract.

5. Receives a briefing on options and indicative costs for a future expansion of the Brunswick Baths Health Club within the current facility footprint and in particular gym operations to cater for future service growth and demand.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

Council purchased a former school site at 33 Saxon Street, Brunswick in 2010. In 2012, 800 sqm of the site was annexed and subdivided to become part of the redeveloped Brunswick Baths. The building in this area, the North-West Building, has not been considered in the scope of the 33 Saxon Street project.

The Saxon Street concept plan endorsed by Council at its November 2021 meeting, notating the space that the North-West Building occupies as for ‘potential future Baths extension’. The building is adjacent to the existing Brunswick Baths gym facility.

The potential for future use of the North-West Building is being investigated as a separate opportunity. This scoping has been accelerated due to recent interest in the Saxon Street site by arts organisations who have approached Council seeking space.

This report seeks to provide an understanding of the municipal needs, community benefits and costs of establishing the North-West Building in the short term as an expanded Brunswick Baths Health Club or arts and culture use.

**Previous Council Decisions**

1. **Land adjacent to Brunswick Baths - Options for Future**  - 13 March 2024

*That Council:*

*1. Notes that the endorsed concept plan for the 33 Saxon Street hub identified the footprint of the North-West building (fronting onto Phoenix Street) as being for potential use for future expansion of Brunswick Baths.*

*2. Acknowledges that if the North-West building is not retained for future aquatics and leisure purposes, the likely best use of the site would be an arts related usage which preferably also increases activation of the site.*

*3. Commissions cost estimates for repurposing the building for arts use, and for Brunswick Baths Health Club (gym) use.*

*4. Undertakes a targeted market sounding during April 2024 to investigate if there are destination arts tenancies who can provide capital investment to repurpose and activate the building.*

*5. Receives a report in June 2024 that outlines the comparative benefits, risks, costs and community impact of Aquatics and Leisure or arts and culture usage including the options of:*

*a) Expansion of Brunswick Baths Health Club extension*

*b) Destination arts venue*

*c) Making space (affordable arts).*

1. **33 Saxon Street Brunswick - Cultural and Community Hub - Final concept**  - 10 November 2021

*That Council:*

*1. Endorses the Final Concept Plan and key design moves, as described in this report, for redevelopment of 33 Saxon Street, Brunswick as a creative and community facility as described in Attachment 1.*

*2. Notes the estimated project cost and endorses the proposed financial strategy, to deliver the redevelopment project, as described in Table 2 of this Council Report.*

*3. Pursues cost mitigation strategies, including examining the feasibility of decanting uses and users of 33 Saxon Street to under-used areas of the Brunswick Town Hall, which will also provide the benefit of temporarily activating these areas, and which will inform a future strategy for reimagining the Brunswick Town Hall.*

*4. Thanks the Brunswick Neighbourhood House Relocation Working Group for the time that they have invested in this phase of engagement, and for their thoughtful consideration of what it would mean for them as an organisation to relocate to a cultural and community precinct with a shared vision, and whether this is a good fit for them.*

*5. Writes to the Board of the Brunswick Neighbourhood House to outline that Council has considered their needs and aspirations and concluded the investigation into what can be accommodated within the 33 Saxon Street precinct redevelopment, and to make a formal offer to the organisation, as follows:*

*a) Brunswick Neighbourhood House will be rehoused in the refurbished heritage house at 33 Saxon Street with a direct lease from Council, in line with their wishes.*

*b) Noting that the number and types of uses in Brunswick Neighbourhood House’s current accommodation do not fit within the heritage house:*

*i. The Occasional Childcare function will be relocated to the existing 27 place facility at the Brunswick Baths, 50 metres from the facility, as a direct lease with Council.*

*ii. A further 140sqm of net lettable area will be allocated for the exclusive use of Brunswick Neighbourhood House within the first floor of the new southern building at 33 Saxon Street.*

*c) The configuration of outdoor spaces in the public park will be determined at the next stage of detailed design, with a commitment that use of outdoor areas for Brunswick Neighbourhood House outdoor classrooms and other programming uses will be accommodated.*

*d) A facilitated process will take place to develop a Memorandum of Understanding between Brunswick Neighbourhood House, Council and the proposed Community Manager outlining the roles and responsibilities of each organisation, consistent with this report, in delivering the project vision for 33 Saxon Street. This will include requirements around input and participation in development of a site Strategic Plan, participation in a tenants and user group, use of shared spaces, marketing and promotion, utilities requirements and dispute management mechanisms, among other relevant items.*

*e) A budget allocation of $30,000 to make improvements to the internal and external spaces of the existing childcare facilities at the Brunswick Baths.*

*f) If Brunswick Neighbourhood House choose to relocate to 33 Saxon Street, the sale of the Brunswick Neighbourhood House-occupied property at 18 Garden Street, Brunswick, will be considered, to offset the Saxon Street redevelopment costs, subject to future decisions of Council.*

*g) If Brunswick Neighbourhood House choose to relocate to 33 Saxon Street, the future use of the Brunswick Neighbourhood House-occupied property at De Carle Street, Brunswick will be reviewed in accordance with Council’s draft community infrastructure strategic needs and future decisions of Council.*

*h) Reasonable relocation and fit out costs for Brunswick Neighbourhood House will be covered by Council; and*

*i) A formal response to indicate if BNH wishes to take up this offer for relocation to be given to the Chief Executive Officer by 2 January 2022, to allow for detailed design to progress.*

*6. Acknowledges the significance of Blak Dot Gallery at 33 Saxon Street over the last 6 years and notes that a new gallery will be provided in the South Building with Blak Dot Gallery as the service provider with a long-term arrangement with peppercorn rent under the proposed Community Manager contract (subject to a separate Council report).*

*7. Explores how a First Nations art and learning use can be embedded on the site on a peppercorn rent in the long term in accordance with Moreland’s Statement of Commitment to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities of the City of Moreland and asks officers to explore the most appropriate mechanisms for achieving this.*

*8. Commence the process to name the heritage house, the new south building and the new park at 33 Saxon Street in accordance with Naming Moreland Places Policy, in order that the process be complete by mid-2024.*

*9. Awards the contract (Contract ST-2021-182) for the full project architectural services and documentation for the Saxon Street Redevelopment project to Kennedy Nolan Architects, for the amount of $1,006,047 and approves a provisional sum of $188,600 for ancillary consultant services required throughout the design process and approves a contingency of $119,464 (10%) for unforeseen variations that may occur during the design and construction period.*

*10. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to do all things necessary to execute the contract (Contract ST-2021-182) for the full project architectural services and for the full project documentation of the Saxon Street Redevelopment project.*

*11. Acknowledges the former Brunswick City Council many years ago sold parts of Saxon Street to St. Ambrose Parish to facilitate safer students and staff pedestrian movements between the former St. Ambrose Primary School and St. Ambrose Parish:*

*a) That Council resolves to open discussions with St. Ambrose Parish and the Catholic Church to resolve the future use and ownership of Saxon Street and that a further report be presented to Council in March 2022 or earlier about the progress of these discussions and options moving forward with an objective of incorporating Saxon Street into the community and arts facility.*

**1. Policy Context**

**Council Plan 2021–2024**

 *Theme 3: A Healthy and Caring Moreland*: Strategy 3.3. Ensure Moreland residents are more active more often at all stages of life by providing a diverse range of accessible and affordable recreation opportunities that reflect our diverse community and develop and maintain partnerships to enhance participation options.

 *Theme 4 Vibrant Spaces and Places in Moreland*: Strategy 4.11 Make Moreland a creative and cultural destination within Melbourne, significantly contributing to local vibrancy, cohesion and inclusion.

**Strategies and Policies**

 *Merri-bek Aquatic and Leisure Strategy 2018–2038* sets out the basis for Merri-bek’s aquatic and leisure facilities to meet the needs of the current population and accommodate future population growth:

- Brunswick Baths - Opportunities to expand areas reaching capacity should be considered to ensure the facility remains relevant to the needs and demand of the local community.

 *Merri-bek Arts and Culture Strategy 2023* – 2030 outlines the need for Investment in arts and cultural spaces to support the local community of artists, audiences and the creative industries.

 *Community Infrastructure Plan 2022 - 2030*: Vision: A network of high-performing community infrastructure supporting the health, social wellbeing, and economic prosperity of our community.

- Deliver Saxon Street Community Hub 2022/23-2026/27 including:

§ Creative spaces

§ Multi-purpose community spaces

§ A Maternal and Child Health facility

- Expand health club services (gym) at Brunswick Baths 2032/33+

§ Consider options to expand health club services (gym) at Brunswick Baths including opportunities to improve integration with Saxon Street Community Hub.

**2. Background**

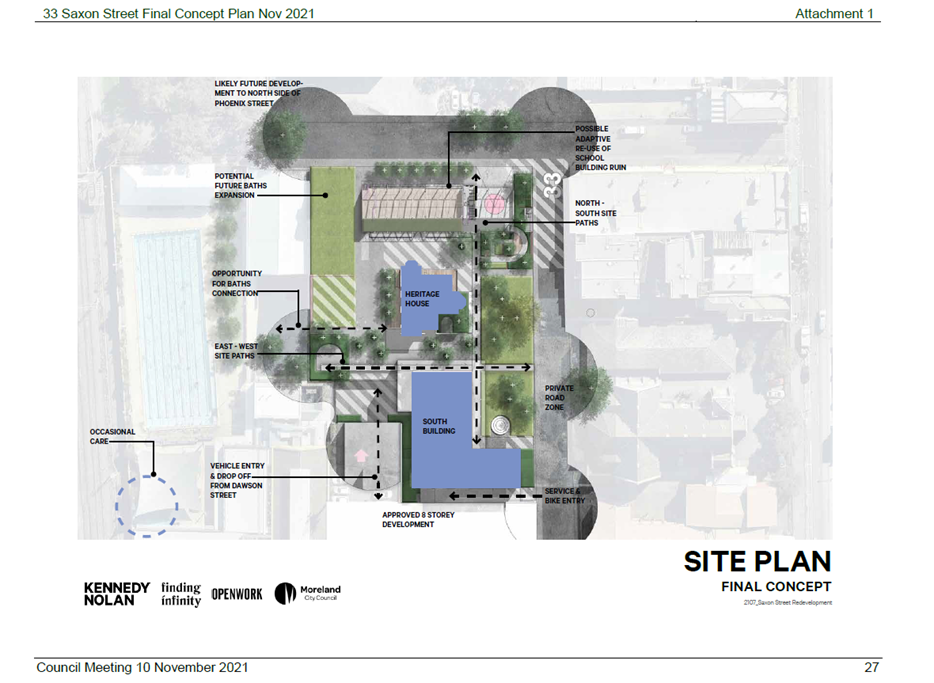
Council purchased a former school site at 33 Saxon Street, Brunswick in 2010. In 2012, 800sqm of the site was annexed and subdivided to become part of the redeveloped Brunswick Baths, with the old sports hall becoming a gym and the basketball court for the Baths.

The remainder of the site was kept and temporarily activated as an affordable arts precinct known as Siteworks whilst longer term plans were considered. Once a Community Needs Assessment and Strategic Framework had been developed, plans were made to redevelop the site to provide a long-term use of affordable arts and community spaces.

The old school building to the North-West of the site (the North-West Building) was originally considered for demolition to maximise the amount of open space in the precinct. However, once more detailed assessments of the building condition had taken place, it was determined that it was not at end of life, and that due its basic soundness as a building, it would not be good practice from an embedded energy perspective to demolish it.

This also presented an opportunity, as the building is immediately adjacent to the buildings of the Brunswick Baths, which is experiencing more demand in its Health Club (gym) than its existing footprint can accommodate. The building was therefore removed from the scope of the 33 Saxon Street project and investigated as a separate opportunity.

The concept plan endorsed by Council at its November 2021 meeting, notates the space that the North-West Building occupies as ‘potential future Baths extension’.



**3. Issues**

**Building Attributes and Condition**

The North-West Building is 429 sqm, split evenly between two floors. The bottom floor is broken up into smaller rooms and storage areas and includes the fire pump room for the whole 33 Saxon Street site. The upper floor has more rooms including a large theatre style space which throughout the Siteworks years was booked extensively for rehearsals, as this type of space is relatively hard to find in the area.

Whilst the use of the building has been removed from the 33 Saxon Street project, some minimal works are included in the construction contract. This is because the building sits on the same title as the rest of the 33 Saxon Street works, and so its compliance as a building must be considered.

These works will make the building safe and ensure that the remainder of 33 Saxon Street is able to receive an occupancy permit.

Ahead of determining the use of the building as future community infrastructure, no allowance had been made for accessibility, lift and renovation of interior spaces.

Once a use is determined, the budget required will need to be fully scoped and a funding strategy developed if it is outside the current capital works budget (2024/25 - $200,000, 2025/26 - $2.5 million).

**Opportunities for Aquatics and Leisure or Cultural Use**

There is a high demand in Merri-bek for affordable spaces for community use, for example from community organisations, arts organisations and others.

Given the history and location of the building, it would be reasonable to expect that the building would be used to support either:

 Aquatics and Leisure: an expansion of Brunswick Baths Health Club as initially scoped and in line with the 20-year Aquatic and Leisure Strategy (infrastructure); or

 Arts and culture: an arts or cultural use in line with the Arts and Culture Strategy 2023-2030, and to align with the strategic vision for 33 Saxon Street.

**Works/costs overview**

The North West building will be delivered as a cold shell through the 33 Saxon Street program of works. A capital works budget of $200K has allocated in the 2024/2025 capital works budget for scoping and design for this building, with a further $2.5 million allocated in 2025/2026.

Following these works, the building will not have an occupancy certificate and as such will not be able to be used until further works are done, which will be scoped following endorsement of this report.

Architects were engaged to undertake preliminary designs to inform recommendations on the use of this space going forward. They provided an overview of options for building upon the committed baseline fit out of the North West building which has informed this report.

**Investigation into benefits, risks, costs and community impact of potential future usages**

In March 2024, Council requested to receive a report that outlines the comparative benefits, risks, costs and community impact of aquatics and leisure or arts and culture usage including the options of:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. **Usage** | 1. **Type** | 1. **Information** |
| 1. Health club | 1. Aquatics and Leisure | 1. Expansion of existing community health club – ground floor only |
| 1. Destination arts venue (major arts) | 1. Arts and Culture | 1. A theatre, performing arts hub, gallery or other visitor-focused arts venue |
| 1. Making space (affordable arts) | 1. Arts and Culture | 1. A flexible, mixed-use space for artists and creatives to utilise for rehearsals, performance, making and presentations |

**Brunswick Baths Health Club**

In 2018 Council endorsed the Moreland City Council Aquatic and Leisure Strategy (2018-2038). It was recommended that for Brunswick Baths:

“Opportunities to expand areas reaching capacity should be considered to ensure the facility remains relevant to the needs and demand of the local community” (p.23).

Council’s *Community Infrastructure Plan 2022–2030* recommends expanding the health club services (gym) at Brunswick Baths in 2032/33:

 Consider options to expand health club services (gym) at Brunswick Baths including opportunities to improve integration with Saxon Street Community Hub.

In late 2022 Council, commissioned a business case including a survey of members and financial modelling to explore the financial viability and sustainability of a health club expansion into the lower level of the North-West building, which sits adjacent to the existing gym. Completed in February 2023, this work included financial projections for an expanded operation, although the financial projections were based on a capital project cost considerably lower than current estimates.

*Membership and member preferences*

The review found that there is strong support among existing members to have the health club extended, with 50 per cent of respondents reporting they would feel more comfortable or potentially return if additional space was added. The lack of space (including stretching areas) and a lack of available equipment are key influencing factors in members cancelling (approximately 43%).

The current Health Club is 320m2 (excluding programming spaces), which is considered undersized for the scale of the centre and its membership base. Based on the catchment size and the level of members per square metre, a Health Club of approximately 650m2 to 800m2 would provide sufficient space for growth.

As the Health club is currently at capacity, there will likely be a higher demand for localised health club services because of increased local residential development. An ongoing consequence of not expanding the existing health club is that there may be a potential decline in membership numbers, possibly resulting in business stagnation, members joining other local gyms, or decline in service offerings.

*Financial modelling*

The financial projections in the February 2023 review were based on a very low estimate for the capital works required to fit out the building and make it compliant. Council now has additional understanding of remediation and compliance works required in the building and the estimated cost would be significantly higher.

Further modelling would be required, but the February 2023 projections suggest that while there might be an increase in member income resulting from an expansion, there would not be a net financial return to Council from the expansion within five years.

*Service expansion*

Council may decide to expand the gym facilities in order to increase the quality of service and the number of people able to access the Brunswick Baths leisure facilities. The Health Club is a popular and often oversubscribed facility that delivers an immediate benefit to members, as well as considerable social value to population health locally.

Further development of the business case for Brunswick Baths expansion would be needed to test the viability of this.

*Risks*

While the North West building is a possible opportunity for an expanded Brunswick Baths Health Club, the building fabric presents limitations in floor area and scale and cost of conversion. It is recommended other options within the current footprint of the baths are explored to understand feasibility and cost.

*Cost estimate*

An indicative costing for this option of $1.962 million for both levels, was provided by a Architect and Quantity Surveyor, but similar to the below options would need to be reviewed once the cold shell works are completed and Officers understand the interface with the existing structure and requirements. The true and adjusted cost could be considerably more than $1.962 million.

**Destination Arts Venue**

Over the past few years, Council has been approached by several high-profile arts organisations who are seeking opportunities to relocate to Brunswick.

Given the appetite in the arts industry to be based in Brunswick, there is an opportunity for Council to scope a usage for the North-West building that establishes it as a destination arts venue that will provide high quality and high-profile arts programming, promoting tourism and attract visitors to the area. This could be a gallery, theatre or performing arts hub, or similar. This usage would complement the strategic vision for Saxon Street and add to its profile as a major cultural destination.

There is currently no business case that explores the use of the North-West building for this purpose. In April – May 2024, market sounding was undertaken to understand:

 The community and cultural benefit of such a project.

 The interest and capacity of arts organisations to invest in and manage a facility of this scale.

 An estimated cost of the upgrades to establish the building for this usage.

*Limitations*

A major challenge to activating the North West building as a destination arts venue is its size and location.

The North-West building is in a part of the site which restricts its visibility from surrounding areas, and with lower footfall than other parts of the site. Additionally, the small footprint and scale of the building is a limiting factor for many high profile, tourist-focussed venues as it is simply too small to attract significant audience numbers through.

These factors would limit interest in the sites as a destination arts venue.

Across the market sounding, sector representatives challenged the notion of a destination arts venue and noted the importance of such infrastructure as being ‘for more than audiences. A place for performances and experiences and for artists, for new work, for safe and supportive spaces for development. Aligned closely with the newly released Arts Merri-bek Strategy 2023 - 2030, this opportunity responds directly to the strategies and outcomes for artists and audiences across the municipality.

*Community and cultural benefit*

There is a significant identified need in Merri-bek for more theatre and performing arts spaces, and recent community consultation (2023) has consistently shown that there is an increasing appetite for these spaces. The *Arts and Culture Strategy* identifies the need to scope a performing arts space in Glenroy or Fawkner; additionally, explorations are being made into the potential to upgrade Coburg Town Hall for such a purpose.

Planning including a timeline for works and running a major procurement process (including developing a prospectus and campaign, negotiations with a preferred bidder, costings etc) has also been undertaken.

Space is at an absolute premium and artists are calling out for it – particularly in Merri-bek which has a high level of creative industries and local artists. Whether for creative development, performance, presentation or making, there is a desperate need. With the population of artists and cultural workers in and around Merri-bek, it makes sense to be seeking and activating as many arts spaces as possible as the demand is so high.

Aligned so closely with the new Saxon Street arts precinct development and in close proximity to existing Council cultural facilities including Counihan Gallery, Brunswick Mechanic’s Institute and BRUDI, the North West Building is an exciting potential site. It would align well with the strategic vision for Saxon Street and enhance Brunswick’s reputation as a creative destination.

The Saxon Street site is lucky to already have one destination arts venue on site, Blak Dot gallery, a highly regarded Indigenous-run art gallery showcasing modern artworks from local and global First Nations cultures. The relationship with Blak Dot gallery is long-established and its design and location within the Saxon Street site has been central to the project of establishing a highly regarded cultural precinct.

*Interest and capacity within the arts industry*

During market sounding, 25 Victorian arts and cultural organisations participated in interviews and information-sharing about how the North West Building might be used, what they might use it for, capacity of commercial-like lease arrangements and what would be needed from Merri-bek if the opportunity was to be realised.

Our research showed:

 Significant interest in this site from arts and cultural organisations

 Capacity and capability for the site to be realised as a destination arts venue

 Interest in 20 - 30-year lease arrangement with options for subsidised rent initially, due to moving and costs associated with the very specific fitouts needed for galleries, theatres etc.

 Need for rehearsal and performance space, reflecting what is known through recent consultations for Arts Merri-bek

 Interest in partnership opportunities - both across the municipality, with the Brunswick Civic and Cultural Precinct (Dawson/Glenlyon/Sydney Road/Saxon St) arts community and with Merri-bek

 Identified need from some (not all) smaller organisations to partner or co-locate to realise an opportunity like this

 Interest from all organisations in flexible space that can host performances AND professional development activities, residencies, and studio-based work.

*Risks*

The North-West building is in a part of the site which restricts its visibility from surrounding areas, and with lower footfall than other parts of the site. This may limit interest in it as a destination venue.

Risks include the precarious nature of the arts industry, which is still recovering from the catastrophic impacts of Covid-19 and ongoing reduction of funding across all levels of government; without market testing it is uncertain whether there are many arts organisations who could afford to invest in the asset upgrade costs. Thus, costs to Council are yet unknown.

Council has resolved to enter a contract with These Are the Projects We Do Together (TPT) to manage the whole precinct and curate its community, so legal risks would have to be considered around a public offer of a co-located but separate arts use.

*Estimated costs*

An indicative costing for this option of $3.271 million has been established, but it would need to be reviewed once the full scope of the project was determined. A destination arts venue would have particular and high-spec fit-out needs, though the costs may be borne by or shared by the partner organisation.

*Timeline and further planning*

Undertaking this scoping and establishing a full business plan would require significant resources to fully explore. With additional resources in place to manage the scoping of the project and management of the tender process it is estimated that this building could be fully functional with a tenant in place in 2027.

**Making Space (affordable arts venue)**

There is a significant unmet demand for affordable, low-cost spaces to create and showcase work in Merri-bek. While there are many galleries and visual arts spaces that currently call Merri-bek home, affordability of these spaces in the wake of city growth is an ongoing challenge. Additionally, there is a small and decreasing number of affordable spaces for making, rehearsing, and presenting work across a variety of other artforms.

Council initiatives such as Saxon Street, Brunswick Mechanics Institute and Coburg Court House were established to meet this need and recent community consultation has consistently shown that there is still significant appetite for this type of flexible arts space.

The new Merri-bek Arts and Culture Strategy (endorsed September 2023) identified Investment as a key priority, noting:

“There is a significant unmet demand for affordable, flexible creative spaces across the municipality. The strategy aims to support the sector’s need and will activate more spaces to create and present work, including studio and rehearsal spaces, performance spaces and galleries. Council’s redevelopment of 33 Saxon Street into a cultural and community hub will offer significant opportunities for artists and the creative industries to work and play close to home.”

While this model will not create additional performance space without significant infrastructure investment, it could be used for creative developments, rehearsals and/or as studio space.

*Community and cultural benefit*

The need for affordable making and production spaces was a key community concern during the Arts and Culture Strategy consultation, particularly as rents increase and warehouses are increasingly developed for housing.

While Saxon Street was developed to increase arts space capacity, there is still need for more affordable and flexible spaces. One identified need that is lacking in the current Saxon Street set up is for messy making space, rehearsal and performance space, and spaces for artist residencies that are not yet being met in the new precinct. The under-developed and small North West building would deliver these outcomes.

The Making Space (affordable arts venue) would be strongly aligned with the strategic vision and intended use of Saxon Street and be a quick and easily achieved option to further activate the site; works to make the building useable for affordable arts are likely to be considerably less expensive than a bespoke high-end arts space or baths expansion. Through consultation it has been estimated that such a space would see a usage of 50 people per week upstairs, 200 per week downstairs.

Additionally, the existing Saxon Street management contract could be varied to accommodate the management and programming of the North-West Building, in accordance with the contract and the User and Tenancy Framework.

*Risks*

A risk of this model is that there is no pathway for asset improvement and future capital works and improvements will be needed. However, the site could be established as an affordable arts venue in the short-term (3 – 5 years) while a fully scoped plan is being developed for the long-term redevelopment of the building.

*Cost estimate*

An indicative costing for this option is $1.25-2 million, including installation of a lift which increases the accessibility of the building (but is not a legislative requirement).

*Timeline*

This option could be complete and operational by June 2026 in line with the allocated capital works budget.

**Community impact**

A key driver for ascertaining the use of this building will be how Council can ensure the broadest and best possible community use for our community.

**Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications**

A key driver for retaining the North-West Building was advice that its demolition would be a poor environmental outcome.

**Economic sustainability implications**

Economic sustainability implications require further scoping.

**Legal and risk considerations**

Further investigation of costs and preferred usage agreements will be conducted.

**Human Rights Consideration**

The implications of this report have been considered in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. The later report proposed to be presented to Council will outline the impact on human rights as defined in the Victorian Charter of Human Rights. A gendered lens will also be used to ensure the impact of gender is included in the analysis of the use of this building*.*

**4. Community consultation and engagement**

Several community consultations, engagements and market soundings have taken place over many years to inform the development of the recommendations in this report.

On the expansion of the Brunswick Baths Health Club extension, significant community consultation has been undertaken in recent years including:

 Consultation and survey of 145 members of the Brunswick Baths Health Club to inform Business Case for expansion (2022)

 Customer feedback has been received through Council about the issue of the gym being at capacity (ongoing)

 YMCA Brunswick Baths member consultation currently underway to greater understand member needs and stresses.

On the establishment of a destination arts venue, consultation has been undertaken since March including:

 Market sounding to explore the interest and capacity of local arts and cultural organisations who may be interested in this opportunity.

 Engagement with existing site tenants TPT and Blak Dot Gallery.

 Analysis of community consultation undertaken during the preparation of the Arts and Culture Strategy 2023-2030.

On the establishment of a Making Space (affordable arts venue) significant community consultation has been undertaken in recent years including:

 Extensive community and arts industry consultation was undertaken during the preparation of the Arts and Culture Strategy 2023-2030.

 Ongoing feedback from arts community regarding the need for flexible and affordable making spaces in Merri-bek.

Additionally, a range of community engagement activities have occurred to obtain community input into the redevelopment of Saxon Street and formation of the Strategic Framework for Saxon Street including:

 Extensive community engagement in 2018 based on the vision, objectives and uses in the endorsed Strategic Framework.

 Community engagement undertaken in 2018 to share information with stakeholders and the public, to engage on specific elements and to help generate knowledge and support for the redevelopment.

**Communications**

A full communications plan will be developed to promote the establishment and opening of the Making Space as part of the Saxon Street development by July 2026.

**5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest**

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

**6. Financial and Resources Implications**

Currently, $200,000 has been allocated in the draft 2024/2025 capital works budget for scoping and design for this building, with a further $2.5 million allocated in 2025/2026. The establishment of the Making Space (affordable arts usage) can be achieved within this budget.

**7. Implementation**

See below an overview of the proposed timeline to establishing the North West building for an interim affordable arts usage:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Jul-Aug 2024 | 1. Scope of works defined 2. Engagement with contract managers and update Tenants and User Framework |
| 1. Sep-Oct 2024 | 1. Architect appointed |
| 1. Nov 2024-Feb 2025 | 1. Building design completed |
| 1. Mar – June 2025 | 1. Appointment of builder 2. Preparation for works |
| 1. Jul 2025 | 1. Works commence |
| 1. May 2026 | 1. Works completed |
| 1. June – July 2026 | 1. Handover to contract managers 2. NW building opens to the public as making and performance development space |

**Attachment/s**

There are no attachments for this report.

**7.7 Adoption of the Economic Development Action Plan 2024-2027**

**Acting Director Place and Environment Phillip Priest**

**City Strategy and Economy**

**Officer Recommendation**

That Council:

1. Adopts as final the Economic Development Action Plan 2024-2027 at Attachment 1.

2. Authorises the Director Place and Environment to make minor editorial changes in finalising the document for publication, including graphical design, that do not change the meaning of the Action Plan.

3. Notes the Consultation Summary Report at Attachment 2 detailing the methodology and findings of consultation and thanks businesses and other stakeholders for their participation throughout the process of preparing the Economic Development Action Plan.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

Council is committed to creating an enabling environment and providing the support that businesses need to start up, grow and create new jobs in Merri-bek.

The draft Economic Development Action Plan (EDAP) 2024-2027 sets out how Council’s Economic Development Unit will support local business and the local economy over the next three years. The Plan aims to facilitate a growing, productive, socially inclusive, and economically sustainable local economy. Its primary goal is to ensure ample access to goods, services, and employment opportunities, therefore supporting the health and wellbeing of the Merri-bek community.

The EDAP has been informed by significant engagement with businesses, through an online business survey, an in-person business feedback forum, discussions with businesses, trader associations, First Nations representatives, and various internal and external stakeholders across Council and its partner organisations.

The document is set out under seven themes, each with specific objectives. Each theme also contains priorities and related work plan actions. The Economic Development Unit will work proactively and collaboratively with other internal teams and external stakeholders to implement the EDAP. The EDAP is also supported by a range of other Council programs and services that support Merri-bek businesses and the wider business community.

This report seeks Council’s endorsement of the draft EDAP 2024-2027.

**Previous Council Decisions**

No previous Council decisions apply to this report.

**1. Policy Context**

To ensure long term outcomes are achieved, it is important that local government aligns their economic development plans to broader, longer term regional and council plans.

This EDAP aligns closely to the following:

**Local Government Act 2020 - Part 2, Division 1, Section 9(2)**

*Local Government Act 2020* states that a Council must in the performance of its role give effect to various overarching governance principles. The key principles include:

(c) the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the municipal district, including mitigation and planning for climate change risks, is to be promoted;

(f) collaboration with other Councils and Governments and statutory bodies is to be sought;

(h) regional, state and national plans and policies are to be taken into account in strategic planning and decision making.

**Community Vision 2021-2031**

The Community Vision Statement acknowledges that Merri-bek *“…is enhanced by all of us supporting our local businesses, arts communities and social organisations*.”

Theme 4 relating to spaces and places aspires to a Merri-bek where living and working is easy and enjoyable, where public and commercial spaces bring people together and where Council and the community support the development of vibrant hubs of arts, businesses and recreation.

**Council Plan 2021-2025 - Theme 4: Vibrant Spaces and Places**

 Strategy 4.9: *Revitalise Moreland’s major activity centres to deliver new integrated community facilities and services, enable new cultural spaces, create jobs and improve local accessibility and amenity, while protecting the special character that each centre is known for and advocating for affordable housing outcomes.*

 Strategy 4.10: *Increase local jobs and economic activity through supporting local, micro and social business and partnership efforts.*

**Melbourne’s North: Investment Attraction Strategy and Investment Prospectus**

Opportunities identified within the Strategy that particularly relate to Merri-bek includes:

 Inner North Employment Precinct

 Coburg Activity Centre

 Brunswick Design District

 Biomed tech specialisation in Brunswick and nearby Parkville

**2. Background**

Merri-bek is Victoria’s eighth most populous municipality and is home to approximately 16,000 businesses and over 51,000 local jobs. Historically, over 90% of Merri-bek’s businesses have been micro-businesses employing less than 5 employees.

Merri-bek’s economy is diverse with numerous strengths and many thriving and viable businesses. However, the last few years have shown that our economy and our business community often face challenges and threats and that owning and operating a business can be both financially risky and personally challenging.

For this reason, it is important for governments to provide an environment that is as conducive as possible to businesses being able to start and operate viably. In doing so, it helps to deliver a vibrant, sustainable and growing local economy, as well as employment opportunities for local residents. It also ensures the Merri-bek community has access to a diverse range of goods and services, contributing to their everyday quality of life and well-being.

Merri-bek City Council supports the growth of businesses and the local economy, including through the following important ways:

 Providing local transport and other infrastructure; land use planning and development approval services; environmental health services, and waste services.

 Setting and enforcing local laws and environmental health regulations, helping to provide for a well ordered and safe community in which businesses can operate.

 Implementing Council’s 2019 commitment to being a Small Business Friendly Council, by implementing new procedures and applying them daily to reduce process delays and improve the services we provide to our business community.

Council’s Economic Development Unit also supports the growth of businesses and the economy, through the following roles and responsibilities:

 Advocating on behalf of local businesses

 Supporting existing and emerging key industries

 Attracting and facilitating business investment

 Supporting and assisting businesses

 Helping businesses in our retail centres and employment precincts and supporting and overseeing the work of Merri-bek’s trader associations

 Attracting visitors and supporting local tourism operators

 Supporting businesses to be more environmentally and socially sustainable.

The Economic Development Unit works with and is supported by numerous other Council teams to support and enable business and to drive a successful and healthy local economy.

From 2016 to 2024, the Economic Development Unit’s work has been guided the following:

 Merri-bek Economic Development Strategy 2016–2021

 ‘Realise your Future’ - Attracting and supporting local business – Action Plan 2021-2023

 Visitor Attraction Action Plan 2022–2024.

As the Strategy and Action Plans have concluded, a new Economic Development Action Plan has been developed to guide the Unit’s work over the next three years.

To inform the development of a new Action Plan, research, and analysis regarding the health of the local economy has been undertaken. Additionally, a comprehensive engagement and consultation process has also been undertaken with the business community and other key stakeholders. See Section 4 below for further detail.

**3. Issues**

**Business community and wider community impacts**

The Economic Development Action Plan will have broad positive impacts for Merri-bek’s business community and the wider community. This includes residents and commuters to Merri-bek who work and earn their livelihood in Merri-bek. It also includes the wider community who enjoy the goods and services delivered by the businesses and service providers in the local area.

**Continuing challenges for Merri-bek’s economy**

Council has obtained the latest local economic data and insights through a Merri-bek Economic Health Check 2023 to help inform analysis of the nature of Merri-bek’s economic landscape and to assist development of the Action Plan. The Health Check ([Where to invest – industrial, commercial and retail precincts (merri-bek.vic.gov.au)](https://merri-bek.vic.gov.au/building-and-business/business/investing-in-merri-bek2/where-to-invest--industrial-commercial-and-retail-precincts/) provides an assessment of the health of the local economy and identifies emerging opportunities, trends and challenges.

The Health Check found that during the pandemic Merri-bek suffered a sharper downturn in economic activity and a correspondingly higher rise in unemployment than the Victorian average; due in part to the local economy’s dependence on sectors hit hard by lockdowns. While the local economy recovered strongly after the pandemic, the cost of living crisis is seeing demand for goods and services impacted again. Recent economic data also suggests that many local businesses, particularly those exposed to discretionary household consumer spending, are again facing hard times.

However, Merri-bek’s economy also has many strengths, such as its strong health care, construction, education, hospitality, and design and creative sectors. Professional services and food manufacturing have also recently demonstrated resilience and growth. Emerging opportunities and trends are likely to support further business and job growth. These include an increasingly well-qualified local resident workforce, continuing local and regional population growth, emergence of a vibrant bio MedTech start-up sector; growing interest in the circular economy, and emergence of AI technologies that are driving rapid change, but which also hold great potential.

Major investments in housing, health, and social, cultural and green infrastructure, complemented by investments in retail, hospitality, and the creative industries also promise to stimulate the local economy and support local businesses and job creation.

**A business community in need of support**

The business engagement process undertaken to inform drafting of the Action Plan provided rich insights into the experience of businesses, confirming that:

 Local Merri-bek businesses currently face a varied number of challenges, including but not limited to: inflation and rising input costs, declining customer demand as the cost of living crisis persists; personal challenges, regulatory compliance challenges, cyber security threats, challenges navigating Council and other government approval processes, and safety and crime.

 Businesses are appreciative of and look to Council to provide them with support in numerous ways, including but not limited to: information regarding government regulations and support programs and grant funding opportunities, small business skill development, event and business networking opportunities, accessing data to inform market research and business planning, navigating regulatory processes, and help with finding and marketing to new customers.

Over 90 per cent of businesses in Merri-bek are sole trader, micro and small businesses. As such, Merri-bek’s businesses can face significant resource constraints when it comes to tackling persistent challenges, as well as exploring and taking advantage of emerging opportunities. Accordingly, there is a significant opportunity for the Economic Development Unit’s work to help support Merri-bek’s industries and business.

**The Draft Action Plan and its Themes and Objectives**

In recognition of the above economic conditions and business experiences – the Merri-bek Economic Development Action Plan outlines how Council will support local businesses and the local economy over the next three years.

The Action Plan has been drafted to include actions that capitalise on the economy’s strengths and emerging opportunities and support local businesses and precincts. At the same time, the Action Plan aims to engage and support business owners and operators from priority groups and to help businesses operate in a socially and environmentally sustainable manner.

The draft EDAP includes a four-tiered structure, designed to ensure clarity, focus and achievable outcomes. The tiers cover:

 *Themes* – under which Objectives, Priorities and Actions are set out

 *Objectives* – stating what it is aimed to achieve under each theme

 *Priorities* – identifying the focus areas for work under each theme

 *Actions* – to be undertaken to collectively achieve the intention of each theme.

The seven themes and the objectives under each theme are set out in Table 1.

**Table 1: Economic Development Action Plan - Themes and Objectives**

| **Themes** | **Objectives** |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Advocating for our Business Community |  To ensure Merri-bek's business community is considered in relevant regional, State and Federal issues, strategies and policies.   To ensure State and Federal Governments deliver infrastructure that supports high quality and socially and environmentally sustainable economic development for Merri-bek.   To enhance Council's performance as a Small Business Friendly Council. |
| 2. Emerging Industries and Clusters |  To develop vibrant business ecosystems that have significant potential for employment growth.   To increase business investment in emerging industries and technologies.   To grow industry sectors that are key to the local economy |
| 3. Business Attraction and Investment Facilitation |  To position Merri-bek as a Council that is investment ready and encourages a coordinated approach to new business investment projects.   To improve approvals processes for employment-generating investment projects.   To attract new business investment to Merri-bek that supports local job creation. |
| 4. Business Support and Capability Development |  To improve the skills and capabilities of business owners to operate viable businesses.   To grow networks between businesses that can benefit from working collaboratively.   To grow awareness of local businesses to increase customer reach.   To improve local business access to timely and relevant information.   To reduce the barriers faced by priority groups to starting and growing a viable business |
| 5. Activity Centres and Commercial & Industrial Precincts |  To create activity centres that are great places to visit, work and run a business.   To increase the visitation and spending at local shopping strips.   To encourage new business investment in key, local commercial and industrial precincts. |
| 6. Visitor and Experience Economy |  To raise awareness of Merri-bek as a great place to visit, work, and to run a business.   To grow the local visitor and experience economy. |
| 7. Environmental and Social Sustainability |  To grow the number of local businesses achieving socially and environmentally sustainable outcomes.   To grow the number of local, start up and viable businesses operated by people from priority groups (e.g. First Nations people, women, LGBTQIA+, migrants and refugees, etc.).   To reduce carbon emissions and other impacts on the environment created by local business. |

**Roles and Responsibilities**

Responsibility for implementing the Economic Development Action Plan lies with the Economic Development Unit. However, the success of many of the plan’s actions will be assisted by the support and activities of many other internal teams and external stakeholders. Accordingly, the Economic Development Unit will proactively reach out to and work collaboratively with other internal teams and external agencies, including trader and business associations, and regional, State and Federal government bodies. The Unit will also engage and work closely with Merri-bek’s many businesses.

**Monitoring, Evaluation and Review of EDAP**

The Action Plan includes a set of Key Performance Indicators that will establish a framework for regular monitoring and evaluation. This will provide valuable insights into the progress and effectiveness of the Economic Development Unit’s actions to support the business community and to achieve the objectives under each theme.

**Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications**

To help mitigate business impacts on climate emergency and enhance environmental sustainability, specific actions are outlined in the draft EDAP under Theme 7 - Environmental and Social Sustainability. The Economic Development team will work closely with Council’s Sustainability and Climate team on these specific actions including to help develop and implement a new Circular Economy Strategy.

**Economic sustainability implications**

Local businesses play an important role in our economy and our community. They provide essential goods and services, create employment and attract visitors to Merri-bek. The EDAP focusses on growth of the local economy, spending in Merri-bek and economic sustainability.

**Legal and risk considerations**

Individual actions within the EDAP that pose a potential risk will require a risk assessment prior to implementation (e.g. Merri-bek’s Christmas Decorations Program, grants, shop front improvement program).

**Human Rights Consideration**

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

A Gender Equity Impact Assessment (GEIA) was undertaken as part of the development and future implementation of the EDAP. This is an assessment of how our work may affect different genders and impact priority groups and how we will work to ensure we do not reinforce inequalities through this project. The GEIA recommendations have helped inform specific actions in the EDAP.

**4. Community consultation and engagement**

The engagement plan for this project was formulated with input from Council’s Community Engagement and Public Participation Unit and is aligned with Merri-bek’s Community Engagement Policy.

Engagement activities focused on and were designed to capture the perspectives of a diverse range of business owners and operators and other key stakeholders.

The process, conducted over several months, included extensive engagement with the business community and key internal and external stakeholders. Table 2 provides a summary of the business community consultation and engagement activities.

**Table 2: Stakeholder Engagement Activities**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Engagement Activity** | **Outcome** |
| Internal workshop with Council teams that regularly interact with local businesses | 50+ workshop participants (incl. Customer Service, Amenity and Compliance, Urban Planning, Urban Design, Building and Environmental Health). |
| Internal surveys with key managers, unit managers and other key leaders. | 24 surveys completed |
| Conversations Merri-bek webpage ‘A new Economic Development Action Plan for Merri-bek’ | 992 views; 878 visits; and 681 page visitors |
| 1. Business Survey (Online, 15 February to 26 March 2024; promoted via various digital and physical channels) | 250 survey responses |
| Business interviews | 1. 20 invites issued   9 interviews completed |
| Direct e-mails to First Nations representatives and businesses, and presentation to First Nations Advisory Committee | 1. 18 direct e-mails sent to local First Nations business owners 2. 2 discussions 3. 2 business survey responses 4. 3 presentations & discussions (1 with Wurundjeri Elders; 1 with a First Nations Advisory Committee Member; and 1 to the First Nations Advisory Committee) |
| Sydney Road Brunswick and Central Coburg Business Association committee engagement | 2 question and answer discussions with business association committees. |
| Merri-bek Business Feedback Forum held in Coburg | 1. 400+ invitations issued   - 48 business participants  - 5 key stakeholder participants |
| 1. Internal branch meetings (to present, review and seek feedback on draft Economic Development Action themes, priorities and actions) | 8 meetings and discussions including:  - Advocacy  - Amenity & Compliance/Open Space & Environment  - City Development  - Community Engagement  - Community Wellbeing  - Cultural Development  - Property, Place and Design  - Sustainability and Climate |

A Consultation Summary Report is included as Attachment 2. The findings of the engagement and consultation have been carefully considered and have been instrumental in informing the development of the Action Plan.

Council’s Economic Development Portfolio Councillors have been briefed throughout the preparation of the EDAP and Councillor Briefings were held on 17 April 2024 and 19 June 2024.

**Affected persons rights and interests**

Before making a decision that affects a person’s rights, Council must identify whose rights may be directly affected and provide an opportunity for that person (or persons) to convey those views regarding the effect on their rights and consider those views.

Throughout the implementation of EDAP, actions may involve initiative-specific engagement with external stakeholders such as impacted cohorts and stakeholders.

**5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest**

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

**6. Financial and Resources Implications**

The funds required to implement the EDAP actions (refer EDAP Table – Part 2 of EDAP document) are included in the ED Unit’s budget, unless marked as ‘subject to funding’ (STF). Additional funds may be sought from external sources or through the internal budget process for consideration.

**7. Implementation**

Implementation of the EDAP will commence following Council endorsement.

The Plan will be published on Council’s website, and survey and workshop participants will receive a direct email notification. In addition, a link to the EDAP will be included in the fortnightly business e-newsletter, posted on social media and highlighted at upcoming business networking events and workshops.

The Economic Development Unit will work with the Community Engagement Team throughout implementation of the plan to provide the community, in particular local businesses, with regular updates as to progress on implementing the plan.

Internal teams will be informed and further engaged through a series of follow up meetings relating to relevant actions within the plan.

The Plan includes a dedicated section on monitoring and evaluation. This is important for assessing how well Council is progressing toward achieving the desired outcomes and its effectiveness in supporting Merri-bek’s business community over the three year period.

**Attachment/s**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Economic Development Action Plan - Final June 2024 | D24/295826 |  |
| **2** | Economic Development Action Plan - Consultation Summary Report June 2024 | D24/297362 |  |

7.8 Improving access to Exercise Programs for Older People in Merri-bek

**Director Community Eamonn Fennessy**

**Aged and Community Support**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes the evaluation findings relating to the Strong and Active Pilot and the Active Seniors Clubs Initiative (ASCI).

2. Notes that officers will continue to pursue opportunities to further implement the Strong and Active model in Merri-bek, through partnerships and external funding opportunities.

3. Continues to collaborate with Active Merri-bek YMCA and other program providers with inclusive onboarding of older people into appropriate classes.

4. Notes the Living and Ageing Well Implementation Plan will continue to focus on exercise, exploring broader exercise and social opportunities such as seniors exercise parks or classes in the parks.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

At the 10 March 2021 Council meeting, following the Living and Ageing Well Report on Year 1 actions, Councillors requested a report on the feasibility and cost implications of providing Merri-bek seniors with a free gym and aquatic membership.

The report was presented at the 14 July 2021 Council meeting, in which officers proposed a supported pathway model that would address the barriers experienced by older people in participating in exercise. Council resolved to proceed with a pilot program and receive a report outlining results and future options.

The Strong and Active pilot and the Active Seniors Clubs Initiative (ASCI) both trialled ways of improving exercise access for older people in Merri-bek. In addition, work has been undertaken as part of Council’s Living and Ageing Well Framework to explore other ways of supporting seniors to be more physically active.

The Strong and Active pilot recruited 27 older individuals into a 6-week program to try local exercise classes they had not tried before. This pilot addressed barriers for individuals such as cost and transport and established a network of peer support. This resulted in high attendance and continuation rates, and significant positive social and health outcomes. There was a focus on strengthening referral pathways between partner agencies Merri Health, Sussex Neighbourhood House, Pronia, Glenroy Neighbourhood House and Oak Park Leisure Centre YMCA. As a result of the pilot, new classes tailored to older people continued past the pilot phase.

The Active Seniors Clubs Initiative delivers outreach exercise classes to established seniors’ groups or clubs. Merri-bek has over 70 self-led seniors’ groups who meet at different community venues. This model encourages older people to exercise in a familiar social setting and has had very positive feedback from participants and much interest from other clubs wanting to participate.

Evaluation of these pilot initiatives highlight the value of a supported pathway for older adults into community exercise. Both have been highly effective in increasing exercise participation, with significant social and physical benefits. Both initiatives responded to older peoples’ preferences to exercise in familiar, supported settings to try something new. This is demonstrated by the high uptake and interest from other older people in both pilots.

Both models provide a needed alternative to the current exercise environment which is siloed and results in older people not accessing the exercise they need.

There is an opportunity to improve the system by:

 Providing programs like the Strong and Active Pilot, which removed systemic barriers and provided social support for older people to transition to exercise programs at existing facilities.

 Enhancing the customer experience and onboarding to Active Merri-bek YMCA exercise programs to make them more welcoming and accessible.

 Providing outreach exercise classes at Seniors Clubs/programs in partnership with the YMCA.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Gym and Aquatic Membership for Moreland Seniors** – 14 July 2021

*That Council:*

*1. Resolves to proceed with option 1 outlined below as a trial for six months commencing August 2021.*

*2. Receives a further report at the end of the trial period outlining the results achieved and any future options.*

**Living and Ageing Well Moreland - Report on Year 1 Actions**- 10 March 2021

*That Council:*

*…*

*3. Receives a report that looks at the feasibility and cost implications of providing Moreland seniors (only) with a free gym and aquatic membership for one year following the anticipated rollout of the vaccine in October 2021.*

*…*

## 1. Policy Context

**Council Plan 2021-2025**

Theme 3: A healthy and caring Merri-bek.

 Strategic Objective 3: To support Merri-bek to become a more inclusive, connected, healthy and caring community through providing equitable access to community facilities and services, facilitating local partnerships and programs.

 Strategy 3.3: Ensure Merri-bek residents are more active more often at all stages of life by providing a diverse range of accessible and affordable recreation opportunities that reflect our diverse community and develop and maintain partnerships to enhance participation options.

 Major Initiatives and Priorities 24. Continue to invest in services for older people to ensure access to services that meet their needs.

**Living and Ageing Well Framework**

Strategic Indicator 4: Older people lead active and healthy lives where they participate in a range of activities.

Strategic Indicator 8: Older people have access to a range of quality services that are responsive to their needs and aspirations.

Actions:

 Provide of a range of opportunities that are either low cost or no cost for older people to be physically active.

 Support older people to build confidence in attending new social activities by accompanying them in initial stages and working with organisations to become more welcoming of new members.

 Evaluate how council services can better cater to the needs, and interests, of older people in the municipality who currently do not access services that are relevant to them.

## 2. Background

Since COVID 19 restrictions in 2020-21, Council has piloted several programs to better support older adults be active.

Strong and Active supported individuals to address social and systemic barriers to exercise and strengthened referral pathways into appropriate exercise classes at existing facilities. These individuals were not connected through established social groups, and the social component of the peer support network was significant to the program’s success.

The Active Seniors Club Initiative (ASCI) provides outreach exercise classes to senior’s groups and clubs at the time and venue that they regularly meet. There are over 70 seniors’ groups/clubs in Merri-bek. As members age, many clubs are seeking to engage new members to continue the important social, physical, and mental health benefits of these groups. Since the pilot began in 2024, the ASCI has already helped one social group to recruit new members wanting to exercise with the club.

This report provides specific details of the Strong and Active Exercise Pilot and the Active Seniors Clubs Initiative (ASCI) and provides an overview of other programs that Council and the YMCA have initiated to support older people in being active in Merri-bek.

Strong and Active Exercise Pilot

Council’s Living and Ageing Well program led the Strong and Active pilot program between May and October 2023, and it has since been fully evaluated. The program was designed to support older residents to increase their rates of exercise, by connecting them with local classes and addressing barriers, with the aim for participants to gain confidence and exit the program into independent ongoing exercise.

Overall, the program was very beneficial for participants, and supported people to continue independently beyond the program.

This program addressed the challenges that can be experienced with traditional exercise programs. The existing exercise service system in Merri-bek is largely not designed to encourage older people to exercise. Since COVID and the general change in how people access information online, it can be difficult for older adults to find information on classes that are right for them, to feel confident enough to take the first step, and to commit funds to an ‘unknown’ class.

The main focus for the Strong and Active program was to link older people into appropriate exercise classes through Sussex Neighbourhood House, Merri Health and Pronia, and Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre and the YMCA, and upskilling and supporting organisation to reduce barriers and encourage participation.

This pilot has demonstrated the ability to affect real change in the system. The organisations that participated were keen for the program to be ongoing. The findings indicated that if Council decides to continue this supported pathway approach, it will make a significant difference to the older community and build capacity for exercise providers to better service any community member facing barriers. This video features interviews with participants of the pilot: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AY9tDKJ8KL8>

Active Senior Clubs Initiative

Council’s Aged and Community Support Service partnered with Active Merri-bek YMCA in 2024 to provide exercise programs to various Senior Clubs/Groups who meet in the community. This initiative has operated for the past 6 months and involved an exercise instructor from the YMCA visiting the clubs/groups to conduct weekly exercise class onsite during the club/groups scheduled meeting times.

Four Clubs/groups participated, i.e.

 Coburg Turkish Elderly Seniors Group –Coburg City Oval

 Fawkner Women’s Health Group– Fawkner Senior Citizen Centre

 Lebanese Seniors Women’s Group – Coburg Senior Citizen Centre

 Council’s Social Support Program – Newlands Seniors Centre

Each group averaged 32 participants, with approximately 120 older people so far.

The pilot stage was funded through Councils Active Merri-bek programming with the YMCA.

The response to this initiative has been highly positive with the current groups wishing to continue and other seniors’ groups expressing an interest in having exercise activities as part of their meetings and have new members joining social groups because of the pilot.

There is an opportunity to expand this program and further work is required to establish the criteria for running the future program and funding implications.

Exercise Classes for Older People at Active Merri-bek Leisure Centres

Council contracts the YMCA to operate its six Aquatic and Leisure centres across Merri-bek. As part of the specifications and deliverables, there is a requirement to deliver seniors programming. Currently there are a range of group fitness classes timetabled across all centres catering for a variety of abilities. There are four levels of classes aimed at beginners or seniors with less mobility and strength to actual gym weights programs as well as Zumba (dance) classes for seniors and variety of aqua aerobics classes.

Key barriers for older people accessing these centre classes include location, transport and cost. Although there is a heavily discounted price for Pension Concession holders, cost is a major deterrent to trying different classes or programs, in order to find the appropriate one. Feeling intimidated or embarrassed in mainstream exercise environments when it is new to someone, not knowing where to go or what to do are other barriers. The Strong and Active evaluation identified that an induction and/or transition program with peer support, greatly enhances participants experience and is more likely to lead to regular exercise participation at leisure centres. A ‘buddy’ system is another possibility to achieve this.

‘Activating Merri-bek Initiative’ programs are developed and targeted to non-traditional users, to assist in removing barriers including awareness. To date some of these programs have been delivered at the Senior Citizen Centres as mentioned above with great participation uptake.

As part of the YMCA’s programming there is an opportunity to build stronger pathways to better support people to transitioning from outreach and allied health exercise programs and to create options for people to undertake a supported trial of exercise classes with support within specific Aquatic and Leisure centres.

Living and Ageing Well Implementation Plan

In addition to the programs above, Council’s Aged and Community Support team supports older people in being active by facilitating change. A recent example of this is the activation of seniors exercise parks. This has involved training volunteers and users of the facilities, holding activation events, developing programs on the sites, and building awareness of the facilities.

## 3. Issues

### Community impact

### Australian guidelines recommend that older people undertake 30 minutes of medium intensity exercise every day. Most people fall well short of this, with only 1 in 4 older Australians meeting the recommended levels (pre-covid data). With 22,853 people aged 65+ in Merri-bek, this suggests around 17,139 (75%) of our older residents could benefit from more exercise. The research conducted as part of the Strong and Active Pilot identified that the COVID-19 lockdowns continue to affect older residents, with residents reporting that they are more isolated and sedentary as a result and have poorer mobility.

### Lack of exercise negatively impacts health, increases the risk of falls, and the ability to live independently at home. Between 2010-2020, older Merri-bek residents were hospitalised 9,949 times for falls. Half of these falls resulted in a fracture. The World Health Organisation recommends exercise programs as one of the top 3 prevention measures against falls.

Our older residents are very keen to participate in exercise classes. However, they face a suite of systemic barriers that hinder them from regular exercise. As demonstrated in the pilots/initiatives, if Council can help reduce barriers and support people to take the first step, many older people can develop an independent ongoing exercise practice. As well as improving physical health and reducing risk of falls, these programs have the potential to greatly increase social connection and sense of belonging in the local community.

### Service impact

### The health, allied health and aged care systems are straining under the demand of the community’s health and mobility needs. This has been considerably exacerbated by COVID-19.

### Covid also impacted the participation rates of older people in exercise programs and system changes are required to develop new onboarding processes and break down the barriers to participation. An increase in participation will have a flow on effect of expanding class options and further reducing barriers.

### The older adult exercise programs recently trialled can support uptake of exercise by this cohort and may alleviate service pressure on the health system.

### Economic sustainability implications

Improving opportunities and access to exercise has economic implications. At the end of the Strong and Active Pilot, almost 70% of participants surveyed said that they will be continuing with the classes (at their own expense) and/or leisure centre memberships. Similarly, a more supported onboarding approach to YMCA exercise programs will support better take up and ongoing participation.

Furthermore, participation in an ongoing exercise program has the potential to reduce costs to the health system, with better participant health outcomes and fewer falls.

### Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and has found that the implications of this report do not conflict with any human rights issues. It in fact supports the Charter, in particular the right to access public services and be protected from discrimination.

The needs of all genders, as well as people with a disability and people from Cultural and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds, were considered as part of the consultation and service planning process.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

During the delivery of the programs and as part of the engagement associated with the Living and Ageing well program, officers undertook discussions older residents, organisations (incl. Merri Health exercise physiology team and multicultural workers, Royal Melbourne Hospital outpatient program, Lifecare Physiotherapy practice, Fawkner Neighbourhood House) and senior clubs. Feedback was received about the barries experienced by older people that prevented them from being involved in exercise programs.

## 5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

## Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

## 6. Financial and Resources Implications

Strong and Active

The 6-week pilot of Strong and Active with 27 participants was funded by the Living and Ageing Well Implementation Plan at a cost of $12,862.13 ($476 per participant). Project coordinator costs were funded internally at $35,328 (Band 6, 0.65 EFT for 24 weeks). Total cost was $48,190.

Estimated total cost of delivering this program for a further two more intakes in 2024/25 would be $96,380. This cost may be reduced by limiting participants to only include allied health referrals.

Officers identified that this program could be a good candidate for future grant funding, possibly in partnership with a research partner. At this stage, however, no opportunities have been identified.

Active Senior Clubs Initiative (ASCI)

The cost of the pilot initiative was delivered within the existing Council contract with the YMCA.

The overall cost of this initiative is determined by the number of clubs/groups participating in the program. Cost per seniors group is limited to YMCA exercise instructor rate of $65.00 per class. For 48 weeks, this would cost approximately $3,200 per seniors group for one year.

The program is scheduled for 4 groups of older people for the remainder of 2024. Active Merri-bek YMCA and Aged and Community Support will combine resources to fund existing programs for 3 seniors’ groups and 1 social support group at a cost of $12 800.

With over 70 seniors’ groups in Merri-bek, it is envisioned that the program will continue to see increased demand. Aged and Community Services and Active Merri-bek YMCA will explore resourcing the program beyond 2024/25 to reach more older people.

Exercise Classes for Older People at YMCA Centres

Our findings indicate that generally once people have been successfully transitioned and onboarded to an exercise program at the leisure centres then they are happy to continue to participate at their own cost.

The key cost of improving access, transition and onboarding to the YMCA older adult exercise programs can be absorbed within the YMCA contract. This would also include provision of limited vouchers to get people started.

Living and Ageing Well Plan Implementation

The Living and Ageing Well program utilise the annual operational budget to support new initiatives and work to support and enhance the wellbeing of older residents in Merri-bek.

This budget will continue to support opportunities to encourage the use of seniors exercise parks and initiate other exercise trials and research as needs are identified (e.g., walking groups, free exercise classes in the parks).

## 7. Implications

The Strong and Active Pilot has delivered significant positive outcomes for participants and the community exercise sector and provided key learnings. This program is highly tailored and does require significant financial resourcing to expand across the municipality. Opportunities to seek future grant applications in partnership with other organisations will continue to be pursued.

Council’s Aged and Community Support team will continue to strengthen referral pathways in partnership with the YMCA, Merri Health, and other community organisations. Both the implementation of the YMCA and Living and Ageing Well work to improve access to exercise can be implemented within existing resources.

## Attachment/s

There are no attachments for this report.

7.9 Improving Community Engagement Policy for older, non-English speaking residents

**Director Community Eamonn Fennessy**

**Community Engagement**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes proposed revisions to the Community Engagement Policy that focus on improving engagement for older, non-English speaking residents to maximise opportunities for them to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

2. Endorses the draft Community Engagement Policy for 15-business days’ public exhibition.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

Council's Community Engagement Policy (the Policy) supports the requirements of the *Local Government Act* 2020. The Policy sets standards for how Council engages with the Merri-bek community, to involve them in decision-making and in shaping projects and services that are important to them.

At the June 2024 meeting, Council requested a review of its Community Engagement Policy (2023) with a focus on improving engagement for older, non-English speaking residents to maximise opportunities for them to have their say on decisions that affect their lives.

This report recommends the Community Engagement Policy with minor amendments on improving engagement for older, non-English speaking residents be endorsed by Council for 15-business days public exhibition.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Notice of Motion – Improving Community Engagement for Older, Non-English Speaking Residents** - 12 June 2024

*That Council:*

*1. Commences a review of its Community Engagement Policy (2023) with a focus on improving engagement for older, non-English speaking residents to maximise opportunities for them to have their say on decisions that affect their lives.*

*2. Receives a Council report at the 10 July Council meeting on the outcomes of the review of its Community Engagement Policy.*

**Community Engagement Policy Update** – 20 June 2023

*That Council:*

*1. Adopts the revised Community Engagement Policy (the Policy) at Attachment 1, based on feedback from the recent community engagement, with the following changes:*

*a) Under heading "Who we engage" (p11), add "informal users of parks" to the list.*

*b) Under heading: Engagement methods we use, add "signs in parks to reach informal users of parks".*

*2. Notes the Community Feedback Report at Attachment 2 that has shaped the revised Policy.*

*3. Replace all references to 'LGBTIQ+' with 'LGBTIQA+' in the revised Policy*

**Community Engagement Policy Update** – 7 December 2022

*That Council:*

*1. Endorses the updated Community Engagement Policy for a 15-day public exhibition period in February 2023.*

*2. Notes the Community Engagement Policy Implementation Plan Year 2 Progress Report.*

*3. Notes the Community Engagement Policy and Portfolio Plan.*

**Community Engagement Policy – Year 1 Progress Report** – 8 December 2021

*That Council:*

*1. Notes the findings of the Community Engagement Policy Implementation Plan Year 1 Progress Report (2021) including identified achievements and areas for targeted improvement.*

*2. Endorses a proposal to proceed with drafting minor amendments to the Community Engagement Policy to provide clearer instruction to Council officers about community engagement requirements. It is recommended that in March/April 2022, briefings be held with Councillors to discuss improvements to the policy, and in May/June 2022 the revised policy be presented to Council for endorsement for public exhibition.*

*3. Uphold the minimum 10-business day requirement for public exhibition set in our Community Engagement Policy 2020 and aligned to the Local Government Act 2020 removal of the requirement to carry out a 28-day public exhibition and Hearing of Submissions process. Noting, more time and a higher standard of engagement needs to be delivered prior to exhibition.*

**Community Engagement Policy 2020 & Implementation Plan 2020-2024** – 9 December 2020

*That Council:*

*1. Adopts the Community Engagement Policy 2020 at Attachment 1 to this report, in accordance with requirements of the Local Government Act 2020.*

*2. Notes the Community Engagement Implementation Plan 2020-2024 at Attachment 2 to this report and add the words ‘and people with low literacy levels’ to action item 2.3.*

*3. Notes the Community Engagement Policy Outcomes of Community Engagement Report at Attachment 3 to this report.*

*4. Notifies participants involved in the development of the Community Engagement Policy about the outcomes of the community engagement process, and thanks them for their participation.*

*5. Notes officers will make grammatical changes to the Community Engagement Policy on:*

*a) Page 5 by inserting the words ‘and timely’ under responsibilities for Directors after the words ‘good quality’.*

*b) Page 5 by inserting the word ‘timely’ under responsibilities for Council officers after the words ‘engagement and’*

*c) Page 8 at dot point 9 by replacing the word ‘may’ with ‘should’*

*d) Page 10 at dot point 6 by removing the words ‘aim to’*

*e) Page 10 at dot point 7 by removing the words ‘upon request’*

*6. Receives a report in December 2021 evaluating the implementation of Community Engagement Policy 2020 and the effectiveness of the new minimum 10 business day exhibition period of draft documents for public viewing and feedback.*

## 1. Policy Context

The Community Engagement Policy supports Council’s obligations under the *Local Government Act 2020,* which requires Council to adopt and maintain a community engagement policy.

It is also directly related to Council Plan *Theme 5:* *An empowered and collaborative Merri-bek* and the associated actions and major initiative:

 5.2 Increase community access and capacity to meaningfully participate in council decision-making and civic life

 5.3. Build greater trust with the community by actively involving them in matters which have a direct impact on their lives

 Major initiative: Implement the Community Engagement Policy.

The Policy complements the Community Vision, in particular:

*Council and community working together proactively and transparently to continue to create a vibrant, safe, healthy, resilient, innovative, and regenerative community.*

## 2. Background

The Community Engagement Policy was endorsed by Council at its meeting on 9 December 2020 following an extensive period of community engagement and engagement with Council officers.

A review of the Policy and the Implementation Plan actions in 2021 and 2022 identified some areas for improvement and recommendations for minor amendments to the Policy to provide clearer instruction to Council officers in the planning and delivery of community engagement, in line with the requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020.*

## 3. Issues

### Proposed revision to the current Community Engagement Policy

We are proposing to update section “Who we engage with” by adding older people. Also including two new sub-sections: “Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Community” and “Older CALD residents”. These changes are in response to the Council resolution and in specific recognition of the need for more targeted community engagement approaches for engaging with older residents as sometimes they are underrepresented in our findings.

Specifically, we are proposing to introduce and exhibit for consultation these new sections into page 13 of the Community Engagement Policy:

### *Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Community*

*Merri-bek is home to a diverse range of cultural and linguistic groups. For many in this cohort, English is their second language (34.5% of the Merri-bek community speak a language other than English at home, and 5.1% of the total Merri-bek community do not speak English well, or at all).*

*We will proactively communicate and engage with our CALD community to ensure that they are represented in the decisions that we make.*

*We will do this by working closely with our CALD Community Connectors, our Accessible and Inclusive Communications Team, and via existing networks.*

***Older CALD residents***

*Council recognises that older, non-English speaking residents, who make up 6.8% of the total population, are not always adequately represented in our community engagement activities.*

*During the lifetime of this policy, we will find new and innovative ways to better communicate the opportunities for engagement, including aged and culturally specific opportunities for our older CALD residents to participate in ways that are inclusive, that maximise their voice and input, and that take a non-digital approach.*

*We will do this by working with our Community Connectors and by using our existing networks to help us connect into these communities.*

The entire Community Engagement Policy is due for review next year (2025). This change to include Older CALD residents as a specific audience is an interim step to guide Council Officers in their engagement practices.

### Community impact

The Policy recognises the community’s right to participate in matters that impact and interest them. In particular, it seeks to increase the participation of groups at risk of underrepresentation, including older adults, children and young people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people from the LGBTIQA+ community, and First Nations people.

The principles contained within the Policy and their associated guidelines ensure Councils community engagement is inclusive, accessible and timely, giving members of the community the opportunity to participate in Council decision-making.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

The Community Engagement Policy provides a framework to improve trust and partnerships between communities and Council on important matters like climate action. In the literature on climate emergency and climate action community engagement is regarded as one of the most important elements for actioning climate strategies and building community resilience.

### Economic sustainability implications

The business sector of the community is an important stakeholder. Their needs and interests are considered as part of the stakeholder analysis process and during the implementation of community engagement. Through targeted engagement, economic sustainability can be considered in the design and delivery of projects and other initiatives.

### Legal and risk considerations

Community Engagement is a statutory obligation of the *Local Government Act 2020*, Section 55. The Policy reflects these statutory obligations. The Community Engagement Policy toolkit and guidance equips officers with a community risk assessment that can be used for each project or engagement plan.

### Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, and the development of the Policy is highly compatible with the Human Rights Charter. Decisions made ensure that the community are not deprived of the right to freedom of expression as outlined in section 15 of the Charter of Human Rights, as well as the right to taking part in public life, outlined in section 18.

By including appropriate public consultation in the decision-making process, human rights will not be unduly affected by the impacts of the proposals outlined in this report. The Policy will ensure that appropriate consultation provides people with rights to be heard and impacts to be considered across all of Council’s engagement projects.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

The draft Policy will be made available on Conversations Merri-bek for 15-business days from Monday 15 July.

Additionally, we will develop an information flyer for older residents, explaining the Policy and highlighting the sections relevant to older CALD residents. The flyer will include one straightforward question, asking for their feedback on how they prefer to be engaged.

 The flyer will be translated into Italian, Greek, Arabic and Turkish.

 We will use our Community Connectors and other networks (such as via our social support programs) to distribute the flyer to their communities.

 We will include pre-paid, pre-addressed envelopes with the flyer for those who wish to provide feedback via post.

### Communications

We will use Council’s established networks, such as the Community Connectors, social support groups and seniors’ groups to promote the opportunity for older CALD residents to provide feedback on the amendment to the Policy.

We will also use Council’s social media channels to promote the consultation more broadly, and a sitewide notification will alert Conversations Merri-bek users to the project when it goes live.

## 5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

## 6. Financial and Resources Implications

There are financial or resources implications related to the updating of this Policy.

## 7. Implementation

The ongoing implementation of the Policy is outlined in the Community Engagement Policy and Portfolio Plan, and through officer capacity building and professional development.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | DRAFT - Community Engagement Policy - Amendment with track changes - June 2024 | D24/301336 |  |

7.10 Rear of 1 to 15 Marks Street, 2 to 16 White Street and 21 Audley Street, Coburg - proposed sale of land from a previously discontinued road

**Acting Director Place and Environment Phil Priest**

**Property, Place and Design**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes that two submissions were received and that there was a Hearing of Submissions Committee Meeting on 2 May 2024.

2. Having fulfilled its obligations under section 114 of the Local Government Act 2020 and Council’s Community Engagement Policy, supports the sale of the land from the discontinued road at the rear of 1 to 15 Marks Street, 2 to 16 White Street and adjoining 21 Audley Street, Coburg, and having received two written submissions and heard a verbal submission regarding the proposal at the meeting of Council’s Hearing of Submissions Committee held on 2 May 2024, directs that the land be sold to the owners of 21 Audley Street, 5 Marks Street and 15 Marks Street, Coburg, by private treaty.

3. Authorises the Director Place and Environment to do all things necessary to effect the sale of the land contained in Lots A, 12 & 13 and 9 on TP023519Q to the owners of 21 Audley Street, 5 Marks Street and 15 Marks Street, Coburg, respectively.

4. Advises the persons who lodged submissions in relation to the proposal, of Council’s decision and the reasons for the decision.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

At its meeting held on 29 January 2002, Council resolved to discontinue the road at the rear of 1 to 15 Marks Street, 2 to 16 White Street and adjoining 21 & 23 Audley Street, Coburg, shown hatched shown in Attachment 1, and to sell the land (from the former road) to adjoining property owners by private treaty.

Most of the land was sold and transferred to abutting property owners except for a few Lots that remained unsold due to lack of interest in purchasing and a prevailing use as a walkway between two properties at 4 White Street and 7 Marks Street, Coburg. These Lots are known as Lots A, B, 12, 13, D and 9 on Title Plan TP023519Q, shown in Attachment 2.

At the time, Council also directed that the section of land being used as a walkway between 4 White Street and 7 Marks Street only be sold once the use of the land as a walkway had ceased. Council officers have been advised by the abutting owners of 4 White Street and 7 Marks Streets Coburg that the land to the rear of their properties is no longer required or being used as a walkway.

Preliminary discussions and negotiations with the adjoining owners have resulted in offers being made for the acquisition of the land in Lots A, 12 and 13 and 9 on Title Plan TP023519Q in Attachment 2.

The purpose of this report is for Council to consider the written and verbal submissions received and to finalise the procedures and section 114 of the *Local Government Act 2020* for the sale of the land from the previously discontinued road.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Proposed Sale of Land from a Previously Discontinued Road – Rear 1 -15 Marks Street, 2-16 White Street and 21 Audley Street, Coburg** – 7 December 2022

*That Council:*

*1. Commences the procedures to sell the land from the previously discontinued road at the rear of 1 to 15 Marks Street, 2 to 16 White Street and adjoining 21 Audley Street, Coburg, to the owners of 21 Audley Street, 5 Marks Street and 15 Marks Street, Coburg, in accordance with section 114 of the Local Government Act 2020.*

*2. Gives notice of its intention to sell the land on Council’s website (conversations Merri-bek) and such notice state that Council proposes to sell the land from the previously discontinued road to the owners of 21 Audley Street, 5 Marks Street and 15 Marks Street, Coburg, by private treaty in accordance with the State Governments “Local Government Best Practice Guidelines for the Sale, Exchange and Transfer of Land”.*

*3. As part of its community engagement process invites both written and verbal submissions on the proposed sale and deal with any submissions received in line with the principles set out in section 223 of the Local Government Act 1989.*

*4. Appoints Councillor Pavlidis as Chair, and Councillors Pulford, Carli Hannan and Bolton to a Committee to hear any submitters requesting to be heard in support of their written submission in relation to the proposed sale of the previously discontinued road to the owners of 21 Audley Street, 5 Marks Street and 15 Marks Street, Coburg.*

*5. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to set the time, date, and place of the meeting of the committee to hear submissions in relation to Council’s intention to sell the previously discontinued road to the owners of 21 Audley Street, 5 Marks Street and 15 Marks Street, Coburg.*

*6. Receives a further report outlining any submissions received, including a summary of proceedings of the Hearing of Submissions Committee, and presenting a recommendation regarding whether to proceed with the proposed sale of the site.*

**Discontinuance of Right of Way – between White and Marks Street, Coburg** - 29 January 2002

*That:*

*1. Council discontinue the Road shown hatched on the plan in Attachment 2 and situated to the rear of 1 to 15 Marks Street, 2 to 16 White Street, and 25 Audley Street Coburg, in accordance with section 206 and Clause 3 of Schedule 10 of the Local Government Act, 1989.*

*2. Council direct that the land from the discontinued road be sold to abutting property owners by private treaty in accordance with Council’s policy.*

*3. Council direct that the section of discontinued road between 4 White Street and 7 Marks Street only be sold once the current use as a walkway between these properties has ceased.*

*4. Council direct that the discontinuance and sale will not affect any right, power or interest held by Yarra Valley Water in the road in connection with any sewers, drains, or pipes under the control of that authority in or near the road.*

*5. Council authorise the Chief Executive Officer to execute the Transfer of Land and the Director Corporate Development to sign any other documents required to effect the sale of the land.*

**1.** **Policy Context**

The Council Plan 2021-2025 sets out strategic objectives through delivery of major initiatives and priorities and ways to achieve these objectives. The Council Plan also outlines how the Council will protect, improve and promote public health and wellbeing within the municipality. The Council Plan includes the Merri-bek Community Vision and part of the key themes to achieve the community vision is to manage assets that meet changing needs over the long term.

The Local Government Best Practice Guidelines for the Sale, Exchange, and Transfer of Land (2009) require Councils to do certain things before selling or exchanging land in accordance with section 114 of the *Local Government Act 2020* and section and *223 of the Local Government Act 1989*.

## 2. Background

At its meeting held on 29 January 2002, Council resolved to discontinue the road at the rear of 1 to 15 Marks Street, 2 to 16 White Street and adjoining 21 & 25 Audley Street, Coburg, shown hatched in **Attachment 1**, and to sell the land to the adjoining property owners by private treaty.

At the time, Council also directed that the section of road being used as a walkway between 4 White Street and 7 Marks Street only be sold once the use of the land as a walkway between the two properties had ceased.

Council officers had been advised by the abutting owners of 4 White Street and 7 Marks Streets Coburg that the land to the rear of their properties is no longer required or being used as a walkway and had commenced discussions with the adjoining owners for the sale of the land.

Whilst most land has been sold, the section used as a walkway together with several other parcels of land, known as Lots A, B, 12, 13, D and 9 on Title Plan TP023519Q, shown in **Attachment 2** remain unsold.

Preliminary discussions and negotiations with the adjoining owners at the time in late 2022 resulted in offers being made by the owners of 21 Audley Street, 5 Marks Street and 15 Marks Street for the acquisition of Lots A, 12 & 13 and 9 on Title Plan TP023519Q, shown in **Attachment 2**, respectively.

Public notice of the proposed sale of the land was given on Council’s website and in the Age newspaper on Friday 17 February 2023. Adjoining property owners were also notified in writing of the proposal, with submissions to be received within 28 days of the date of notice.

Two written submissions were received with one submission (Submitter 1) requesting to be heard at a Hearing of Submissions Committee meeting held on 2 May 2024.

## 3. Issues

In July 2023, following the granting of the development permit at 21 Audley Street (MPS/2021/890) Submitter 1 (whose written submission objected to the sale of Lot A), informed Council’s planning staff that they wished to express an interest in purchasing Lot A. Council’s Property Unit managing the sale process was not aware of Submitter 1’s interest in Lot A as they had not responded to the formal process in late 2022 to declare an interest in purchasing the land known as Lot A and had therefore not been sent a letter of offer.

Submitter 1 reiterated interest in purchasing Lot A at the Hearing of Submission Committee meeting held 2 May 2024.

Following the Hearing of Submissions Committee meeting, Council’s Property Unit:

 Wrote to Submitter 1 on 29 May 2024 detailing the process undertaken to date, included a formal Letter of Offer for Lot A and made a further attempt to contact the submitter by phone to discuss the process.

 The letter of offer was sent via 2 separate email addresses and a hard copy of the letter was placed in the letter box at their address.

 The emails and the letter detailing the process, provided contact details of the Property officer undertaking the process and highlighted that the letter of offer gave 14 days notice and expired at 5pm Friday 14 June 2024.

There has been no response from Submitter 1 to the letter of offer for Lot A as at 25 June 2024.

### Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Section 8 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities - Right to recognition and equality before the law which means that all Victorians have the right to be recognised as a person, to enjoy their rights without discrimination, to be treated equally under the law and protected from discrimination.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

Public notice of the proposed sale of the land was given on Council’s website and in the Age newspaper on Friday 17 February 2023. Adjoining property owners were also notified in writing of the proposal, with submissions to be received within 28 days of the date of notice.

**Submissions**

Council received two written submissions regarding the proposal.

Submitter 1 objects to the sale of Lot A, located directly behind their rear fence, to the owner of 21 Audley Street. A copy of this submission is shown in **Confidential** **Attachment 3**.

The submitter is aware that a townhouse is to be built at the rear of 21 Audley Street with a driveway facing the current laneway at Lot A. The submitter is of the view that this will increase the noise level behind their property.

The submitter had elected to be heard in support of the submission.

Submitter 2 supports the proposed sale of Lot A to the owner of 12 Audley Street. A copy of this submission is shown in **Confidential** **Attachment 4**.

**Hearing/Consideration of Submissions**

A meeting of Council’s Hearing of Submissions Committee was convened on 2 May 2024, to hear Submitter 1 who requested to be heard in support of their written submission.

The minutes of the meeting of the Hearing of Submissions Committee has been circulated to Councillors.

The issues raised by Submitter 1 in their submission relate to planning matters associated with the development application for 21 Audley Street rather than issues relating to the sale of Lot A.

Furthermore, these planning issues have been considered in the context of a determination made by VCAT on 24 July 2023 after having considered representations made by Submitter 1 and the owner of 21 Audley Street. At a hearing on 21 July 2023, VCAT determined that the development application should be approved and planning approval for the development was issued by Council on 4 August 2023.

The sale of the land to the owner of 21 Audley Street accords with the long-held intention of the owner of that property to acquire the land in conjunction with development application (MPS/2021/890) to construct a double storey dwelling at the rear of that property.

Submitter 2 is in support of the proposed sale of Lot A to themselves and had signed a Letter of Offer to acquire the land as part of the initial consultation in late 2022.

## 5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

## 6. Financial and Resources Implications

The land is to be sold in accordance with Local Government Best Practice Guidelines for the Sale, Exchange, and Transfer of Land (2009).

The land in Lot A on TP023519Q is encumbered and has been valued by an independent valuer at $385.00 per square metre. The remaining parcels of land to be sold, being Lots 12 and 13 and Lot 9 on TP023519Q, are unencumbered and have been valued at $715.00 per square metre.

Three adjoining property owners at 21 Audley Street (10m²), 5 Marks Street (20m²), and 15 Marks Street (8m²), Coburg, have agreed to acquire the land for the ‘total sum of $31,735.00 as well as meeting a share of some of the costs associated with the statutory process, should Council resolve to sell the land.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Lot No** | **Area m2** | **Property** | **Market Value** | **Costs** |
| 13 | 8 | 5 Marks Street | $5,720.00 | $4,625.00 |
| 12 | 20 | 5 Marks Street | $14,300.00 |  |
| 9 | 11 | 15 Marks Street | $7,865.00 | $4,625.00 |
| A | 10 | 21 Audley Street | $3,850.00 | $4,625.00 |
|  | | | **$31,735.00** | **$13,875.00** |

Once the land is sold it will become rateable.

## 7. Implementation

Subject to Council’s decision, Council’s Solicitors will be instructed to arrange for the land to be sold and transferred to the owners of 21 Audley Street (Lot A), 5 Marks Street Lots 12 & 13) and 15 Marks Street (Lot 9), Coburg.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Previously discontinued road shown hatched rear White and Marks Streets, Coburg | D24/291298 |  |
| **2** | Title Plan proposed sale of land from a previously discontinued road White and Marks Streets, Coburg | D24/291295 |  |
| **3** | Proposed sale of land rear Whites and Marks Streets, Coburg - submission one  *Pursuant to section 3(1)(b) of the Local Government Act 2020 this attachment has been designated as confidential because it relates to security information, being information that if released is likely to endanger the security of Council property or the safety of any person.* | D24/291297 |  |
| **4** | Proposed sale of land rear Whites and Marks Streets, Coburg - submission two  *Pursuant to section 3(1)(b) of the Local Government Act 2020 this attachment has been designated as confidential because it relates to security information, being information that if released is likely to endanger the security of Council property or the safety of any person.* | D24/291296 |  |

**7.11 Contract Award: RFT-2023-570 - Dunstan Stormwater Harvesting Project**

**Acting Director City Infrastructure Indivar Dhakal**

**Open Space and Environment**

**Officer Recommendation**

That Council:

1. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to:

a) Make a formal offer to **Multipro Civil Pty Ltd, ACN 112 295 879** (**Contractor**) to award to the Contractor contract **RFT-2023-570 Stormwater Harvesting Works at Dunstan Reserve** for the **construction of a storm water harvesting system** on the following terms and otherwise subject to and in accordance with paragraph 1(b) of this Resolution:

**- for the lump sum of $1,204,761 (excluding GST) plus provisional sum(s) of $35,702 (excluding GST), totalling $1,240,463 (excluding GST). The contract commencement date is 22 August 2024 for an estimated period of 26 weeks.**

b) Negotiate and finalise the terms of the Contract between Council and the Contractor provided that:

i. the terms specified in paragraph 1(a) of this Resolution shall not be altered without a further Resolution of Council; and

ii. other than terms referred to in paragraph 1(a) of this Resolution, the terms of the Contract are acceptable to the Chief Executive Officer;

2. Conditional on acceptance of the Contract by the Contractor in accordance with the terms of this Resolution:

a) Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to do all things necessary to execute the Contract and any required documentation for the Contract; and

b) Advises all tenderers of Council's decision in relation to the Contract.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

This report seeks the award of the preferred contractor, Multipro Civil Pty Ltd for the contract RFT-2023-570 Stormwater Harvesting Works at Dunstan Reserve.

A request for tender was released on Saturday, 2 March 2024 and closed on 28 March 2024, with five tenders received.

An extensive tender evaluation process was undertaken including ‘value engineering’ to reduce costs of the project, by undertaking further soil testing to eliminate stock piling of contaminated soil on site by sending the spoil material straight to approved landfill premises in accordance with EPA Victoria requirements and subsequent tender negotiations.

The tenders were evaluated and MultiPro Civil Pty Ltd was identified as the preferred tenderer, achieving the highest score through the evaluation process by the evaluation panel.

Multipro Civil Pty Ltd has previously delivered a similar type of stormwater harvesting project for Merri-bek City Council successfully to very good standard and demonstrated in their tender submission that they have undertaken stormwater harvesting construction and drainage works for other local government authorities.

The lump sum construction contract offered includes preliminaries, demolition and site preparation, diversion pipes and pit work, earthworks (including removal and disposal of contaminated spoil), irrigation/ pump station installation and raingarden/ tank works.

The tender complies with section 109(1) of the *Local Government Act 2020.*

There is an allocation of $1.5 million in 2023/2024 budget for Sportsfield Stormwater Reuse project. This allocation consists of $750,000 in grant funding through Melbourne water Liveable Communities, Liveable Waterways Program.

**Previous Council Decisions**

There have been no previous Council decisions in relation to this specific contract or project.

**1. Policy Context**

This project supports the Council Plan Theme 1 “An environmentally proactive Merri-bek ’ by investing in an integrated approach to water management in public space, improving water usage and water quality entering our local waterways The stormwater harvesting system can contribute to mitigating local flooding, as well as provide water for irrigation and urban cooling.

In August 2020, Council adopted the Integrated Water Management Strategy 2040 and Five-Year Action Plan: 2020/2021-2024/2025. This project also supports the outcomes in the Merri-bek Nature Plan (Adopted 2020).

The construction of the Dunstan Reserve Stormwater Harvesting system was identified as a Priority Project in the Integrated Water Management (IWM) Five Year Action Plan 2020/2021-2024/2025.This project is Council Action Plan item 161 ‘Construction of Dunstan Reserve (Brunswick West) stormwater harvesting system, subject to external funding’ in the Council Action Plan 2023-2024.

This report is in keeping with Council’s commitment to accountability and sound financial management. It also addresses the requirement under Section 109(1) of the Local Government Act 2020 which requires Council to conduct a public tender for goods, services and works where once-off or ongoing cumulative spend over the life of the contract is expected to exceed $300,000 (incl GST) as well as the policy commitments contained in the Procurement Policy.

**2. Background**

The Integrated Water Management Strategy 2040 includes the following targets:

 reduce stormwater pollutant loads and flow volumes discharging to receiving waterways and onto Port Phillip Bay;

 reduce Council’s mains water use; and

 increase Council’s alternative water use.

In aid of achieving this target, Council is planning the construction of a water sensitive urban design (WSUD) stormwater harvesting and treatment system, at Dunstan Reserve, Brunswick West.

The design also includes a planted swale and raingarden contributing to the biodiversity and amenity of the public open space reserve and the detail design feasibility for the stormwater harvesting system was completed in 2022-2023.

A procurement and Probity Plan was also developed for this project (**Attachment 1**).

An advertisement was placed in *The Age* newspaper from 8.00 AM (Melbourne Time) Saturday, 2 March 2024 inviting tenders via the e-tender portal from suitably experienced contractors to undertake the construction of the Stormwater Harvesting Works at Dunstan Reserve, West Brunswick.

The tenders closed on 28 March 2024 and five tenders were received from the following contractors:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Company Name** | **ABN No.** |
| Armstrong Constructions VIC Pty Ltd | 83 005 253 323 |
| Contek Constructions Pty Ltd | 80 060 505 099 |
| Evergreen Civil Pty Ltd | 67 667 088 791 |
| Multipro Civil Pty Ltd | 15 872 800 386 |
| Optimal Stormwater Pty Ltd | 53 139 725 894 |

All submissions received were conforming.

1. The tenders were evaluated in accordance with Council’s Procurement Policy, at the time of tendering.

In assessing the tenders, consideration was given to the following predefined evaluation criteria:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Criteria No.** | **Category** | **Weighting** |
| Previous Experience and Capabilities | | |
| 1 | Project Understanding and Appreciation | 5% |
| 2 | Tenderers Experience | 5% |
| 3 | Local and State Government Experience | 5% |
| Capacity to Deliver the Project | | |
| 4 | Current and Future Commitments | 5% |
| 5 | Methodology and task appreciation – Proposed Project Methodology | 10% |
| 6 | Methodology and task appreciation – Staging Plan | 5% |
| 7 | Methodology and task appreciation – Preliminary Project Works Program | 10% |
| Sustainability | | |
| 8 | Social Sustainability | 5% |
| 9 | Economic Sustainability | 5% |
| 10 | Environmental Sustainability | 5% |
| 11 | Lump Sum Price | 40% |
| Total | | 100 |

The membership of the tender evaluation panel was as follows.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Title and/or company** | **Project Manager/ Generalist or Nominated Speciality** | | **Full Voting / Advisory Member** |
| Project Manager | | Project Manager (Chair) | Full |
| Integrated Water Management Lead | | Generalist | Full |
| Water Management Officer | | Generalist | Full |
| Senior Procurement Partner | | Procurement | Advisory |

The evaluation process identified MultiPro Civil Pty Ltd as the preferred tenderer based on the results of the evaluation matrix, included as **Confidential** **Attachment** **1**.

Interviews were conducted with three of the preferred tender submissions received to determine its current and future work commitments, workforce and understanding of the works required under this contract.

During the interview process, all three tender submissions indicated that they were all adequately resourced to successfully complete the project within the specified time frame and lump sum amount, however, MultiPro Civil Pty Ltd tender submission demonstrated better value for money.

MultiPro Civil Pty Ltd has previously undertaken similar construction works for Merri-bek City Council at Coburg City Oval which involved the construction of a stormwater harvesting system that included a raingarden, pond, built in weirs, timber boardwalk, planting, rock and pathways. This project was successfully delivered to a very good standard.

Referees’ checks were also undertaken for their past projects with other councils, the results can be found in **Confidential Attachment 1.**

**3. Issues**

**Environmental implications**

Flora and fauna and Cultural Heritage issues have been taken into account during the design of the stormwater harvesting system including protection of existing trees, land subject to inundation overlay and soil management. No trees are required to be removed; The specification for the construction works requires the contractor to submit a Site/Environmental Management Plan prior to the commencement of the works outlining, procedures for erosion control, sediment transport control, sediment retention measures, transportation of excavated materials to recycling facilities, tree protection and general site management. These will be monitored during construction.

**Cultural Heritage and Management Plan**

A Cultural Heritage and Management Plan was not required as the site is not located within an area of cultural heritage sensitivity.

**Soil Contamination**

Geotechnical analysis and soil contamination testing was undertaken at the design stage which indicated soil contamination. Further soil contamination assessment was carried out to determine type of soil contamination and expected volumes. The detailed soil investigations enable spoil material to be directly disposed of in accordance with EPA Victoria requirements. Direct disposal from site will eliminate double handling and provides contractors more confidence of what to expect on site and price the project accordingly.

Category A, D contamination was identified during these tests.

**Social / Local Implications**

To minimise user disruption during the works, site detours will be provided and clearly marked.

Owners, residents, local service providers and sports groups will be informed prior to works commencing on site. Council’s project manager will maintain communication with key stakeholders throughout the delivery of the project.

**Human Rights Consideration**

The implications of this report have been considered in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

**Collaboration**

There were no opportunities to collaborate with other Councils or public bodies due to this being a stand-alone civil project and Council owned site.

**4. Consultation / Recommendation from Management**

The Sustainable Built Environment Unit led the design development for this project and has consulted with relevant Council departments to inform the design process, as well as the tender evaluation.

Internal stakeholders including, Engineering, Open Space and Environment, Open Space Maintenance have been involved at the time of detail design.

External stakeholders including, Melbourne Water were heavily involved at the design stage and will be involved at the construction hold points.

Extensive community consultation for this project was undertaken from 13 January - 10 February 2022, including pop up consultation, letter drops and through Conversation Merri-bek website. Over 66 per cent of the feedback received was supportive of the proposed design.

**5. Declaration of Conflict of Interest**

Council Officers, external consultants and all other parties involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

**6. Financial and Resources Implications**

The amount of $750,000 has been allocated from Council funds (Rates), for delivery of this project. Melbourne Water Liveable Communities, Liveable Waterways Program Funding of $750,000 has also been granted. Total budget available for this project is therefore $1,500,000.

The table below shows the overall expenditure for the project.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Item** | **Amount (excluding GST)** |
| - revised tendered lump sum amount | $1,204,761 |
| - revised tendered provisional sum amount | $35,702 |
| Total | $1,240,463 |

In some cases, there will be contract variations required due to latent conditions outside of Council’s and Contractor’s control. In these instances, the delegated Council representative will have the authority to approve variations up to 20 per cent of the value of the contract.

**7. Implementation and Timeline**

It is proposed that the Chief Executive Officer be authorised to do all things necessary to execute the contract/s and any other required documentation.

the estimated contract start date is 22 August 2024.

Works on site are expected to commence in August/September 2024 to be delivered in a 26-week program, inclusive of Christmas and New Year holiday shutdown period and subject to weather conditions.

**Attachment/s**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | RFT-2023-570 - Tender Recommendation Report  *Pursuant to section 3(1)(g(ii)) of the Local Government Act 2020 this attachment has been designated as confidential because it relates to private commercial information, being information provided by a business, commercial or financial undertaking that if released, would unreasonably expose the business, commercial or financial undertaking to disadvantage.* | D24/292819 |  |

**7.12 Contract Award: RFT-2024-574- Supply and Install of Gym Equipment for Council’s Aquatic and Leisure Centres**

**Director Community Eamonn Fennessy**

**Community Wellbeing**

**Officer Recommendation**

That Council:

1. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to:

a) Make a formal offer to Life Fitness Australia ACN 079 300 815 (**Contractor**) to award Contract RFT-2024-8 for supply, install and maintenance of cardio and weight equipment under a purchase outright and operating lease (**Contract**) on the following terms and otherwise subject to and in accordance with paragraph 2(c) of this resolution:

i. For the lumpsum amount of $1,078,444 (excluding GST) comprising of Fawkner Leisure Centre $445,102 (excluding GST) and Coburg Leisure Centre $633,342 (excluding GST).

ii. For a fixed term of seven years, commencing 01/10/2024.

b) Make a formal offer to Pilates Health Equipment ACN 650 009 304 (**Contractor**) to award Contract RFT-2024 -8 for the supply and install of Pilates Reformer equipment for Brunswick Baths and Oak Park Sports & Aquatic Centre under outright purchase agreement (**Contract**) on the following terms and otherwise subject to and in accordance with paragraph 2(c) of this resolution:

i. For the lumpsum amount of $95,000 (excluding GST).

c) Negotiate and finalise the terms of the Contract between Council and the Contractor provided that:

i) The terms specified in paragraph 1(a) and 1(b) of this Resolution shall not be altered without a further Resolution of Council.

ii) Other than terms referred to in paragraph 1(a) and 1(b) of this Resolution, the terms of the Contract are acceptable to the Chief Executive Officer.

2. Conditional on acceptance of the Contract by the Contractor in accordance with the terms of this Resolution:

a) Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to do all things necessary to execute the Contract and any required documentation for the Contract.

b) Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to exercise the option(s) to extend contracts in accordance with the provisions within the Contract and subject to satisfactory performance of the Contractor.

c) Advises all tenderers of Council's decision in relation to the Contract.

3. Refers the budget impacts as paragraph 1(a) and (b) of this Resolution as detailed below:

a) Refer savings of $374,900 from the 2024/25 capital works program (for Fawkner gym equipment replacement program) to the first quarterly financial review;

b) Refer operating expenditure of $152,210 in relation to year 1 of the lease agreement to the 2024/25 first quarterly financial review (for leasing expenditure relating to Coburg and Fawkner leisure centres);

c) Refer the removal of the $469,170 from the 2026/27 capital works program (for Coburg gym equipment replacement program) to the 2025-2029 budgeting process;

d) Refer the inclusion of the remaining 5 years of operating expenditure of $152,210 per annum to the 2025-2029 budgeting process.

i. Noting this includes an overall shortfall of $69,190 being referred to the future budget process.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

The purpose of this report is to recommend the award of a contract (RFT 2024-8) for the supply, install and maintenance of gym equipment at Councils Aquatic and Leisure Centres as part of the ongoing gym equipment renewal program.

Tenders were called for a panel of suppliers for three main projects aligning with Council’s five-year capital works budget.

The cyclic gym equipment renewal program is based on industry standards and warranty periods. To protect Council’s interest, a lease/purchase arrangement has generally been used, so that if the contracted Service Provider went into insolvency etc, then Council still owned the assets. This is now becoming a costly exercise at the time of renewal due to the ongoing maintenance costs on out of warranty equipment.

This year a new approach was taken looking at the value of purchase outright, including purchase outright, lease own, or lease renew options over a three- and six-year periods.

The Finance Unit reviewed the three proposed options and pricing. From a financial perspective, the recommendation is an operating lease for 6 years due to:

 The six-year lease, warranty is extended to throughout the lease period.

 The six-year lease period is close to the useful life.

 There’s only a minor trade in value if Council opted for a chattel mortgage.

 With the exception of smaller costed items where the interest rates to lease, out costs the replacement purchase price.

To undertake an operating lease over the six years, some financial adjustments will need to be made to the five-year Capital works budget as shown in the financial implications section. The adopted 2024-2028 budget assumed purchase of the equipment outright with the below funding arrangements.

 $500,000 in the 2024/25 capital works program for Fawkner Leisure Centre Gym Equipment; and

 $469,170 in the 2026/27 capital works program for Coburg Leisure Centre Gym Equipment.

The awarding of this contract will require the outright budget to be spread over a six-year period, covering the lease arrangement. The tender complies with section 109(1) of the *Local Government Act 2020.*

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Council Action Plan Item - Adoption of Aquatic And Leisure Strategy 2018-2038** – 13 June 2018

*That Council:*

*1. Notes the key feedback provided in submissions to the Draft Aquatic and Leisure Strategy, at Attachment 3 to this report.*

*2. Adopts the Aquatic and Leisure Strategy 2018–2038, at Attachment 1 to this report.*

*3. Notes the Aquatic and Leisure Strategy 2018–2038 Background Report, at Attachment 2 to this report.*

**1. Policy Context**

This report is in keeping with Council’s commitment to accountability and sound financial management. It also addresses the requirement under Section 109(1) of the *Local Government Act 2020* which requires Council to conduct a public tender for goods, services and works where once-off or ongoing cumulative spend over the life of the contract is expected to exceed $300,000 (incl GST) as well as the policy commitments contained in the Procurement Policy

**2. Background**

As part of the new Fawkner Leisure Centre and ongoing gym renewal program Council was seeking to either purchase or lease the gym equipment through a Request for Tender (RFT) process.

The tender process included the below, with six (6) respondents submitting a tender response.

 A public tender that opened on 23 March 2024 and closed 3 May 2024 Advertising in *The Age* newspaper on 6 April 2024.

Tender evaluation was undertaken by Tender Evaluation Team and Life Fitness has been identified as the preferred service provider for the cardio and weights equipment, and Pilates Health Equipment for the Reformer equipment, based on the evaluation criteria.

The companies that tendered were:

 Technogym Pty Ltd

 Life Fitness Australia Pty Ltd

 Novofit Pty Ltd

 Compound Fitness

 Pilates Health Equipment

 Iron Edge Enterprises

The membership of the tender evaluation panel was as follows:

| **Title and/or company** | **Role on panel** | **Full Voting / Advisory Member** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Senior Project Manager Aquatics | Generalist (Chair) | Full |
| Unit Manager Aquatics, Leisure and Community Venues | Generalist | Full |
| Aquatics and Leisure Service Officer | Generalist | Full |
| Centre Manager Active Merri-bek YMCA | Specialist | Advisory |
| Unit Manager Finance | Finance | Advisory |
| Procurement Business Partner | Procurement | Advisory |

Detailed evaluation criteria and weighting are provided in the following table:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Criteria** | **Weighting** |
| Price | 40% |
| Capability of the tenderer to provide the goods, services and works | 15% |
| Capacity of the tenderer to provide the goods, services and works | 10% |
| Maintenance and Service Deliverables and Capacity | 15% |
| Integrated Member Experience | 10% |
| Social Sustainability | 2.5% |
| Economic Sustainability | 2.5% |
| Environmental Sustainability | 5.0% |

In assessing the tenders, consideration was given to the predefined evaluation criteria included in the Procurement Evaluation and Probity Plan. Further details of tender evaluation are shown in the attachment Tender Recommendation Report (**Confidential Attachment 1**).

**3. Issues**

The pricing comparisons were substantially different with all tenders based on their specialty area and size of organisation. In order to evaluate more thoroughly, the pricing evaluation was divided up into cardio, weights and accessories and reformer pilates.

**Collaboration**

Note that section 109(2) of the *Local Government Act 2020* requires that any report to the Council that recommends entering into a procurement agreement must include information in relation to any opportunities for collaboration with other Councils or public bodies which may be available.

Under this contract, there are no opportunities to collaborate with other Councils because our gym renewal program does not align with other councils’ contract requirements including renewal their program.

**Tender Pricing Options**

Purchase outright – Council would procure the equipment outright.

 This can work better for some equipment such as weights and group fitness equipment that has a longer lifespan, however it is not as suitable for cardio equipment;

 Drawback is that being owned outright it would be easier for council to hold onto assets longer than advised/planned which could lead to an increase in maintenance costs, increased down time of equipment and a reduction in member satisfaction;

 At the end of the warranty period, servicing fees also conclude with service and maintenance fees increasing significantly; and

 Trade in prices at the conclusion of the equipment’s lifespan are also near $0 return and often the equipment is given away to local sports clubs.

Chattel Mortgage - With this type of contract the finance company uses the asset/goods as security against the loan and the borrower makes monthly payments to repay the loan.

 The goods are referred to as ‘chattel’ in the loan contract and the finance company effectively takes a mortgage over the goods until the borrower has finalised all payments.

 The borrower takes ownership of the goods at time of purchase (when the loan contract is finalised)

 Its a simple loan structure – fixed loan term, fixed interest rate, fixed monthly payments, option for a balloon. A balloon payment is just a percentage of the purchase price which is deferred for payment at the end of the loan term, when all monthly repayments have been finalised. The balloon can be paid as a lump sum or in some cases, refinanced.

 At the end of the lease period, all warranties and servicing fees also conclude with service and maintenance fees increasing significantly.

 Trade in prices at the conclusion of the equipment’s lifespan are also near $0 return and often the equipment is given away to local sports clubs

Operating Lease - This is an agreement to finance equipment and the lessee (Council) can return equipment to the lessor at the end of the lease period without any further obligation.

 The assets remain the property of the finance company throughout the duration of the term. Council pays the monthly rental amount and at the end of the term usually gives back the assets and commences a new contract with new and updated equipment.

 An Operating Lease helps health club’s turnover their aging equipment on a regular and scheduled cycle. This means that your facilities will always have the most up to date and relevant equipment offering. This is also an advantage when you are financing tech-based equipment such as the cardio machines (due to the rapid advancements in tech and high depreciation).

 Typically, councils who lease their equipment would plan to turnover their cardio equipment every 4-5 years

**Gym Equipment Renewal Program**

The lifespan of the gym equipment varies and can vary significantly between sites based on hours of usage. Generally:

Cardio equipment has a lifespan of 6-8 years pending the amount of use.

 Brunswick Baths being at capacity and double the industry standard when it comes to number of members per square metre, cardio equipment sees heavy usage and can expect a significantly shortened lifespan of around 5 years.

 For other centres such as Coburg Leisure Centre and Oak Park Sports & Aquatic Centre that have an industry average number of members, equipment will last a little longer, around 7 years.

Weight equipment (pin loaded, plate loaded and cable machines) has a lifespan of approximately 10 years before replacement of parts become more regular and costly.

 Brunswick Baths being highly utilised has a shorter lifespan.

 Coburg and Oak Park with average usage will last 10-12 years.

 Fawkner Leisure Centre with below average usage will last approximately 15 years (although usage is yet to be determined post redevelopment).

**Community impact**

With nearly 8,000 members across Merri-bek and 6,500 of those being health club users, the need to maintain the standard of gym equipment is vital for the successful operations of each centre.

The Active Merri-bek Team are constantly reviewing industry trends and user feedback in relation to programs, services and equipment. Given the trend of the industry we will be introducing Reformer Pilates as a new service in-line with many leisure centres within the industry.

**Economic, social and environmental sustainability implications**

The preferred contractors have internal policies supporting social sustainability, environmental management.

**Legal and risk considerations**

Council will engage the Legal team to draw up a new contract they cover both the procurement of goods and services and an operating lease.

**Human Rights Consideration**

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

**4. Community consultation and engagement**

Councils Service Provider YMCA was consulted throughout the process

Members and users of the relevant Aquatic and Leisure Centres will be engaged and informed prior to the works commencing on site.

**Communications**

Once the contract has been awarded, Officers will work with the YMCA re further communications with members and users for the changeover and new services.

**5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest**

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

**6. Financial and Resources Implications**

The table below details the five-year Capital Works budget, including carry forwards totalling $1,133,170 (excluding GST):

 Carry forward of $164,000 for the gym equipment placement program (declared as a part of the third quarter financial report – 10 April 2024)

 Fawkner Leisure Centre Gym Equipment $500,000 for 2024/25

 Coburg Leisure Centre Gym Equipment $469,170 for 2026/27.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Current Budget** | **2024/25** | **2025/26** | **2026/27** | **2027/28** | **2028/29** | **2029/30** | **TOTAL** |
| Capital works program  (Carry forward – Q3) | $164,000 | - | - | - | - | - | **$164,000** |
| Capital works program (Fawkner Leisure Centre) | $500,000 | - | - | - | - | - | **$500,000** |
| Capital works program  (Coburg Leisure Centre) | - | - | $469,170 | - | - | - | **$469,170** |
| **TOTAL** | **$664,000** | **-** | **$469,170** | **-** | **-** | **-** | **$1,133,170** |

The table below details the proposed forecast, noting additional funding ($164,172) is required is required over the six-year lease term.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Forecast** | **2024/25** | **2025/26** | **2026/27** | **2027/28** | **2028/29** | **2029/30** | **TOTAL** |
| Capital works program  (Fawkner Leisure Centre) | $165,201 | - | - | - | - | - | **$165,201** |
| Lease expenditure  (Fawkner Leisure Centre) | $46,650 | $46,650 | $46,650 | $46,650 | $46,650 | $46,650 | **$279,900** |
| Capital works program  (Coburg Leisure Centre) | - | - | - | - | - | - | **-** |
| Lease expenditure  (Coburg Leisure Centre) | $105,560 | $105,560 | $105,560 | $105,560 | $105,560 | $105,560 | **$633,360** |
| Capital works program  (fitness equipment; various centres –  separate to this tender) | $123,899 | - | - | - | - | - | **$123,899** |
| **TOTAL** | **441,310** | **$152,210** | **$152,210** | **$152,210** | **$152,210** | **$152,210** | **1,202,360** |

The below table summarises the movement from the adopted 2024-2028 budget to the proposal, in summary:

 Removing $913,260 from the 5-year capital works program;

 Increasing operating expenditure for lease repayments by $913,260 over the next 6-years;

 Referring the overall shortfall of $69,190 to the 2025-2029 budget process.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Movement** | **2024/25** | **2025/26** | **2026/27** | **2027/28** | **2028/29** | **2029/30** | **TOTAL** |
| Capital works program | 374,900 | - | $469,170 | - | - | - | **$844,070** |
| Lease expenditure | ($152,210) | ($152,210) | ($152,210) | ($152,210) | ($152,210) | ($152,210) | **($913,260)** |
| **TOTAL** | **$222,690** | **($152,210)** | **$316,960** | **($152,210)** | **($152,210)** | **($152,210)** | **($69,190)** |

The 2024/25 impacts will be referred to the first quarterly financial review and future year impacts to the 2025-2029 budgeting process.

**7. Implementation**

It is proposed that the CEO be authorised to do all things necessary to execute the Panel RFT 2024-8 with each of the two recommended Suppliers and any other required documentation.

It should be noted that the 6-year lease commences in October 2024 for Fawkner Leisure Centre, however the installation at Coburg Leisure Centre won’t be until January/February 2025 (dependant on other factors). As a result of this, the proposed contract term is 7-years.

**Attachment/s**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | RFT-2024-8 - Tender Recommendation Report  *Pursuant to section 3(1)(g(i))(g(ii)), and of the Local Government Act 2020, this attachment has been designated as confidential because it relates to private commercial information, being information provided by a business, commercial or financial undertaking that relates to trade secrets, and private commercial information, being information provided by a business, commercial or financial undertaking that if released, would unreasonably expose the business, commercial or financial undertaking to disadvantage.* | D24/294303 |  |

**7.13 Friends of Aileu Annual Report 2023**

**Director Community Eamonn Fennessy**

**Community Wellbeing**

**Officer Recommendation**

That Council notes the Friends of Aileu Annual Report 2023 (Attachment 1).

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

This report submits for Council’s information the Friends of Aileu Annual Report 2023.

The Annual Report outlines activities and achievements of the Merri-bek and Hume City Councils’ *East Timor Partnership Project (Friends of Aileu)* during the calendar year 2023.

Some highlights amongst the activities covered by the Friends of Aileu Annual Report 2023 are:

 The Council - Friends of Aileu delegation to Timor-Leste in October, which strengthened personal and organisational relationships with Timor-Leste Government, the Aileu Municipal Administration and non-government partner organisations, and provided insights into the ongoing development of Aileu and the value of our friendship contributions

 The Friends of Aileu’s anniversary dinner, held at Town Hall Broadmeadows in May, with guest speaker Mr Bill Armstrong AO, and a performance by the Dili All Stars band and the Timor OanS cultural dance group

 Friends of Aileu’s fundraising, primarily through the annual Trivia Quiz ($10,770 allocated in 2023), allowed 21 students to be chosen by the Aileu Friendship Commission for the Aileu University Scholarship Program, when it was renewed in 2021, and of these:

 9 have now graduated with 4-year Bachelor (Licentiate) qualifications in Engineering, Petroleum Studies, ICT and Tourism at the Timor-Leste’s National University, Dili Institute of Technology and Institute of Business

 5 have now graduated with 3-year Diploma qualifications in Multi-media, ICT and Tourism at Timor-Leste’s Institute of Business

 The continuation of Hume City Council’s annual donation for education in Aileu ($5,200 in 2023) has allowed a separate scholarship program to continue, with:

 7 students graduating with a 4-year Bachelor of Education qualification (Licentiate degree) from Timor-Leste’s Baucau Teacher’s College

 2 students graduating with a 3-year Bachelor of Teaching qualification from Timor-Leste’s Baucau Teacher’s College

 The *Merri Health* 2022/2023 donation of $25,000 and other fundraising and donations ($25,680 in 2023), has allowed Friends of Aileu’s Timor-Leste and Ail government and non-government partner organisations to implement a range of community development activities, including in community health, environmental improvement, reforestation, water and food security, nutrition, cultural expression, and organisational and staff development

 Friends of Aileu was able to allocate $3,040 of funds to contribute towards the costs of a community celebration of Aileu’s 50th anniversary as an independent local government entity in June 2023.

 Ongoing development and maintenance of supporter base, networks and relationships, through various events and activities conducted by Friends of Aileu or conducted by others including the East Timorese community in Melbourne.

 The financial support provided for Aileu, and the friendship that is integral to it, was only possible due to the work of the Friends of Aileu Community Committee and of the members of the Project Reference Group, along with the many volunteers who assisted with events and the numerous supporters who made donations or attended fundraising events and other activities.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Friends of Aileu Annual Report (Calendar Years 2021 and 2022 Combined)** – 10 May 2023

*That Council:*

*1. Notes the Friends of Aileu Annual Report, for calendar years 2021 and 2022 combined (Attachment 1).*

**1. Policy Context**

Under the *Local Government Act 2020*, *Part 2-Councils, Division 1-The role and powers of a Council*, states inter alia that:

*(1) The role of a Council is to provide good governance in its municipal district for the benefit and wellbeing of the municipal community*

*(3) In performing its role, a Council may-*

*(b) perform any (other) functions that the Council determines are necessary for the Council to perform its role*

*(4) If it is necessary to do so for the purpose of performing its role, a Council may perform a function outside its municipal district*.

It was in the context of similar provisions in the *former Local Government Act 1989* that the friendship relationships between many Municipalities and communities in Victoria (and elsewhere in Australia), with District Administrations and communities in Timor-Leste, were established commencing in the year 2000.

The friendship relationship between the then Moreland City Council, Hume City Council and the then District of Aileu was originally established in May 2000 with the signing of:

 The *Statement of Principles for Victorian Local Governments working in East Timor* by the then Minister for Local Government Victoria, and Presidents of the MAV and the VLGA, and by Xanana Gusmão, as President of CNRT representing the people of East Timor

 A *Memorandum of* Understanding regarding Aileu, by the then mayors of the two Councils and Xanana Gusmão, representing the people of East Timor.

The commitments of the friendship relationship are outlined in the *Friendship Agreement* between the 2 Councils, the Timor-Leste Minister for State Administration and the Aileu Municipal Administrator, which has been renewed periodically most recently in 2020.

The *Friendship Agreement 2020* and the complementary *Municipal Cooperation Agreements* *2016* between each Council and the Timor-Leste Minister for State Administration are consistent with the Victorian Government’s engagement with and support for the development of Timor-Leste, which was most recently restated with the signing in 2017 of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Victorian and Timor-Leste Governments.

The *Friendship Agreement* and the *Municipal Cooperation Agreements* are consistent with the Australian Government’s engagement with and support for the development of Timor-Leste and are registered under the *DFAT Foreign Agreements Scheme*.

The *East Timor Partnership Project (the Friends of Aileu)* is guided by:

 *The Friends* of *Aileu Community Committee*, a joint Working Group of Merri-bek and Hume City Councils

 The *Friends of Aileu Strategy Plan 2020*, which is:

 One of the related strategies under Theme 3: A healthy and caring community of the Merri-bek Council Plan 2021-2025

 Consistent with Council’s commitment to developing policy and programs founded on health and well-being, social justice, human rights and social inclusion

 Management arrangements agreed periodically between Merri-bek’s Director Community and Hume’s Director City Services and Living.

**2. Background**

The East Timor Partnership Project (Friends of Aileu) operates to implement:

 The *Friendship Agreement 2020*, and which aims to support the development of a more sustainable future and local democracy for Aileu; and

 the complementary *Municipal Cooperation Agreements* between each of the Councils, which were signed in 2016 and provide for each Council to support the Municipality of Aileu during the decentralisation process and the transition to responsible local government.

Guiding the implementation of the friendship relationship are:

 The Friends of Aileu Strategy Plan 2020

 The deliberations and input of:

 The Friends of Aileu Community Committee, comprised of Merri-bek and Hume councillor representatives, community members and partner organisation representatives

 The Aileu Friendship Commission, comprised of Aileu municipal, village council and community organisation representatives.

Management arrangements for the East Timor Project provide for the submission of an annual report to both Councils on the activities of the Friends of Aileu.

**3. Issues**

**Community impact**

The positive community and social implications of the East Timor Partnership Project are illustrated by the broad range of personal and organisational interactions, and partnership and community development activities documented in the Annual Report.

These positive community and social implications include development of community connections and capacities within Merri-bek and Hume City Councils and their communities, and both with and within the Municipality of Aileu and its community.

**Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications**

The projects and activities noted in the Annual Report were undertaken to deliver on the Friendship Agreement, which includes a commitment to support the Municipality of Aileu to build a more sustainable future.

Positive impacts on environmental sustainability in Aileu are a consideration for the selection, design and implementation of all projects and activities supported under the friendship relationship.

**Economic sustainability implications**

The *East Timor Partnership Project* has positive implications for the economic development of the Municipality of Aileu, including through the support it provides for health, education, livelihood and cultural and economic development activities.

**Legal and risk considerations**

*Merri-bek City Council - Friends of Aileu* is registered as a fundraiser with *Consumer Affairs Victoria*.

An application for *Merri-bek City Council - Friends of Aileu* to be declared a charitable or community organisation with the *Victoria Gaming and Casino Control Commission* was submitted in May this year.

All funds raised by or for, or disbursed by, Friends of Aileu are managed using Merri-bek City Council financial systems, procedures and delegations.

100 per cent of funds raised are used to support agreed community development activities in Aileu, with all funds expended by Aileu partner organisations, apart from minor expenditure in Australia such a shipping costs for any materials sent to Timor-Leste through the *Rotary Donations in Kind* project.

There are no other legal or risk issues associated with the Friends of Aileu Annual Report.

**Human Rights Consideration**

The implications of this report and the Friends of Aileu Annual Report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Victorian *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities*.

The operation of the Friends of Aileu Community Committee, the Aileu Friendship Commission, and the projects and activities outlined in the Annual Report, contribute positively to the rights including Right to life, *Taking part in public Lif*e and *Cultural rights*.

**4. Community consultation and engagement**

Input on the draft Friends of Aileu Annual Report has been provided by members of the Friends of Aileu Community Committee and the Annual Report was endorsed at its meeting on 11 April 2024.

**5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest**

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

**6. Financial and Resources Implications**

There are no financial or resource implications related to this report.

**7. Implementation**

A similar report, submitting the Friends of Aileu Annual Report 2023, is being prepared for Hume City Council.

Following the two Councils’ noting the Friends of Aileu Annual Report 2023, copies will be provided to members of the Friends of Aileu Community Committee, partner organisations both locally and in Aileu and Timor-Leste, other interested organisations such as the Australia Timor-Leste Friendship Network and members and East Timorese community organisations.

The Annual Report will be made available to members of the public on the Merri-bek and Hume City Council websites.

**Attachment/s**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Friends of Aileu Annual Report 2023 | D24/214244 |  |

7.14 Financial Management Report for the Period Ended 31 May 2024

**Director Business Transformation Sue Vujcevic**

**Finance Management**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council notes the Financial Management Report for the period ended 31 May 2024, at Attachment 1 to this report.

REPORT

**Executive Summary**

This report presents the Financial Management Report for the financial year to date period ending 31 May 2024.

A detailed financial review was undertaken across the organisation at the end of February 2024. The results of this review are included in this report as the Full Year Revised Forecast.

The May 2024 Income Statement shows the Council surplus is $5.0 million higher than the year-to-date revised forecast as a result of higher overall revenue and lower overall expenditure. These differences are considered largely timing in nature. As set out in the Issues section of this report, operating surplus funds do not convert to immediately available cash to Council; they are used to fund important community infrastructure projects like the Fawkner Leisure Centre redevelopment or the Cultural and Community Hub at 33 Saxon Street, Brunswick.

Council has spent $66.3 million on capital expenditure, which is tracking below the year-to-date (YTD) forecast of $87.0 million, with $42.7 million budget remaining.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**2023/24 Third Quarter Financial Report** – 10 April 2024

*That Council:*

*1. Notes the 2023/24 Third Quarter Financial Report for the period ending 29 February 2024, including operating performance and capital performance.*

*2. Notes the status of the capital works program for 2023/24.*

*3. Note the decrease to the full-year forecast for operating income of $0.01 million and the decrease to operating expenditure of $2.2 million arising from the 2023/24 Third Quarter Financial Review.*

*4. Notes a forecast underspend of $0.8 million against the adopted budget in the waste charge and $1.3 million of unbudgeted grant funding (factored into the 2023/24 waste charge) to be transferred to the Waste Charge Reserve ($1.1 million identified in the Third Quarter Financial Review).*

*5. Endorses the full-year capital expenditure forecast of $109.0 million, arising from the 2023/24 Mid-Year Financial Review.*

*6. Carries forward the following capital project funding to the 2024/25 Capital Works Program:*

 *Derby St Kindergarten Children’s Centre - $1,000,000*

 *Oak Park Kindergarten - $1,000,000*

 *Hosken Reserve Stage 4 Open Space & Civil Work - $1,000,000*

 *Clifton Park – Synthetic Soccer - $740,001*

 *Sportsfield Lighting – JP Fawkner Park - $641,744*

 *Mitchell Pde Retaining Wall - $632,421*

 *Greenbank Crescent Retaining Walls - $525,000*

 *Shared Zones – Victoria Street and Albert Street, Brunswick East - $460,000*

 *Sportsfield Lighting – Allard Park - $378,785*

 *Coburg Bluestone Cottage Complex Redevelopment - $300,000*

 *Dawson Street bike lane – make permanent - $220,000*

 *Merri Creek Trail Access and Safety Upgrades – Various - $191,900*

 *Accommodation Changes to Meet Service Demand - $184,766*

 *Merri Trial – Sumner Park to Capital City Trail Flood Mitigation – Bridge across Merri Creek into Darebin, Brunswick East - $170,000*

 *Furniture & Fittings Replacement Program - $169,745*

 *De Carle Street Protected Bike Lanes – The Avenue to Moreland Rd, Coburg - $165,679*

 *Gym Equipment Replacement Program – Various Locations - $164,000*

 *HW Foletta, Brunswick - $130,000*

 *Summer Bank/Dowding Reserve - $130,000*

 *Coburg Olympic Pool – Pool Plant and Building Works - $120,000*

 *Fisher Reserve, Brunswick East (Design Only) - $120,000*

 *Parks and Reserve flooding rectification - $100,000*

 *McBryde St Reserve (Moomba Park) – Social Room Amenities & Kitchen - $100,000*

 *Blackspot Project – De Carle St & Albion St - $98,000*

 *Kendall/Harding Footbridge – Footbridge over Merri Creek - $76,424*

 *MITS – Road closures - $73,000*

 *Shore Reserve – Public Toilets - $35,457*

 *Brunswick Velodrome – Community Pump Track - $30,000*

 *Glenroy Activity Centre Upgrade Works – Wheatsheaf Rd North - $21,862.*

*7. Approves the following additional capital project funding to be funded from the Public Resort and Recreation Land Reserve:*

 *Coburg Lake – Exersite - $12,560*

 *ATC Cook Reserve – Exersite - $6,746*

 *ATC Cook Reserve – Picnic Shelter - $5,329*

 *Charles Mutton Reserve – Tennis Court Resurface & Lighting - $3,982.*

## 1. Policy Context

This report supports Merri-bek City Council’s continuing commitment to open and accountable management of its financial resources on behalf of its ratepayers.

## 2. Background

The Financial Management Report at **Attachment 1** provides Council’s financial statements for the year to date (YTD) period ending 31 May 2024. The actual results are compared to the revised forecast which includes changes made in the Third Quarter Financial Review.

## 3. Issues

Council ended May 2024 with a surplus operating result of $47.1 million which is $5.0 million (3%) more than the year to date (YTD) revised forecast of $42.1 million. These differences are considered largely timing in nature.

It is important to note that the $5.0 million operating surplus does not convert to immediately available cash to Council. Surplus funds are used to fund important community infrastructure projects like the Fawkner Leisure Centre redevelopment or the Cultural and Community Hub at 33 Saxon Street, Brunswick.

As described above, significant amounts of surplus are restricted by legislation and must be used for future infrastructure investment.

Significant variance explanations are provided below to clarify where the current YTD variances are expected to be a timing or permanent difference by 30 June 2024. A timing variance is a current difference between actual result and budget which is expected to be resolved before the end of the financial year. A permanent variance is a current difference between actual result and budget which will continue to the end of the financial year.

The main items contributing to the overall variance are:

### Revenue

 **Grants – Capital** ended $2.0 million (116%) favourable primarily due to the timing of grant funding for Oak Park Kindergarten ($0.8 million) and Pascoe Vale Community Centre ($0.3 million) which were received earlier than anticipated, and the receipt of an unbudgeted grant for JP Fawkner Sportsfield Lighting ($0.6 million).

### Expenditure

 **Contracts, Materials & Services** ended $2.7 million (4%) favourable due to timing of expenditure and delays in project delivery (timing).

 **Finance Costs** ended $0.1 million (7%) favourable primarily due to variable loan interest expense being lower than anticipated (permanent).

### Key Definitions

Surplus – is reported based on the Australian Accounting Standards and includes all operating income and expenditure recognised in the financial period, including gifted subdivisional assets (non-monetary), developer contributions and grants towards capital works projects. It is important to note that the surplus is not a cash surplus. It does not convert to immediately available cash for Council. Significant amounts of the surplus are restricted by legislation and must be used for future infrastructure investment.

Adjusted underlying surplus – is the surplus for the year adjusted for non-recurrent capital grants and contributions. It is an accepted measure of financial sustainability as it is not impacted by non-recurring or once-off items of revenue and expenses that can often mask the operating results.

Unrestricted result – this is the net funding result after considering the funding requirements to meet loan principal repayments and transfers to and from reserves.

### Capital Projects – Capital Expenditure

The Capital Expenditure program year to date has an actual spend of $66.3 million which is tracking below the YTD forecast of $87.0 million (24%), with $42.7 million (39%) revised budget remaining.

### Cash

At the end of May, Council had cash and short-term investments of $112.9 million. This is $4.4 million lower than the cash position at the beginning of the financial year. Cash fluctuates frequently over the year due to a number of factors including the timing of payments and receipts.

### Solvency Assessment

Council’s liquidity ratio (current assets divided by current liabilities) is 4.0 as at 31 May 2024. The Victorian Auditor-General's Office recommends that this ratio be 1.5 or higher.

### Community Impact

There are no community impacts identified in this report.

### Climate Emergency and Environmental Sustainability Implications

There are no climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications identified in this report.

### Economic Sustainability Implications

There are no economic sustainability implications identified in this report.

### Legal and Risk Considerations

There are no legal and risk considerations identified in this report.

### Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

## 4. Community Consultation and Engagement

This report has been prepared based on information provided by managers and reviewed by directors.

## 5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

## 6. Financial and Resources Implications

The overall corporate objective is to deliver the 2023/24 budget with the best possible outcome for Council and the community and in line with the adopted budget targets.

## 7. Implementation

The financial position of Council will continue to be monitored and managed. Subject to Council endorsement, budget adjustments will support the continuation of the projects outlined in this report.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Council Finance Report - May 2024 | D24/277939 |  |

**7.15** **Governance Report - July 2024 - Cyclical Report**

**Director Business Transformation Sue Vujcevic**

**Governance and Strategy**

**Officer Recommendation**

That Council:

1. Notes the summary of minutes from the Arts Advisory Committee held 21 May 2024, at Attachment 1 to this report.

2. Notes the summary of minutes from the Audit and Risk Committee held 4 June 2024, at Attachment 2 to this report.

3. Notes the Records of Meetings, at Attachment 3 to this report.

4. Adopts the revised Prevention of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace - Councillor Policy at Attachment 4 to this report.

5. Amends the commencement time for the Council meeting of Wednesday 9 October 2024 from 7pm to 6pm.

6. Notes the information provided in relation to Councillor enrolment in the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) – Company Directors Course.

7. Notes that the provisions relating to the Company Directors Course contained in the current Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy will be considered when the policy is reviewed in the next Council term.

8. Defers the review of the Councillor Gifts, Benefits, and Hospitality Policy and amend the review date of this policy to April 2025.

9. Approves attendance of Mayor Adam Pulford at the Northern Councils Alliance Mayor and CEO advocacy visit to Canberra in August 2024, at a cost of up to $1,200, and notes CEO Cathy Henderson will also be attending.

10. Notes actions and associated costs in the 2023/24 financial year for the implementation of Council’s name change to Merri-bek City Council.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

The Governance report is prepared as a monthly standing report to Council which provides a single reporting platform for a range of statutory compliance, transparency, and governance related matters.

This Governance report includes:

 A summary of the minutes of the Arts Advisory Committee.

 A summary of minutes from the Audit and Risk Committee held 4 June 2024.

 Records of Meetings, with a recommendation that Council notes the records.

 A revised Prevention of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace - Councillor Policy for adoption.

 A proposal to amend the commencement time of the Council meeting of 9 October 2024.

 A report on Councillor enrolment in the AICD company Directors Course.

 A proposal to defer the review of the Councillor Gifts, Benefits, and Hospitality Policy and amend the current review date from December 2024 to April 2025, allowing the newly elected Council sufficient time to review and consider any proposed amendments.

 Proposed nomination for Mayor Pulford to attend the Northern Councils Alliance advocacy delegation to Parliament in Canberra in August.

 The actions and associated costs in the 2023/24 financial year for the implementation of Council’s name change to Merri-bek City Council.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Governance Report – March 2024 – Cyclical Report** – 13 March 2024

*That Council:*

*…*

*9. Resolves to receive a report by July 2024 which:*

*a)* *includes consideration of an exclusion to the Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy to access the AICD Company Directors Course during the final year of the Council term; and*

*b) provides an overview of the key benefits and learning of the AICD Company Directors Course and it’s relevance to Council duties; and*

*c) outlines Councillor expenditure incurred, attendance and completion dates, and accreditations awarded of the AICD Company Directors Course during the current Council term.*

*…*

**Prevention of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Councillor Policy** – 13 July 2022

*That Council**:*

*1. Adopts the new standalone Prevention of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace – Councillor Policy (provided as Attachment 1 to this report).*

*2. Implements in-person training and awareness strategies to inform Councillors about their rights and responsibilities.*

**Revised Councillor Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy** – 7 December 2022

*That Council adopts the revised Councillor Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy as provided in Attachment 1 to this report.*

**Implementation of Council's new name - progress update** –12 July 2023

*That Council:*

*1. Notes the update on actions to implement Council’s name change to Merri-bek City Council and the associated costs for the 2022/23 financial year.*

**Merri-bek Naming Support Grant** –7 December 2022

*That Council:*

*1.* *Approves the reallocation of $25,000 from the $250,000 allocated this financial year through for implementation of Councils name change to a Merri-bek Naming Support Grant program in 2022/23 to assist community organisations and businesses who wish to update from ‘Moreland’ to ‘Merri-bek’ and require financial support to do so.*

*2.* *Refers an additional $25,000 to the 2023/24 Council budget process for consideration to continue the once-off Merri-bek Naming Support Grant program next financial year.*

*…*

**What’s In a Name? Moreland to Merri-bek** – 12 October 2022

*That Council:*

*...*

*3.* *In July 2023 and July 2024 present a report to Council detailing the implementation actions of the name change and associated costs in the previous financial years.*

…

**Proposed Renaming of Moreland City Council** –13 December 2021

*That Council:*

*…*

*6.* *Notes and refers to the budget process an additional $250,000 per year for two financial years ($500,000 total) to update Council’s digital platforms, signs at significant Council buildings and facilities and municipal entry signs and notes updating Council assets such as street and park signs, smaller facilities signage, staff uniforms and vehicles will be addressed incrementally within existing budget allocations and asset renewal programs over a 10-year timeframe.*

**1.** **Policy Context**

Reports from Advisory Committees to Council are provided in accordance with the Terms of Reference.

The Local Government Act 2020 (the Act) and the Governance Rules set out the requirements for keeping and reporting records of meetings held under the auspices of Council.

The Prevention of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace - Councillor Policy sets out the scope, objectives and policy details including the following:

 Legislative details

 Reporting sexual harassment

 Responding to sexual harassment

 Support options

 Roles and responsibilities

 Monitoring, evaluation and review

 References.

Section 138 of the *Local Government Act 2020* requires Council to have in place a Councillor Gift Policy that explains the procedures for the maintenance of the Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality register.

The Support, Expenses and Resources Policy requires that all travel, accommodation and registration to conference and events with a value of $100 or more per ticket, be approved by a resolution of Council. The policy also outlines the requirements for the professional development of Councillors including enrolment in the AICD Company Directors Course.

Implementing a new name for Council is aligned with the following key Council plans and policies:

 Council Plan 2021-2025: Theme 3: A healthy and caring Merri-bek

 Statement of Commitment to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities of the City of Merri-bek

 Human Rights Policy 2016-2026

 Social Cohesion Plan: Theme 4: Diversity and Discrimination.

**2. Background**

The Governance Report is prepared as a monthly report to Council to provide a single reporting platform for a range of statutory compliance, transparency, and governance related matters.

In accordance with best practice principles and good governance practice, and to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Act, this report incorporates matters including reporting of Advisory Committees, records of meetings held under the auspice of Council, items relating to the delegation of Council powers and duties, and policy and strategy reporting.

A driver in implementing a standalone Prevention of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace - Councillor Policy was Council’s participation in the Victorian Auditor General’s Office (VAGO) survey on sexual harassment in local government. The survey, conducted in June 2020, was open to all council employees and elected councillors. The policy was previously endorsed by Council at its meeting on 13 July 2022.

At its meeting held 13 March 2024, Council sought a report regarding Councillor access to the AICD Company Directors Course during the final year of the Council term. The report is also to provide an overview of the benefits of the course and the details associated with enrolment in the course.

At its meeting held 7 December 2022, Council adopted its Councillor Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy setting a review date for December 2024*.*

Council officially changed its name to Merri-bek City Council on September 26, 2022. Council resolved to allocate $250,000 per year across two financial years to enable implementation of the name change. This report provides an update on the second and final year of implementation in the 2023/24 year.

**3. Issues**

**Arts Advisory Committee minutes**

A summary of the minutes of the Arts Advisory Committee held 21 May 2024 is provided at **Attachment 1** for Council’s information.

The summary of the minutes does not contain any recommendations from the committee to Council.

**Audit and Risk Committee minutes**

A summary of the minutes from the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held 4 June 2024 is provided at **Attachment 2.**

The summary of the minutes does not contain any recommendations from the committee to Council.

**Records of Meetings held under the auspice of Council**

Records of matters discussed at meetings organised or hosted by Merri-bek that involve Councillors and Council officers are kept in accordance with the Governance Rules.

Meeting Records must include meeting attendees, including organisations represented by external presenters; the title of matters discussed; and any conflicts of interests disclosed and whether the declarant of a conflict of interests recused themselves from the meeting.

Some examples include Councillor Briefings, meetings with residents/developers/ clients/organisations/Government departments/statutory authorities and consultations.

Records of Meetings received since the November Council Meeting are presented at **Attachment 3** as follows:

 Audit and Risk Committee – 4 June 2024

 Councillor Briefing – 5 June 2024

 Councillor Briefing – 11 June 2024

 Councillor Briefing – 19 June 2024

 Merri-bek Affordable Housing and Haven Home Safe Presentation of Wilkinson Street planning permit application - 24 June 2024

 Planning Briefing – 24 June 2024.

**Prevention of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace - Councillor Policy**

Council is committed to providing and maintaining a safe, flexible and respectful work environment that is free from all forms of sexual harassment. Two minor revisions are proposed to the Councillor Policy since it was last adopted in July 2022, as follows:

 revising the review period from 2 years to 4 years (earlier reviews can occur if needed e.g. in response to legislative changes); and

 update references to ‘Moreland’ to ‘Merri-bek’.

**Proposal to amend the commencement time of the Council meeting - 9 October 2024**

The Council meeting scheduled for 9 October 2024 will be the last Council meeting held in the current Council term and will be conducted during the Election Period whilst Council is in Caretaker mode. The Election Period Policy contained in Council’s Governance Rules requires that Council avoids making decisions that would affect voting at an election or decisions that may unreasonably bind an incoming Council or could be deferred until after the election. Accordingly, it is expected that there will be limited officer reports presented to Council for consideration at this meeting.

Furthermore, it is also a requirement of Election Period Policy that Public Questions are not heard at Council meetings conducted during the Election Period. Therefore, it is anticipated that this meeting will be similar in duration to a Special Council meeting. Given these factors, it is considered appropriate to commence this meeting at 6pm.

**AICD Course - Councillor Support Expenses and Resources Policy**

The Company Directors Course is an important platform for the professional development of directors and board members (including Councillors) to further their Governance skills and knowledge. It explores issues and trends facing today’s boards and businesses. On completion of the course, participants will deepen their understanding of what effective governance looks like in practice.

The course is recommended by the MAV for elected officials and has the following key learning objectives:

 The role of the board and the practice of directorship

 Decision making

 Director duties and responsibilities

 The board’s legal environment

 Risks and issues for boards

 Strategy

 Financial literacy for directors and driving financial performance

 Achieving board effectiveness.

During the current Council term, Councillors were approved for enrolment in the AICD Company Directors Course via a resolution of Council. The costs for each Councillor's AICD membership and enrolment fee are shown below. All enrolled Councillors are still completing the course including assessment.

| **Councillor** | **Mode of Delivery** | **Commencement Date** | **Cost** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Cr Pulford | In person | 27 May 2024 | $9,600 |
| Cr Pavlidis | Self-paced | 1 April 2024 | $6,100 |
| Cr Riley | Online | 15 May 2024 | $8,400 |
| Total | | | $24,100 |

As it is best practice for each incoming Council to review the Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy in the first year of their Council term, it is proposed that the policy be fully reviewed in early 2025. The provisions relating to the Company Directors Course (including access to the course during the final year of the Council term) is proposed to be considered as part of that review.

**Councillor Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy**

The Councillor Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy is scheduled for review in December 2024. In accordance with the *Local Government Act 2020*, Council may review and update the Councillor Gifts Policy. Accordingly, the current policy is set for review in December 2024. With the upcoming Council Elections, it is recommended that the Council defer the review and administratively amend the review date to April 2025. This adjustment will provide the newly elected Council with sufficient time to review and consider any proposed amendments.

**Northern Councils Alliance Mayor and CEO advocacy trip – Canberra, August 2024**

Merri-bek City Council is a participating member of the Northern Councils Alliance, an alliance of 7 municipalities in Melbourne’s north working together to advocate for the future of the region. The Alliance is expecting to conduct the Mayor and CEO advocacy delegation to federal parliament, Canberra in the week commencing 19 August 2024, likely for two days, requiring one or two night’s accommodation.

Advocacy priorities to be presented to ministers, parliamentarians and stakeholders are expected to include the proposed Upfield rail line duplication, and potentially other Northern transport priorities.

**Implementation of Merri-bek City Council’s name change**

Council made the official name change to Merri-bek City Council on September 26, 2022. Council resolved to allocate $250,000 per year across two financial years to enable implementation of the name change. This funding included updates to Council’s visual identity, signage, uniforms and other actions. This update provides an outline of the second and final year of implementation in financial year 2023/24. It includes actions delivered and associated costs, along with identified savings that were achieved during the completion of the implementation.

In the second and final year of implementation, key actions have been completed within budget:

 Old logos and artwork on Council fleet vehicles have been replaced.

 New signage at key locations and facilities has been updated, including kindergarten signs.

 Frontline staff uniforms have been updated, including community service officers, customer service officers and outdoor service workers.

 Promotional gear, including marquees, pull-up banners, and stationery, has been purchased.

 Park signage across Merri-bek's 40 parks has been audited for replacement, with new designs in place.

Opportunities to find efficiencies with regard to implementation were considered. Community concerns around the costs of implementation were strongly considered and many of the final year implementation activities were developed and delivered within existing resources to maintain low costs. This kept our use of the allocated contingency budget to a minimum.

Considerably more park signage was able to be replaced across the municipality than initially anticipated. This is due to savings from auditing, measuring, and designing most of the signage in house.

Savings were also achieved through absorbing most of the 2023/24 costs of rebranding Council’s vehicle fleet into the existing budget for fleet renewals.

Furthermore, we didn’t receive any further applicants for the community renaming grant allocation.

Consideration was given to the existing awareness and recognition of the Council logo, particularly within CALD communities. To accommodate this, the decision was made to retain the existing logo and change only the corporate name within the logo. Minor updates were then applied to the colour palette used for Council branded material.

Environmental sustainability was front of mind to avoid or reduce waste as much as possible, and in some instances assets or materials with ‘Moreland’ remain and will be replaced as they age as part of Council’s renewal program. A large portion of the renaming to Merri-bek involved digital assets which had minimal impact to the environment.

Local suppliers based in Merri-bek were predominantly engaged to supply services and materials as part of the implementation actions.

In the final year of implementing the Merri-bek name change, all activities were delivered and completed under the allocated amount of $250,000, with approximately $175,000 spent. This variance is attributed to savings made through absorbing some costs into existing operational budgets.

Completed final year (2023/24) implementation:

| **Year 2 implementation activities** | **Estimated budget at July 2023** | **Actual expenditure** | **Comments** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Uniforms for outdoor staff (e.g. Open Space maintenance, Waste Services etc) | $26,000 | $29,950 | Completed – and included Homecare and customer service |
| Signage for key facilities: parks, community halls, senior citizen centres | $88,000 | $121,347 | Completed – and included additional park signage. |
| Remaining stationery and collateral: staff ID, pull up banners, translated material for CALD communities, accessible signage etc. | $19,000 | $20,848 | Completed – and included marquees for civic events and outdoor community events |
| Remaining fleet and vehicles: updating name and branding of Council vehicles including waste trucks, fleet vehicles, street sweepers, immunisation vehicle etc. | $55,000 | $2,485 | Completed – the design and wraps were purchased last financial year. Savings incurred by teams absorbing the wrapping costs into the already budgeted vehicle replacements/upgrades |
| Support grants to assist local organisations and businesses to change their name and brand to Merri-bek if they wish. | $25,000 | 0 | Completed – no grants were requested this year |
| Contingency on escalations (additional infrastructure and supply chain costs) | $37,000 | $660 | Allocated to community infrastructure costs related to Zero Carbon Moreland.  No further contingency was required. |
| **Total** | **$250,000** | **$175,290** | **Savings: $74,710** |

**Human Rights Consideration**

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

**4. Community consultation and engagement**

Advisory committees provide a valuable communication and consultation link between the organisation, Councillors, Council and the community.

**5. Officer Declaration for a Conflict of Interests**

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflicts of interest in the matters contained therewith.

**6. Financial and Resources Implications**

Travel, accommodation and registration expenses for Mayor Pulford and the Chief Executive Officer to attend the advocacy trip to Canberra will be met from the annual budget.

There are no further financial and/or resource implications as a result of this report.

**7. Implementation**

Governance activity, including reports of Committees to Council, Records of Meetings and Community Question Time items will continue to be reported to Council monthly.

The implementation plan of the name change is complete. As part of business as usual, Council will continue to incrementally update smaller Council assets such as street signs, smaller facilities signage, and miscellaneous signage within existing budget allocations and asset renewal programs over the next 8 years.

Subject to Council’s decision the next steps include:

 The updated Prevention of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace - Councillor Policy will be uploaded to the internet and communicated to all Councillors.

 Amending Councils meeting schedule to reflect that the October Council meeting will now commence at 6pm.

 Amending the review date for the Councillor Gifts, Benefits, and Hospitality Policy to April 2025.

 Mayor Pulford will represent Council alongside the Chief Executive Officer, Cathy Henderson, at the Northern Councils Alliance Mayor and CEO advocacy trip to Parliament in Canberra in August.

**Attachment/s**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Report from Advisory Committee to Council | D24/305519 |  |
| **2** | Summary of Audit and Risk Committee Minutes - 4 June 2024 | D24/297140 |  |
| **3** | Records of Meetings - July 2024 | D24/297215 |  |
| **4** | Prevention of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace - Councillor Policy (tracked changes) - June 2024 | D24/292185 |  |

**8. Notices of Motion**

**8.1 Family Violence Initiatives**

**Cr Helen Davidson**

## Motion

That Council receives a report:

1. Detailing current statistics on family violence in Merri-Bek, along with various initiatives aimed at prevention and response.

2. That explores the potential for renewed partnerships with local stakeholders, including Victorian Police, family violence support services and community organisations, in order to collaborate and enhance our practices and preventative measures within the Council and its services to combat family violence.

3. That considers, in partnership with Victoria Police and stakeholders, Council implementing public awareness campaigns about family violence, utilising multiple platforms, including social media and community events, to educate the public on recognising the signs of family violence; accessing available resources; understanding the importance of reporting incidents; and to challenge harmful gender stereotypes and promote respectful relationships.

## 1. Background

Cr Davidson’s background:

It is acknowledged that Council collaborates with Victoria Police and various community stakeholders dedicated to community safety and well-being and confirms its support for their invaluable work within our community relating to family violence.

Through its advocacy initiatives, Council actively seeks state and federal government funding opportunities for training programs through community groups registered with the Council, as well as exploring other potential funding sources within our own budgetary considerations. It is acknowledged that through continued advocacy initiatives, training programs designed to cover critical areas including trauma-informed care, cultural sensitivity, and effective intervention strategies may also be identified.

## 2. Policy Context

Officer’s comments:

Council’s Gender Equality Commitment is:

 All gender identities feel able to flourish in Merri-bek.

 All gender identities, and at all intersections of identity, have equitable access to housing, employment, education, public space, recreation and sport as well as representation at all levels of decision making.

The commitments most relevant to addressing gender-based violence are:

2. All genders can access public space, sports and recreation and feel safe

4. All genders have access to safe and affordable housing

## 3. Financial Implications

Officer’s comments:

Preparation of a report can be undertaken within existing budgets. Any additional resources required for campaigns will depend on scope and will be outlined in the future report.

## 4. Resources Implications

Officer’s comments:

The motion can be actioned with existing resources.

**8.2 Recognition of internationally renowned local artist - Destiny Deacon 1956 to 2024**

**Cr Sue Bolton**

**Motion**

That Council:

1. Pays tribute to the life and work of internationally renowned Merri-bek artist Destiny Deacon.

2. Receives a report with recommendations on the best way to recognise the contribution of Destiny Deacon to art, the First Nations community and the local community. Some suggestions for recognition to be considered include an artist’s residency or art prize in Destiny Deacon’s name as well as other recommendations.

**1. Background**

Cr Bolton’s background

Destiny Deacon is arguably Merri-bek’s most famous artist. Deacon was internationally renowned with an extensive number of solo exhibitions overseas as well as at home. She possibly had more recognition internationally than she had in her own country. Deacon won a number of awards, including the prestigious Royal Photographic Society Centenary Award in 2022.

Destiny Deacon is a descendent of the Kuku people from Cape York Peninsula in Far North Queensland people and the Erub and Mer people of the Torres Strait. She was also a descendent of Chief Kahlemu from the Kanaky (New Caledonia) island of Lifou. As with other First Nations artists, the personal and political coalesce in Destiny Deacon’s artwork. The Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery describe Deacon’s work as “been primarily involved with performative photography, exploring Indigenous identity with often provocative and humorous imagery that mocks and satirises clichéd and racist stereotypes. Partly autobiographical and partly fictitious, Deacon’s work is an insightful comedy that is effective in establishing a discourse about political, Indigenous and feminist concerns.”

In the obituary for Destiny Deacon (<https://www.smh.com.au/culture/art-and-design/destiny-deacon-s-life-of-political-art-was-a-true-act-of-love-20240605-p5jji8.html>), Daniel Browning draws attention to the fact that Destiny Deacon was the first person to drop the “c” in black, “to derive the word “blak”, an inclusive term meaning diverse and emerging urban Aboriginal identities. It caught on because for urban blackfellas without access to Country, language and unbroken cultural tradition, it validated their lived experiences in a single term. Destiny grew up being called a “black c”, so there was some satisfaction in taking the “c” out, identifying herself and others like her in a decisive rhetorical act of self-definition.”

Destiny was a long-time Merri-bek resident, living in Hope Street, Brunswick for 35 years. She was also one of the first wave of Aboriginal teachers in the 1970s and taught at the Brunswick Technical School. Merri-bek Council should consider the best way of paying tribute to Destiny Deacon.

**2. Policy Context**

Officer’s comments:

The importance of Merri-bek artists and the creative community is highlighted through the Community Vision and Council Plan:

 Community Vision: Merri-bek is enhanced by all of us supporting our local businesses, arts communities and social organisations.

 Council Plan 2021-2024, Theme 4: Vibrant spaces and places in Moreland, Strategy 4.11 "Make Moreland a creative and cultural destination within Melbourne, significantly contributing to local vibrancy, cohesion and inclusion.

The 2023 Arts and Culture Strategy seeks to prioritise First Nations artists and audiences. It also prioritises investment - becoming a city that invests in the creative community and generates opportunities for artists and the creative sector.

This Notice of Motion also aligns with:

 Statement of Commitment to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities of the City of Merri-bek

 Public Art Guidelines

In addition, recognition of Destiny Deacon has been previously discussed by Council’s First Nations creative consultation group, a group of local First Nations artists who advise on arts strategy and programming. They have suggested that a fellowship be established in Destiny’s name, and that fellowship is included in the 2023/2024 and 2024/2025 Arts and Culture Strategy Action Plans.

**3. Financial Implications**

Officer’s comments:

Preparation of a report can be undertaken with existing operational budgets.

**4. Resources Implications**

Officer’s comments:

Preparation of a report can be undertaken with existing resources.

**8.3 Art and History at the Brunswick Town Hall**

**Cr Lambros Tapinos**

**Motion**

That Council calls for a report into the best use of the Brunswick Town Hall and as part of the report considers the following:

 Expanding the Counihan Gallery to include a permanent exhibition of the Merri-bek Art Collection which focus on the work of Noel Counihan and themes associated with Brunswick.

 Interpreting the history of Brunswick in collaboration with the Brunswick Historical Society the permanent exhibition spaces can display art and objects which interpret the history of the suburb, including the historical council chambers and multimedia displays.

 That consideration be given to expanding the Library and community usages, which include study spaces, meeting rooms, information and customer service desk and other community spaces.

 That consideration also be given to small scale commercial operations and, or social enterprises, which can contribute to the vision and function of the Brunswick Town Hall.

**1. Background**

Cr Tapinos’s background:

The Brunswick Town Hall is one of the most historical buildings in the municipality built in 1876. Currently, the Brunswick Town Hall building contains the Counihan Gallery, the Brunswick Library, Customer Service Desk, Community Office Space, Atrium and historical council chambers.

The building is considered to be under-utilised despite its historical appeal and prominent location on Sydney Road in an area considered part of the economic, civic and arts precinct of the municipality.

The Counihan Gallery promotes and inspires innovation and diversity in the visual arts through regular exhibitions, talks and workshops. The Gallery is named after Noel Counihan, who was a Brunswick social realist painter, printmaker, cartoonist and illustrator active in the 1940s and 1950s in Melbourne. An atheist, communist, and art activist, Counihan made art in response to the politics and social hardships of his times. He is regarded as one of Australia's major artists of the 20th century.

The Merri-bek Art Collection contains a number of Counihan works purchased or donated to the Gallery. Artworks are displayed in Council building foyers and meeting rooms, libraries and now also available to explore online.

**2. Policy Context**

Officer’s comments:

The current and potential future usages of Brunswick Town Hall for cultural activities align closely with Council’s strategy’s and policies.

The importance of Merri-bek artists and the creative community is highlighted through the Community Vision and Council Plan:

 Community Vision: Merri-bek is enhanced by all of us supporting our local businesses, arts communities and social organisations.

 Council Plan 2021-2025, Theme 4: Vibrant spaces and places in Moreland, Strategy 4.11 "Make Moreland a creative and cultural destination within Melbourne, significantly contributing to local vibrancy, cohesion and inclusion.

The Arts and Culture Strategy 2023–2030 identifies the need to provide varied arts and cultural spaces for its diverse community, and prioritises *Investment* – becoming a city that invests in the creative community and generates opportunities for artists and the creative sector.

The Merri-bek Heritage Action Plan 2017–2032 provides a clear framework for Council and its partners in identifying, managing, protecting and celebrating our City’s heritage, under the following four themes:

 *Knowing*: To know where we have come from and understand the significance of our heritage.

 *Protecting*: To protect Merri-bek’s heritage places from inappropriate demolition, development or subdivision.

 *Supporting*: To assist in conserving and education others about our heritage places.

 *Communicating*: To celebrate, connect with and enjoy our heritage places.

The Community Infrastructure Plan 2022–2032 notes the following future community infrastructure needs:

 *Upgrade Brunswick Town Hall*: Plan for and implement works for the use and occupation of Brunswick Town Hall, including improvements to allow for provision of arts spaces (delivery 2027–2032).

 *Plan for library and complimentary services and spaces across Brunswick Library and Campbell Turnbull Library*: Plan for library and complimentary services and spaces in Merri-bek South. Consider redevelopment options for Brunswick Library (Brunswick) and Campbell Turnbull Library (Brunswick West) (delivery 2027 – 2032).

The Library Services Strategy 2019 identifies as a key priority:

 *Places*: Planning and advocating for quality flexible spaces for our community to learn, discover and connect.

**3. Financial Implications**

Officer’s comments:

A report can be achieved within current financial allocations.

**4. Resources Implications**

Officer’s comments:

A report can be achieved within current resource allocations.