**Council MEETING AGENDA**

Wednesday 12 March 2025

Commencing 6.30 pm

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

A close-up of a newspaper

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

**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 9 April 2025 commencing at 6.30 pm, in the Bunjil (Council Chamber), Merri-bek Civic Centre, 90 Bell Street, Coburg. The next Planning and Related Matters meeting will be held on Wednesday 26 March 2025 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 February 2025 and the Special Council Meeting held on 28 February 2025 be confirmed.

**4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND OTHER MATTERS**

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**9. Notice of Rescission**

Nil

**10. Foreshadowed Items**

**11. URGENT BUSINESS**

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12.1 Legal Matter update

*Pursuant to section 3(1)(e) of the Local Government Act 2020 this report has been designated as confidential because it relates to legal privileged information, being information to which legal professional privilege or client legal privilege applies.*

12.2 Chief Executive Officer Employment Matters

*Pursuant to section 3(1)(f) of the Local Government Act 2020 this report has been designated as confidential because it relates to personal information, being information which if released would result in the unreasonable disclosure of information about any person or their personal affairs.*

**5. Petitions**

**5.1 Petition - Extend hours Fawkner Leisure Centre Outdoor Pool**

A petition (D25/117181) has been received containing 53 signatories requesting Council:

 Open the outdoor 50 metre pool at Fawkner Leisure Centre for lap swimming in the mornings, for example, from 6-8 am or 7-9 am; and

 Keep the 50 metre outdoor pool open all year for lap swimming given that it is heated.

**Officer Recommendation**

That Council:

1. Receives the petition, requesting Council extend hours for the Fawkner Leisure Centre outdoor 50 metre pool.

2. Refers the petition requesting Council extend hours for the Fawkner Leisure Centre outdoor 50 metre pool to the Director Community for consideration and response.

**Attachment/s**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Petition - Extended hours for the Fawkner Leisure Centre Outdoor Pool - Redacted | D25/71144 |  |

**7. Council Reports**

**7.1** **Streets for People Plan - Consultation Approach**

**Director City Infrastructure Anita Curnow**

**Transport**

**Officer Recommendation**

That Council:

1. Endorses the draft Streets for People Plan (Attachment 1) for community engagement for five weeks from Friday 28 March until Sunday 4 May 2025, including pop-up sessions in Brunswick, Coburg North and Glenroy.

2. Receives a further report at the July 2025 Council meeting with a final version of the Streets for People Plan and a community engagement report that outlines the feedback received and how this feedback influenced the final version of the Streets for People Plan.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

The draft *Streets for People Plan* was developed in response to Council’s new approach to streetscape changes (The Streets for People *Framework*) outlined in Council’s transport strategy *Moving Around Merri‑bek.* There is also a corresponding action outlined in the *Moving Around Merri‑bek Action Plan 2024/25* to *“Develop and implement a Streets for People Framework that outlines a clear and transparent approach to selecting streets for upgrades, the approach to identifying challenges and opportunities for each street, concept designing, and integrating community knowledge.”*

The plan has two key objectives;

1. Identify which streets in Merri-bek council should target as Streets for People Projects by undertaking a holistic design process for streetscape improvements.

2. Detail the role these streets play in Merri-bek’s transport network and what should be considered to help them adapt as safe, accessible, sustainable, healthy, liveable and inclusive transport connections.

A map of the future network of Streets for People corridors in Merri‑bek is detailed in the plan which identifies each corridor’s role in the future network and how it fits in with Merri-bek’s existing or planned infrastructure. These corridors will be prioritised for streetscape improvements as part of our capital works program.

Each corridor identified in the plan is categorised by street type based on the Victorian Government’s Movement and Place classification scheme. The draft plan details the range of potential streetscape features that will be considered for each street type to determine how these streets will function and what can be done to help make those streets safe, accessible, healthy, sustainable, liveable and inclusive.

The draft plan outlines two processes for delivering streetscape improvements. Smaller projects will be delivered as part of our regular capital works program. Larger projects will be delivered as *Streets for People Corridor Projects.* The draft plan details which streets will be treated as a ‘corridor’ project, the process corridor projects will undertake (including community engagement), and the prioritisation of projects for delivery.

Community engagement for the draft Plan will include a dedicated Conversations Merri‑bek page with an online survey and interactive map. Three in-person pop-up stalls will be conducted - one in Brunswick, one in Coburg North and one in Glenroy. The draft plan will also be presented to relevant advisory committees and reference groups for feedback. Following completion of the community engagement period, the draft plan with be revised and a final plan will be presented to Council at the July 2025 Council meeting for adoption.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Glenroy to Coburg Bike Route Survey Outcome** – 12 June 2024

*That Council:*

*…*

*7. Receives a report on a comprehensive plan for a safe, direct and comfortable bike network between Glenroy and Coburg as part of the Streets for People Plan being prepared in the 2024/25 Financial Year.*

**Moving Around Merri-bek - final transport strategy for adoption** – 13 March 2024

*That Council:*

*1. Endorses as final the Transport Strategy Moving Around Merri-bek (Attachment 1) and associated Action Plan (Attachment 2) with the following changes:*

*…*

*2. Refers to the 2024/25 Budget Process funding requests for the following two Action Plan items:*

*…*

*b. $130,000 for development of a Streets for People plan.*

*…*

**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 council’s transport network contribute to objectives aligned to the values of Safe, Accessible, Sustainable, Healthy, Liveable, and Inclusive. The Streets for People Framework is a key component of our transport strategy, guiding the way we make changes to our streets. The Streets for People Plan contributes to delivering on the following components of Moving Around Merri‑bek (2024):

 Create streets where everyone feels safe.

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

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

 Reduce air and noise pollution generated from vehicles.

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

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

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

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

**Council Plan 2021-2025**

The Council plan sets out Council’s and community’s vision for the future. Key objectives and strategies related to this report include:

Strategic Objective 2: To contribute to the health, safety, and security of everyone living in our diverse community and to increase safe, accessible, physically active and enjoyable ways to get around Merri‑bek, especially via walking, cycling and public transport:

2.1 Build safe, accessible and high-quality bike and pedestrian infrastructure to create links between areas of high pedestrian and cycling demand

2.2 Scope and implement suburb based active transport (bike and pedestrian) improvements (prioritising Fawkner, Gowanbrae, Hadfield, Oak Park, Pascoe Vale and Glenroy)

2.5 Facilitate substantially increased use of active transport in the community through targeted programs which include a focus on children, young people, families and older people

2.6 Collaborate with the community to improve pedestrian and cycling infrastructure on a case‑by‑case basis

**Zero Carbon Merri-bek**

Council’s Zero Carbon Merri‑bek 2040 Framework outlines the community vision and strategic directions for the transition to zero carbon in Merri-bek by 2040. In 2019/20, transport was recorded to contribute 17 per cent of all carbon emissions in the Merri‑bek local government area and 13 per cent were from private motor vehicles. The 2040 vision for Sustainable Transport includes:

 Most people choose to walk or cycle to get around locally because its healthy, free, safe and convenient

 Merri-bek is known for its pedestrian and cycle-friendly streetscapes

This overarching Framework informed 5-yearly action plans to drive the transition to zero emissions including:

 Investing in infrastructure to support active travel and public transport

 Reallocate space used for private vehicle travel and parking to support sustainable transport use and other purposes.

In addition, Council resolved in December 2021 to adopt an interim target towards the Zero Carbon by 2040 goal of a reduction of emissions by 75 per cent by 2030.

**2. Background**

10 Year Capital Works Programs for Walking and Cycling

The draft 10-year Active Travel Capital Plan is a capital works plan that outlines a future delivery of walking and cycling infrastructure. It was presented to Council on 9 June 2022 and the final plan adopted on 23 June 2022 as part of the Budget Special Council meeting. It included a significant amount of community feedback. We have received 880 submissions via our interactive map, and 270 survey responses, which informed the development of the walking and cycling programs. These programs have informed the development of the Streets for People Plan.

**Moving Around Merri-bek**

The Streets for People Framework was first introduced in Council’s new transport strategy, Moving Around Merri-bek, adopted in March 2024.

It is a framework for making changes to our streets. It takes a holistic approach to understanding how our streets function in the wider transport system, how we make changes to streets to benefit all users, and ensure we align project outcomes with our values and strategic objectives. *Figure 1* shows how the Framework (that is outlined in Moving Around Merri-bek) relates to the Streets for People Plan (presented as part of this report), and individual corridor projects.

1. *Figure 1 Relationship between the Streets for People Framework, The Plan, and Corridor Projects*

The Framework has informed the development of the Streets for People Plan, the corridors identified that form our long-term walking and riding network, and the street design elements shown in the Streets for People Plan.

**Movement and Place**

Movement and Place is a Victorian Government framework that is used to classify streets. Under this framework, all streets perform both a movement function and a place function. Both functions of a street are rated based on their ‘level of significance’. The numbers correspond thus:

1. State significance

2. Regional significance

3. Municipal significance

4. Neighbourhood significance

5. Local significance

The Movement and Place classification further identifies street types based on their movement and place ratings. *Figure 2* shows how the movement and place ratings align with different types of streets. The red rectangle overlayed on the image identifies streets that are typically council-managed roads and that have been considered as part of the Streets for People Plan.

A diagram of a city

Description automatically generated

1. *Figure 2 Movement and Place classifications*

Descriptions of the street types are provided in *Table 1*. They are drawn directly from the Victorian Government’s report *Movement and Place in Victoria.*

1. *Table 1 Movement and Place Street Types*

| **Street type** | **Description** |
| --- | --- |
| City Places | City Places are roads and streets with high demand for pedestrian activities and lower levels of vehicle movement. City Places are places communities value and for people and visitors to enjoy. |
| Activity Streets and Boulevards | Successful Activity Streets and Boulevards provide access to shops and services by all modes. There is high demand for movement as well as place with a need to balance different demands within the available road space. Activity Streets and Boulevards aim to ensure a high-quality public realm with a strong focus on supporting businesses, traders and neighbourhood life. |
| Connectors | Successful Connectors should provide safe, reliable and efficient movement of people and goods between regions and strategic centres and mitigate the impact on adjacent communities. |
| Local Streets | Successful Local Streets should provide quiet, safe and desirable residential access for all ages and abilities that foster community spirit and local pride. They are part of the fabric of our neighbourhoods, where we live our lives and facilitate local community access. |

In the draft Streets for People Plan, the network has been coded based on its street type. The street type is used in the draft plan to guide what street design elements are appropriate for different street types.

**3. Issues**

**Community impact**

The draft Streets for People Plan proposes changes to the way some streets operate in Merri‑bek to make walking and riding safer and more attractive. This may result in changes to the way people use a given street. The draft plan shows the streets we will consider for changes in the future and our approach to working with the community on each street. The process section of the draft plan details the steps we will take to work with the community to develop plans for a given street. This is done to ensure that changes to the street make the street safer and more attractive for people who walk and ride along the street and that the amenity for businesses and residents on that street are improved as well.

**Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications**

Transport emissions are the second largest source of emissions in Victoria and are set to become the largest source in the coming years.

Reducing transport emissions and the effects of climate change is a key focus of the transport strategy. Council aims to reduce transport emissions by providing infrastructure that enables people to use zero emission transport modes such as walking and cycling, by supporting our community to switch to electric vehicles, by advocating to the State Government for improvements to public transport infrastructure and services, and by supporting increased densities in activity centres and around transport hubs.

Delivering on a connected network of walking and cycling corridors, as outlined in the draft Streets for People Plan, will provide opportunities to choose low and zero emission transport modes and support community efforts to reduce their transport emissions.

**Economic sustainability implications**

The draft Streets for People Plan details Merri-bek’s approach to enhancing the liveability and accessibility of activity centres and local destinations. This is reflected in the application of Movement and Place and the Healthy Streets approach to selecting projects and the strategic objectives that inform the design process. The Streets for People Plan will therefore improve accessibility and patronage of local businesses by enhancing the safety, comfort and amenity of local trips that support the local economy.

**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 *Gender Equality Act 2020.*

Under the *Gender Equality Act 2020* Council has a duty to promote gender equality in new or revised policies/ programs and services with a direct and significant impact on the community. The tool that we are asked to use are gender impact assessments and the Act requires us to demonstrate how our recommendations and actions will:

 meet the needs of people of different genders

 address gender inequality, and

 promote gender equality.

A Gender and Equity Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the draft Streets for People Plan. A gender lens has been applied to the development of the draft Plan and the Assessment will be provided to the Human Rights Commission at the next submission date.

**4. Community consultation and engagement**

Council officers undertook significant engagement on the development and adoption of Moving Around Merri-bek, Council’s new transport strategy. Findings from this engagement have influenced the development of the draft Streets for People Plan.

Key findings from this engagement include:

 We heard that east-west connectivity is poor for people walking and riding.

 We heard that pedestrian connections to shops and destinations need to be safer with more amenity provided (trees, seating, etc).

 We heard that maps of our future network are important for the community to see and understand what our priorities are for infrastructure improvements.

The Sustainable Transport Advisory Committee was briefed on the draft Streets for People Plan on Tuesday 4 February 2025.

An article on Streets for People was published in the Summer edition of Community News.

**Forthcoming Activities**

Planned Engagement and Communications activities for the Streets for People Plan are as follows.

Engagement will launch on Friday 28 March, following the March council meeting (pending any final adjustments).

Engagement is planned to close on Sunday 4 May, providing opportunity for community feedback across 5 weeks and 6 weekends.

Engagement will include:

 An updated Conversations Merri-bek project page.

 Social media posts including in-language ads.

 A short survey (available digitally on Conversations Merri-bek, in several languages other than English, and in hard copy format at all public-facing council facilities and upon request).

 Briefings to relevant Council advisory committee and reference groups.

 An email to all Council committee and reference group members to inform them of the Draft Strategy and to seek their feedback.

 Proactively seek feedback from surrounding Councils, relevant State Government departments, and local MPs.

 Briefing to our Merri-bek Connectors to facilitate feedback from our CALD communities.

 Pop-up events in Brunswick, Coburg North and Glenroy which will be promoted on the Conversations Merri-bek page and at the locations when times, dates and locations are confirmed.

**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.

Officers recommend a public exhibition period for the draft Streets for People Plan to allow all affected community members the opportunity to provide feedback on the Plan. Changes to the document will then be considered that directly address the ideas or concerns of all affected persons before the Plan is finalised and presented to Council for adoption at the July 2025 Council meeting.

**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 is no direct impact this draft Plan will have on the current council budget, as the resources to prepare and consult on the strategy are in existing budgets. Council officers will undertake a full financial and resource impact on the final plan prior to being presented to Council in July 2025.

We will provide an updated assessment of budget implications when the final documents are presented for endorsement. The Plan recommends streetscape improvement projects for future years that will require consideration through the annual budget processes including the 5-year Capital Works Program.

It is important to note that construction costs, particularly for Streets for People projects, carry significant uncertainty and are subject to change following the design stage of each project. Once construction estimates are better understood additional funding (Council or external grants) may be required, or projects may be staged across multiple years. Delivery of additional projects may require additional project management resources.

**7. Implementation**

Community feedback will be sought on the draft Streets for People Plan from late March to early May 2025.

We will review feedback and revise the draft Streets for People Plan in May and June.

Officers will prepare a report for council detailing findings of the engagement on the draft Plan and present the final Plan to Council for adoption at the July Council Meeting.

**Attachment/s**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Draft Streets for People Plan - March 2025 Council Meeting | D25/106306 |  |

7.2 Bachar Houli Foundation - Islamic College of Sport and Aspire Sports Centre

**Director Community, Eamonn Fennessy**

**Early Years and Youth**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes the Bachar Houli Foundations concept designs for the proposed Aspire Sports Centre as shown in Attachment 1.

2. Notes the Federal Government’s commitment to provide grant funding of $15 million and the Bachar Houli Foundation’s application to the Victorian Government’s Building Fund for Non-Government Schools to develop the facility.

3. Notes the planning requirements that must be met for the project to proceed, and the significant community benefits it will deliver.

4. Resolves to enter into a peppercorn lease agreement with the Bachar Houli Foundation for a 30-year term with a 10-year extension option, exercisable by the Bachar Houli Foundation, subject to confirmation that funding has been secured for the project.

5. Receives a further report setting out detailed terms of the proposed lease agreement, potential relocation options for existing users at the former Coburg Bowls Club, grant funding updates, further design and planning considerations and draft community and stakeholder engagement plan.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

This report provides an update on the Bachar Houli Foundation's Aspire Sports Centre proposal (originally titled the Islamic College of Sport and Centre of Excellence) which Council considered and provided in principle support to at its July 2024 meeting.

The Aspire Sports Centre, proposed for the former Coburg Bowls Club site at 19 Harding St Coburg, aims to establish a multi-purpose facility integrating education, sports, and community use. The proposal seeks Council agreement to enter a long-term lease of the land and the facility which would be owned by Council under the terms of the lease, with the Bachar Houli Foundation meeting the entire cost of the facility, which is estimated to cost up to $24M. The facility would assist in addressing the significant shortage of indoor sports facilities in Merri-bek, while providing educational opportunities for up to 250 students and a range of other community uses. It would also serve as offices and related facilities for the Bachar Houli Foundation.

The concept design includes a multi-purpose sports hall, gymnasium, classrooms and community spaces across two floors. The Bachar Houli Foundation has been given a commitment of funding of $15M from Commonwealth Department of Home Affairs Modernised Multicultural Grants Program (Infrastructure for Multicultural Organisations stream) and has submitted a grant application to the Victorian Government Building Fund for Non-Government Schools for funding of up to $6 million, with an outcome anticipated by October 2025 and a preliminary indication expected by mid-year or possibly sooner.

Under the proposed lease terms Council would be responsible for repairs, maintenance, asset lifecycle replacement and insurance, with the first-year cost to Council estimated to be approximately $113,200 and the Foundation would be responsible for operating costs including cleaning, security and utilities.

The proposed initial lease term is 30 years at a peppercorn rate, with an option to extend this by a further 10 years. The Bachar Houli Foundation and Islamic College of Sport would have priority use of the facility during school hours for educational purposes, however use of spaces that are not required for this can be made available for community use and also during evenings and weekends. Details of the proposed lease are yet to finalised and will be the subject of further Council report, along with other key considerations including overall community benefits, funding application outcomes, design and planning considerations and relocation options for the current temporary users of the Bowls Club site. Subject to Council consideration it is proposed that a detailed community consultation and stakeholder engagement plan regarding the proposal will be developed.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Bachar Houli Foundation - Islamic College of Sport and Centre of Excellence Proposal** 10 July 2024

*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.*

## 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 court facilities across Merri-bek).

## 2. Background

The Bachar Houli Foundation was established in 2012 by former celebrated Muslim AFL football player Bachar Houli. The Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to empowering young Muslims through sport and education. The Foundation runs a variety of programs each year, engaging thousands of participants, and has proposed the Aspire Sports Centre as a permanent base for its operations and program delivery.

The proposal also includes the development of the Islamic College of Sport aimed at providing a sports-integrated education for secondary school students. The Aspire Sports Centre would bring together Bachar Houli Foundation programs and educational initiatives, enhancing their delivery and improving community access to sporting and educational opportunities.

In line with the July 2024 Council resolution to support the intent of the proposal Councill officers have liaised with the Bachar Houli Foundation and provided general advice in the further development of this proposal. Further development of the proposal has included the completion of concept designs, stakeholder engagement, financial modelling and funding applications. Simultaneously, preliminary discussions regarding the potential relocation of current users of the former Coburg Bowls Club site are underway and will be further explored as the proposal progresses.

## 3. Issues

**Concept Design**

The concept design for the Aspire Sports Centre, as shown in **Attachment 1** outlines a multi-purpose facility supporting educational, sporting, and community activities. The design features dedicated spaces for learning, sports, and community use across two floors.

Ground Floor Overview (Total Area: 2,645m²):

 Multi-Purpose Sports Hall (1,500m²): Designed to accommodate various sports, including basketball, netball, and futsal, with spectator seating.

 Gymnasium (250m²): Intended for strength training, stretching, and recovery activities.

 Amenities: Includes male and female change rooms (50m² each), lockers, and showers.

 Foyer and Exhibition Space: A central entry point featuring a gallery wall for displays.

 Outdoor Plaza: Proposed as a play and breakout area for students.

First Floor Overview (Total Area: 1,151m²):

 General Learning Areas (GLAs): Multiple 72m² classrooms to support academic programs.

 Student Breakout and Resource Areas: Spaces for informal learning and group activities.

 Prayer Room: Included to support the diverse needs of students and staff.

 Staff Areas: Comprising a principal’s office, workroom, kitchenette, and meeting rooms.

 Viewing Gallery: Overlooking the sports hall, providing space for spectators.

**Proposed Location and Current Users**

The former Coburg Bowls Club site at 19 Harding Street, Coburg has been identified as a suitable site for the proposed Aspire Sports Centre. The Coburg Bowls Club closed in 2019 due to declining membership. Since then, interim use of the site has included food relief distribution, a COVID-19 PCR testing facility and it is currently utilised on a temporary basis by the Merri-bek Community Shed and the Coburg Common, a community gardening group.

The Bachar Houli Foundation has indicated that the site offers advantages for their proposal, citing its central location within the Coburg sporting precinct, Coburg’s centrality and importance to Muslim communities, accessibility via public transport and the potential for integration with the Coburg City Pavilion to expand community use.

**Planning Considerations**

Development and use of the land for the Aspire Sports Centre will require a planning permit under the Merri-bek Planning Scheme. Council will have two roles being the landowner and the statutory planning decision maker (or Responsible Authority). When Council is acting as the Responsible Authority, it is important that the planning decision relies on documentation included in the planning application (e.g. traffic & parking reports), any objections received from the community, external referral comments (e.g. Department of Transport) and the policy guidance and controls within the Merri-bek Planning Scheme. At this preliminary stage there is no guarantee that a planning permit will be granted. The policies within the Merri-bek Planning Scheme, reveal the following key considerations:

 Appropriate provision of car parking, which must include expert and independent car parking and traffic analysis;

 Any new building must be appropriately sited to be respectful of the heritage listed Coburg City Oval grandstand; and

 Any new building must be of high architectural quality and must include passive surveillance of adjoining public spaces.

The next steps would be for a pre-application meeting to be lodged with Council. A pre-application meeting will provide a forum to ideally resolve any key issues, detail the process and information requirements which will include expert reports.

**Funding Strategy**

The Bachar Houli Foundation has been given a commitment of funding of $15M from Commonwealth Department of Home Affairs Modernised Multicultural Grants Program (Infrastructure for Multicultural Organisations stream) and has submitted a grant application to the Victorian Government Building Fund for Non-Government Schools for funding of up to $6 million, with an outcome anticipated by October 2025 and a preliminary indication expected sooner. Council provided a letter of support to accompany the application, which supported the intent of the proposal in alignment with the July 2024 Council resolution.

**Community Benefits**

The proposed Aspire Sports Centre has the potential to deliver a range of community benefits including social, educational, and sporting outcomes. The facility is expected to contribute to community well-being by increasing access to sports, education, and shared spaces with a focus on increasing women and girls access to sporting facilities and participation.

Community Benefits:

 Sporting opportunities: new indoor courts and recreational spaces, promoting healthier lifestyles.

 Inclusive participation: facilities that will support programs for women, youth, and culturally diverse groups.

 Educational impact: dedicated learning spaces for the Islamic College of Sport, integrating sports with education.

 Community spaces: multi-purpose rooms that could host meetings, events, and activities, fostering social cohesion.

Immediate Benefits:

 Addressing the basketball court shortage: Merri-bek currently has only seven indoor courts, with one court per 24,480 residents, exceeding recommended standards. The Coburg Basketball Stadium is at full capacity, limiting opportunities for local clubs and associations.

 Increased court access: additional courts may help meet demand, supporting junior participation and local competitions.

 Public access: opportunities for evening and weekend use by the wider community.

If realised, these outcomes would significantly enhance Merri-bek’s community infrastructure, increasing local sporting and educational opportunities. The Bachar Houli Foundation have undertaken a Qualitative Social and Economic Impact Analysis Report which outlines the range of community benefits the Aspire Sports Centre would deliver to the Merri-bek community and is shown in **Attachment 2.**

**Key Lease Terms, Facility Management and Community Use**

The following has been proposed by the Bachar Houli Foundation for the Aspire Sports Centre operations. These terms should be considered as a starting point for further negotiations as lease details are negotiated.

Lease Structure

 Council Ownership: Council will own the capital improved asset upon project completion.

 Term: a 30-year peppercorn lease with a 10-year extension option, exercisable by the Bachar Houli Foundation.

 Rate: peppercorn rent, consistent with other Not-for-Profit and community-based leasing arrangements.

 Permitted use: The lease may permit core and related activities of the Bachar Houli Foundation and the Islamic College of Sport. It will include consent for the Bachar Houli Foundation to license the Centre to the College for educational use during school hours.

Responsibilities:

 Bachar Houli Foundation: day-to-day operations, programming, and managing community access. This includes the allocation of and charging to use the facility between various user groups, with revenue retained by the Bachar Houli Foundation to assist with operating the facility.

 Bachar Houli Foundation**:** to meet day to day operating costs of the Centre (eg: utilities, cleaning/waste management, security, IT, venue staff).

 Council: to assume responsibility for repairs, ongoing maintenance, asset lifecycle replacement, and insurance costs.

Community Use - User Schedule

 Bachar Houli Foundation and Islamic College of Sport priority use: weekdays, 8:00 AM – 3:30 PM (school terms), with community or other school use possible when available.

 School Holidays: priority allocated to Bachar Houli Foundation programs, with community sports scheduled in available times.

 Daily early access (6:00 AM – 8:00 AM): shared use for Islamic College of Sport or community sports and activities.

 Weekday evenings (4:00 PM – 10:00 PM): allocated for Islamic College of Sport or community sports.

 Weekends (8:00 AM – 10:00 PM): reserved for community sports and activities.

Governance and Reporting:

 Usage terms in lease: the lease will include a usage schedule to ensure community sporting access outside of Bachar Houli Foundation and Islamic College of sport hours.

 Annual reporting: Bachar Houli Foundation proposes submitting annual reports to Council covering facility usage, participation rates, and community engagement.

 Operational review: periodic reviews to discuss/assess alignment with community needs and Council policies.

**Leasing Process Overview**

Council must address several statutory and policy obligations when considering a 30-year peppercorn lease or similar with the Bachar Houli Foundation. These obligations are guided by the Local Government Act 2020, Council’s Leasing and Licensing Policy, and Procurement Policy.

Council can lease land for up to 50 years under Section 115 of the Local Government Act 2020, though leases exceeding 10 years are generally exceptions requiring a specific Council resolution. If the lease exceeds 10 years or was not included in the budget process, Council must conduct a public consultation process in line with Council’s Community Engagement Policy.

Council’s Leasing and Licensing Policy permits longer-term leases when specific conditions are met, such as substantial tenant contributions to capital works, conditions from funding bodies, or service level agreements with the tenant.

Although leases are typically exempt from procurement processes under Section 108 of the Local Government Act, to ensure transparency and good governance Council will ensure proper probity practices are in place including the option to appoint an external probity auditor. The leasing process generally involves:

 Council Report: to signal intention and commence consultation.

 Public Consultation: conducted for a minimum of four weeks.

 Review of submissions: consideration and analysis of community feedback.

 Pre-lease negotiation: conducted alongside consultation.

 Final Council resolution: to approve and execute the lease agreement.

**Design and Construction Delivery Timeline**

The Bachar Houli Foundation has provided a preliminary construction programme shown in **Attachment 3,** for the Aspire Sports Centre, outlining key stages from November 2024 to December 2027. Officers note that a project of this scale and complexity would realistically take no less than three years, assuming no major delays.

The program sets out design and planning stages for 2025, with construction starting in mid-2026 and completion by late 2027. As this is a preliminary timeline proposed by the Foundation, it should be viewed as indicative and subject to refinement through further discussions and detailed project planning.

If the project progresses, Councils role as landowner will include maintaining oversight of all key stages of the development, while the Bashar Houli Foundation will focus on operational aspects of the construction process.

### 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 environmentally sustainable design outcomes for stadiums and school facilities.

### Economic sustainability implications

The project is expected to deliver over $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, including local employment opportunities.

### 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

### Stakeholder Consultation and Engagement

Between November and December 2024, the Bachar Houli Foundation consulted with key stakeholders including community members, local schools, community groups and sports associations to inform the Aspire Sports Centre’s development. These discussions focused on facility needs, community use, and inclusivity. Key themes from the consultation included:

Facility Demand and Design:

 High demand for indoor courts, particularly for basketball and netball.

 Preference for versatile, year-round hard-floor courts and training spaces.

 Interest in classrooms for community training and development.

Women and Girls’ Participation:

 Support for female-only spaces and programs.

 Interest in activities encouraging mother-daughter participation.

Social Inclusion and Community Engagement:

 Desire for programs fostering intercultural connections and inclusive events.

 Need to balance competitive and social sport offerings.

Accessibility and Community Access:

 Calls for all-abilities access and inclusive design.

 Importance of community access alongside the Foundations operations.

Stakeholders strongly supported the proposal to develop the Aspire Sports Centre, highlighting the important community benefits, inclusivity, and diverse participation opportunities. The full stakeholder engagement report is shown in **Attachment 4.**

It is important to note that Council has not yet led any community engagement on this proposal. If the project proceeds a community and stakeholder engagement plan will be developed in line with Councils Community Engagement Policy.

Existing site users have been consulted in the preparation of this Report and provided initial input on their relocation needs should the proposal be pursued.

### Communications

A detailed communications plan will be developed subject to Councils endorsement of the proposal.

## 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 Bachar Houli Foundation have developed a preliminary 10-year operating and financial model for the Aspire Sports Centre, prepared with input from consultants as shown in **Attachment 5.**

The model presents three scenarios: expected, conservative, and very conservative—each reflecting varying utilisation rates of the facility’s courts and gym spaces.

While Bachar Houli Foundation proposes to secure all capital funding and manage day-to-day operations, the financial model includes an annual Council contribution to reflect its asset ownership responsibilities, to cover the following cost estimates:

 Repairs and maintenance: 0.4% of the $20.1M estimated trade build cost (the $24M figure reflects the full cost of the project including contingencies and consultants etc).

 Asset lifecycle sinking fund: 1.4% of the estimated build trade cost.

 Building insurance: 0.15% of the estimated build trade cost.

Combined, these costs are estimated to total approximately $113,200 in the first year (2028/29), increasing annually with CPI adjustments and escalating repairs and maintenance requirements. By 2037/38, the Council’s estimated contribution reaches approximately $392,200 per annum. Over the full 10-year period, the cumulative Council contribution is approximately $3.28 million.

This annual cost is considered reasonable given the cost of other similar sized projects and the significant capital investment and community benefit that comes from the infrastructure versus the cost of Council delivering the infrastructure itself.

## 7. Implementation

Subject to Council’s decision, officers will continue to liaise with the Bachar Houli Foundation to refine the proposal and operational terms.

A further report will be presented to Council setting out any adjusted lease terms, potential relocation options for existing users at the former Coburg Bowls Club, funding updates, further design and planning considerations and draft community engagement plan.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Aspire Sports Centre - Concept Design Feasibility | D25/92336 |  |
| **2** | Aspire Sports Centre - Impact Analysis - December 2024 | D25/38355 |  |
| **3** | Aspire Sports Centre - Preliminary Works Programme | D25/38383 |  |
| **4** | Bachar Houli Foundation - Stakeholder Engagement Summary December 2024 | D25/38364 |  |
| **5** | Aspire Sports Centre - Preliminary Operational Summary and Financial Model | D25/92350 |  |

7.3 Victoria Mall - Improving Safety, Cleanliness and Community Wellbeing

**Director Community Eamonn Fennessy**

**Community Wellbeing**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes that additional security services in Victoria Mall Coburg are in place to protect community and staff safety; and that these additional services are under frequent officer review, and are expected to continue until July 2025 and potentially beyond, as required.

2. Notes that the future scope, extent and approach of the security services will be reviewed and determined by Council officers in the next two months.

3. Refers approximate costs of $250,000 (to fund six months’ additional security costs) to the 2024/25 Quarter 3 budget review process and the 2025/26 budget process for consideration.

4. Continues the enhanced street cleansing arrangements that are now in place for Victoria Mall.

5. Resolves to hold a Community Safety and Needs Forum for central Coburg in May 2025, open to the community and stakeholders, including traders, service providers, sports clubs and community leaders and that the forum consider how the community can safely use the space in front of Coburg Library in Victoria Mall.

6. Requests officers to continue to explore ways to better engage with people displaying dangerous and antisocial behavior, including forms of assertive social support and outreach.

7. Notes that any future consideration for replacing seats in the Mall will be determined by officers, following a comprehensive assessment of staff safety risks and community safety.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

Victoria Mall is a much-loved community and civic space in the heart of Coburg, containing a range of retail and hospitality businesses and Coburg Library.

Unfortunately, in the past year, violent and threatening behavior, accompanied by crime and antisocial behaviour, have increased dramatically in and around Victoria Mall. This includes a recent assault on a library staff member. These events are unfortunately associated with an intensifying street-based drug use culture. The behaviours have affected the safety of Library staff, traders, shoppers and diners. Local trade has also been impacted.

To respond to this situation, in December 2024 Council established a temporary seven day a week security presence in Victoria Mall and surrounds. This service is run by experienced security personnel, trained in de-escalation techniques, who have worked closely to support staff and traders, respond to incidents, and refer people to support services where relevant. (The Library social worker has also provided support to people who require it at Coburg Mall.) Feedback from the community and traders is that security is having a positive impact and should be continued.

As an employer, Council has a serious responsibility for staff occupational health and safety, as well as public safety. Earlier this year officers removed the bench seating from the front of the library because they had become a hot spot for drug related activity and consequentially unpredictable and often violent behaviors immediately adjacent to the Library. This decision was made to protect staff at the library and the community and to defuse an unsustainable and escalating pattern of behaviors. In the month that the seats have been removed, there has been a marked decrease in antisocial behavior in Coburg Library and Victoria Mall.

Since January Council has enhanced the level of street cleaning and general amenity services in Victoria Mall and this has had a positive impact on community experience.

This report addresses a range of issues for Councils consideration in relation to continued efforts regarding safety and reducing risk, cleanliness, engaging with violent and antisocial people, and community engagement in Victoria Mall Coburg.

**Previous Council Decision**

**Improving safety, cleanliness and wellbeing of community at Victoria Mall** – 12 February 2025

*That Council receives a report by mid-March that considers:*

*1. Security*

*In the interests of public safety, Council extends the current level of Security Services in Victoria Mall with these security services to be trained in and have a focus on de-escalation, for a period of a further 6 months and undertakes a review of the impact of these services within the next 3 months.*

*2. Cleanliness*

*Maintains and seeks to increase the cleaning services in the Mall, so that rubbish, tree debris and pigeon droppings are properly managed. In the interests of wellbeing the community should have access to a healthy, hygienic and pleasant public space, that enhances community wellbeing and contributes to a thriving local economy.*

*3.**Community Forum*

*That Council coordinates a Community Needs and Safety Forum, which is advertised for the public to attend as well as all stakeholders, including Council, traders, service providers, sports clubs, community leaders to have an input into community safety in central Coburg. This forum should consider ways of turning the area in front of the Coburg Library into a community space.*

*4. Exploring ways to better engage with people displaying dangerous and antisocial behaviour*

*To keep the community safe, address safety concerns, and reassure shoppers, traders, and the community, Council explores methods for better engaging with people displaying dangerous and antisocial behaviour.*

*5. Reinstating public seating with back rests and access to shelter in Coburg Mall*

*In the interests of elderly people. people with mobility issues and others, Council to consider reinstating public seating with back rests in Coburg Mall. Consideration should be given to providing an equivalent amount of public seating to that which was demolished, and some of the new seating to be in front of the library with a table.*

**Support for Central Coburg Businesses and Community** – 11 September 2024

*That Council:*

*1. Notes the long-term planning underway to revitalise Central Coburg, as kickstarted by the recent Coburg Conversation community engagement.*

*2. Notes Council’s existing and strengthening relationship with the Central Coburg Business Association, recognising the importance and value of thriving local businesses for economic development, placemaking and creating a sense of community.*

*3. Notes the complex and intersectional needs of some of the people frequenting the Victoria Street Mall and acknowledges that punitive approaches to managing complex needs does not resolve issues.*

*4. Organises a meeting for Council officers, local businesses, Victoria Police and the Central Coburg Business Association and any other relevant stakeholders to discuss possible short and medium-term interventions to increase both actual and perceived safety and create a more inviting space for the Coburg community in Victoria Mall and receives a report on the outcomes of this meeting, officer recommendations and possible next steps in the first half of 2025.*

## 1. Policy Context

This report aligns with the following themes of the Council Plan (2021–2025):

 Vibrant spaces and places in Merri-bek

 A healthy and caring Merri-bek

 Moving and living safely in Merri-bek

The Merri-bek Economic Development Action Plan (2024-2027) outlines how Council supports local businesses and the local economy.

The Local Government Act 2020 outlines the accountabilities the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) has for staff and ‘ensuring the effective and efficient management of the day-to-day operations of the Council’.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 outlines the accountabilities and a duty of care that Council has to its employee to ensure a safe workplace, in particular the elimination and or reduction of risks.

The Victorian Government will introduce new regulations later in 2025 strengthening how psychological hazards (such as aggression, occupational violence and exposure to traumatic events) in workplaces are managed with new compliance guidance for employers on how to meet their duties under the proposed regulations.

## 2. Background

For many decades Victoria Mall has been a much-loved community and civic space in the heart of Coburg. It is renowned as a local place, to meet and linger, shop or dine at one end and visit the Coburg Library at the other.

Unfortunately, in the last year, crime and antisocial behavior has increased dramatically in and around Victoria Mall, driven by an increasing street-based drug use culture in the area. This has included bashings; a stabbing; targeted attacks and harassment of women, children and older people; axe attacks on shop windows and vehicles; visible drug dealing and drug using; theft; public nudity, urination and defecation; and aggressive begging have left traders, shoppers and diners, library staff and patrons, and the broader community anxious and in distress.

In the last six months traders in Victoria Mall had reported a decline in trade, with local people anecdotally too scared to visit Victoria Mall due to the unpredictable and frightening behavior they experience while doing their shopping or having a coffee or a meal.

To address staff and community safety, in December 2024 Council established a seven day a week (business hours) security presence in Victoria Mall and surrounds on a temporary basis. This is run by highly experienced security personnel, who are trained and use de-escalation techniques and work in a relational way with people exhibiting dangerous and antisocial behavior. A large part of this approach is clearly defining what is acceptable behavior and what is not, but it also involves, where possible, referring people to other support services, such as drug and alcohol support services.

The security team have worked closely to support traders and respond to incidents. Their presence has been well received by traders and there is a sense that safety and thus the experience for traders and the community has improved.

The staff and patrons at Coburg Library, also in Victoria Mall, have equally experienced frequent and frightening behavior in and around the library. More recently this has included an assault on a library staff member.

As an employer, Council has serious responsibilities for staff occupational health and safety. Earlier this year officers made the decision to remove the bench seating from the front of the library because they had become an epicenter of drug related activity and consequentially unpredictable and often violent behaviors. This decision was made to protect staff at the library and the community and to diffuse an unsustainable and escalating pattern of behaviors. In the month that the seats have been removed there has been a marked decrease in antisocial behavior in Coburg Library and Victoria Mall.

In January 2025 Council introduced an enhanced level of street cleaning and general amenity services to Victoria Mall. This has had a positive impact on community experience and has been well received.

## 3. Issues

### Community impact

### Security

Council has engaged temporary specialist security services to support the community, library staff and traders in and around Victoria Mall since December 2024. This service was put in place following an escalation of assaults, threats and other behaviours. Council enacted a similar security presence temporarily in the summer of 2023/24 until winter 2024 following a stabbing outside Coburg Library and escalation of frightening antisocial behaviour.

Security officers conduct regular foot patrols across Victoria Mall, including high-traffic areas, parking facilities, and entry/exit points. The service operates during business hours, seven days a week.

The provider deploys several specialist security personnel throughout the mall. Given the complex nature of the behaviours experienced in Victoria Mall, the officers engaged are specifically trained and highly experienced in de-escalation practices. Their approach is to de-escalate, to engage problematic individuals as well as to refer them into other specialist support services and other agencies wherever possible. This has included liaising closely with the library social worker service, based at Coburg Library, and with drug and alcohol services.

The current security arrangements have had a significant and successful impact on reducing and deterring unwelcome, unwanted and unsafe behaviours in Victoria Mall. Feedback from staff, shoppers and traders has been very positive, with many appreciating the heightened visibility of security.

Due to the volatile nature of the situation in Victoria Mall, security arrangements are expected to continue until at least July 2025. A review will be undertaken within the next two months to determine the future scope, extent and approach of the service. If necessary, the arrangements will be extended further.

A separate security presence operates within Coburg Library to support library staff and library patrons.

### Coburg Library safety

Coburg Library is Merri-bek’s busiest library and attracts over 200,000 visitors a year. The library operates Monday to Friday from 9am to 8pm, on Saturday from 9am to 4pm and on Sunday from 1pm to 5pm.

In the last year, the impact of antisocial, violent and criminal behaviours on library staff safety and wellbeing has been significant. This is unacceptable in any workplace. Staff have reported over 200 incidents relating to occupational violence and behaviours of concern, frequent reporting and calling police and security for assistance. More recently this has sadly included an assault on a library worker.

Victoria Mall and in particular the seats in front of the library had become a meeting place for drug use and other antisocial and criminal behaviour and this was frequently spilling into and disrupting the library, including the libraries toilets. This has had a profound impact on both staff safety and wellbeing and the safety and experience of library patrons including children and older people.

The safety of Merri-bek staff is taken very seriously. The CEO and senior staff have responsibility for staff safety and wellbeing and under both the Local Government Act 2020 and the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 and will do whatever is required to ensure a safe workplace for Council staff.

In the past month this has included removing bench seating from outside the library which had become a magnet for antisocial, violent and criminal behaviours in Victoria Mall. In recent years the front windows of the library, some of which are next to the children’s book collection, have been frosted due to inappropriate and unsafe behaviour occurring on the seats such as public nudity and sexual acts.

The large timber table that was in front of the library was set on fire and very badly damaged in late 2024 and has since been removed and stored.

### Cleanliness and amenity

Since January 2025 Council has deployed additional and enhanced street cleaning services in Victoria Mall to improve amenity. This includes:

Monday – Friday Service:

 Pressure cleaning of all of Victoria Mall, including outside Coburg Library on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings.

 This includes addressing high volume pigeon feeding/excrement locations.

PM Service Weekdays:

 The ‘hot spot’ team drop in and check Victoria Mall, collect any rubbish and debris and check if public litter bins need to be tipped early and attend to them if needed.

Weekend Service:

 Footpath Sweeper goes through and does an early morning clean of Victoria Mall.

 Two staff do a clean-up of this area with a three-hour shift on site, usually between 9am – 12pm.

Cleanliness of the public dining area is the responsibility of the shop owners as part of their footpath trading agreements and permits.  An issue that can impact amenity in Victoria Mall is when the public litter bins are used for business waste. This and stacking bags around the bins, can add additional pressure and time to the cleaning regime.

This enhanced level of service is considered suitable at present however will be monitored and can be adjusted when required.

### Community forum 30 January 2025

In line with the Council resolution of September 2024, a Safety Information Evening was held on Thursday 30 January 2025 at Coburg Library with Central Coburg Business Association, Council and Victoria Police.

This was a well-attended event with over forty traders attending to hear about Council’s current interventions in Victoria Mall, to hear from Victoria Police about the current situation and police response as well as practical tips on how traders could address safety and report crime.

Attendees shared the impact that the current criminal and antisocial behaviour in Coburg was having on them and their businesses, and on the community. The session included a Question and Answer session with Victoria Police and Council officers.

At its February 2025 meeting Council requested coordination of a further ‘Community Needs and Safety Forum’, for the public to attend as well as all stakeholders, traders, service providers, sports clubs, community leaders to have an input into community safety in central Coburg. Council requested this forum should consider ways of turning the area in front of the Coburg Library into a community space.

It is recommended that this Forum is scheduled in May 2025, given the relatively recent event with traders and police. Outcomes of the Forum will be reported to Councillors and stakeholders.

### Better engaging with people displaying dangerous and antisocial behaviour

Council’s security providers are specifically trained and highly experienced in de-scalation practices. Their approach is to de-escalate, minimise harm and actively engage with problematic individuals displaying dangerous and antisocial behaviour.

This approach includes building rapport with individuals, some of whom are frequently in the area, as well as referring them into other specialist support services and support other agencies wherever possible. This has included liaising closely with the library social worker who has been based at Coburg Library and with local drug, alcohol and mental health services.

This engagement is complex, time consuming and at times unwanted by people displaying dangerous and antisocial behaviours. In instances where dangerous and antisocial behaviour cannot be de-escalated and is a significant risk to public safety, the support and intervention of Victoria Police is required.

Council has run a Library Social Worker trial for 18 months and many individuals seeking support have been assisted through this program at Coburg Library.

Forms of assertive social support and outreach suitable to engage with people displaying dangerous and antisocial behavior require further investigation. It is recommended that officers continue to explore these approaches, the costs, benefits and risks, and provide a future briefing to Council on options.

### Reinstating public seating with back rests and access to shelter in Victoria Mall

The long timber bench seats outside the Coburg Library on Victoria Street were removed in early February 2025 due to serious occupational health and safety concerns for library staff and for community safety concerns. The seats had become a hotspot for drug dealing and use and unpredictable, antisocial and often violent behaviour, frequently spilling into the library.

The large timber table was removed in late 2024 due to arson-related damage.

At this stage in the interests of staff and community safety, these seats will not be immediately reinstated. Any future consideration for replacing the seats will be determined by officers, following a comprehensive assessment of OHS risks, including psychological hazards and community safety.

The seats outside the entry to Coburg Library remain. There is other public seating throughout Victoria Mall and officers will review these with regard to the provision of seats with back rests.

### Economic sustainability implications

Antisocial and criminal behaviours have at times impacted trade and confidence in local businesses in Victoria Mall. While this has improved with recent Council interventions, including a security presence, it will be important to continue to monitor economic impacts and impacts on trade and seek feedback from traders through the Central Coburg Business Association.

### Legal and risk considerations

There are no legal considerations arising from the recommendations in this report. Some of the recommendations, such as continuing security arrangements and not replacing bench seating in front of the library are a direct response to significant risks to community safety and OHS risks to Council staff. Risks to staff safety are serious and are being addressed through Council’s obligations under the provisions of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004.

### 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

‘The Coburg Conversation’ engaged with over 1300 community members in late 2023 to hear about what people value now about central Coburg now and their aspirations for the future of central Coburg.

A Safety Information Evening was held on Thursday 30 January 2025 at Coburg Library with Central Coburg Traders Association, Council and Victoria Police. Attendees heard about Council’s current safety interventions in Victoria Mall and from Victoria Police about the current situation and how traders could address safety and report crime. Attendees shared the impact that the current criminal and antisocial behaviour in Coburg was having on them and their businesses, and on the community.

It is recommended that Council hold a Community Safety and Needs Forum for central Coburg in May 2025. This would be open to the community, stakeholders, including traders, service providers, sports clubs and community leaders; and that the forum consider how the community can safely use the space in front of Coburg Library in Victoria Mall.

Council also liaises frequently with Victoria Police, local service providers and the Central Coburg Business Association about community safety issues in central Coburg.

### Communications

A communications plan will be developed that provides information to traders and the community about the current and proposed interventions in Victoria Mall. This will include onsite information about the recent public seating removal outside the Coburg Library.

## 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 continue with security in Victoria Mall are unbudgeted. Costs of up to $250,000 required to fund security for a further six months will be referred to the 2024/25 Quarter 3 budget review process and if required the 2025/26 budget process for consideration. This amount may be adjusted down if a reduced service is considered appropriate.

Other costs such as cleaning can be accommodated within existing operational budgets.

## 7. Implementation

Additional security arrangements will continue in Victoria Mall until at least July 2025. This will be informed by a review in the next two months to determine the scope and approach required in consultation with the security provider. Additional security arrangements may be required beyond July.

The current enhanced cleaning regime for Victoria Mall will continue and where required can be adjusted given conditions.

A community forum will be designed, scheduled and promoted to occur in May 2025.

Officers will continue to explore ways to better engage with people displaying dangerous and antisocial behaviour. As an example, this could include forms of assertive social support and outreach. A future briefing will be provided to Council on the costs, risks and benefits of such an approach.

## Attachment/s

There are no attachments for this report.

**7.4 Lygon Street - Requests Arising from Community Forum**

**Director City Infrastructure, Anita Curnow**

**Transport**

**Officer Recommendation**

That Council:

1. Notes the considerable progress with implementing improvements under Council’s control for Lygon Street as outlined in this report, and ongoing advocacy efforts.

2. Refers to the 2025/26 Budget process consideration of $40,000 to undertake an infrastructure and street furniture audit on Lygon Street to declutter the street from unnecessary infrastructure.

3. Advocates to the State Government to install accessible tram stops on Lygon Street and at that time to review the use of the kerb lane on sections of Lygon Street north of Weston Street to consider parklets, kerb buildouts and in-road tree planting.

4. Advocates to the State Government for a 30 km/h speed limit trial in the Lygon Street precinct to improve road safety and improve streetscape amenity.

5. Advocates to the State Government for improved pedestrian wait times at traffic lights and the installation of a call-up button for cyclists at the Lygon Street/Albert Street intersection.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

On Thursday 25 July 2024 the Brunswick Residents Network (BRN) and Walk-On Merri-bek hosted a community forum named “Make Lygon Street SPARKLE”. The organisers of the forum also undertook a survey of attendees and developed a report. Key concerns highlighted in the report and survey results relate to road safety, the amenity of Lygon Street, and the impact this has on Lygon Street businesses and users.

Following the forum a service request was received by officers to prepare a report considering the items discussed at the forum for council to consider by March 2025.

Council has undertaken a range of work in recent years to improve road safety and streetscape amenity on Lygon Street. While Lygon Street is a council-managed road, potential to impact tram operations means engagement with the State Government is required on proposed changes to the way Lygon Street functions.

This report outlines potential actions Council could undertake to address issues raised by the forum organisers, as well as the advocacy work required to enable wider change to more significantly improve safety and amenity on Lygon Street.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Council Meeting Minutes** – 14 August 2024

*Public question: “Will you commission a report on road safety issues on Lygon Street?”*

*Director of City Infrastructure response: “Council officers will prepare a Council report to be considered by Council in March 2025 which consider road safety, urban design and economic issues on the Lygon Street corridor. The report will consider resourcing and funding requirements and potential timeframes for any implementation along with potential advocacy opportunities.”*

**1. Policy Context**

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

Moving Around Merri-bek was adopted at the March 2024 Council Meeting. The Strategy seeks to ensure all actions impacting the council’s transport network contribute to objectives aligned to the values of Safe, Accessible, Sustainable, Healthy, Liveable, and Inclusive. There is no specific recommendation for Lygon Street. However, these objectives in Moving Around Merri-bek (2024) are relevant for addressing issues experienced on Lygon Street:

 Create streets where everyone feels safe.

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

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

 Reduce air and noise pollution generated from vehicles.

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

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

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

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

Moving Around Merri-bek uses the Movement and Place framework to determine what streets should look like and how they should function. A street type in this framework is “*Activity Streets & Boulevards*” which Lygon Street would fall under. This type can have a low to high movement classification as well as a low to high place classification.

The Pedestrian Network chapter states: "*There are many elements beyond the footpath that are important for supporting and enabling people to get around on the pedestrian network. Seating, lighting, wayfinding signage, and trees and other greenery can all help us when walking or wheeling on the pedestrian network. We will look to enhance our pedestrian amenity in and to activity centres and along the Principal Pedestrian Network (part of the Victorian Government’s transport hierarchy).”* Lygon Street is part of the Principal Pedestrian Network.

The Cycle Network chapter mentions that “*we will be pro-active in rolling-out bike parking where needed, particularly in activity centres, including for new larger e-bikes and cargo bikes*.” In addition, safer intersections and crossing points for cyclists is mentioned.

The Public Transport chapter specifies: "*Ensure all tram stops are fully accessible in line with our Reshaping Brunswick Advocacy document*". Lygon Street has tram 1 and tram 6 operating on the street.

The Driving Network chapter states we will adopt a Safe System Approach to road safety and the Movement and Place framework will be used to develop a clear road hierarchy for how to apply this. Relevant for Lygon Street is the statement to balance the use of kerbside space as managing competing demands for this space in high-demand areas requires careful consideration.

The Land Use chapter states that we will support people to live, work, buy and play locally and that we will support the creation of great places. We aim to further strengthen our activity centres and key destinations that are socially and economically enriching and vibrant.

**Brunswick Structure Plan Reference Document (2018)**

The Brunswick Structure Plan Reference Document 2018 is a consolidation of all past adopted Structure Plans relevant to Brunswick Structure Plan Area and Activity Centre. It provides the strategic planning framework for the three major corridors in the Brunswick Activity Centre, bring Sydney Road, Lygon Street and Nicholson Street.

The objectives relating to Lygon Street under the Transport and Movement theme and the Public Realm and Open Space theme are listed below.

**Transport and Movement**

***Objectives***

4.4.32 To promote a hierarchy of movement corridors that centres on Lygon Street as the main north-south link and identifies key east-west links that provide connections to Sydney Road and Nicholson Street.

***Strategies***

4.4.33 Prioritise the enhancement of the Lygon Street pedestrian corridor through upgrading of footpaths, improved pedestrian crossings, street seating and maximum street wall heights that ensure adequate solar access.

4.4.34 Identify the following key east-west pedestrian streets as priorities for pedestrian access and amenity:

 Brunswick Road

 Glenlyon Road

 Albert Street

 Victoria Street

 Stewart Street

4.4.35 Identify and enhance areas to promote the interchange between different transport nodes, particularly north-south tram routes and east-west bus routes.

***Public Realm***

***Objectives***

4.6.40 To develop three distinct hubs connected by a network of smaller public spaces which encourage active uses along the length of Lygon Street and offer areas of rest and respite along the way.

4.6.41 To improve the legibility, accessibility and appearance of the street, by the upgrading of footpaths, furniture and signage, and installing several new pedestrian crossing points.

4.6.42 To improve pedestrian links along Albert Street to Fleming Park and along Stewart Street to CERES further east.

***Strategies***

4.6.43 Improve the parks located in East Brunswick, including Fleming Park.

4.6.44 Construct landscaped kerb extensions (incorporating WSUD tree pits or rain garden, where possible) in side streets.

4.6.45 Improve pedestrian access to Fleming Park by planting trees on the north side of Albert Street, installing wayfinding signage, and creating a shared zone at the interface with Fleming Park.

4.6.46 Implement the following public realm and open space projects in accordance with the Brunswick Public Realm and Infrastructure Strategy, as follows:

a) Urban Public Spaces

i. New pedestrian priority spaces at Albion/Lygon intersection (P7)

ii. New public space at the Maternal and Child Health Centre (P8)

b) Key Pedestrian Streets

i. Improve pedestrian amenity on Lygon Street (S6)

ii. Improve pedestrian amenity on Stewart Street (S7)

iii. Improve pedestrian amenity on Albert Street (S8)

c) Kerb Extensions

i. Upgrade kerb extensions at Stewart Street (K6)

ii. New kerb extension and activation program at Pitt Street (K7)

iii. New kerb extension at O’Connor Street (K8)

iv. New kerb extension at Piera Street (K9)

v. New kerb extension at Barkly Street (K10)

**Council Plan 2021-2025**

The Council Plan sets out Council’s and community’s vision for the future. Strategic Objective 2 relates to this report:

“To contribute to the health, safety, and security of everyone living in our diverse community and to increase safe, accessible, physically active and enjoyable ways to get around Merri‑bek, especially via walking, cycling and public transport.”

**Zero Carbon Merri-bek**

Council’s Zero Carbon Merri‑bek 2040 Framework outlines the community vision and strategic directions for the transition to zero carbon in Merri-bek by 2040. In 2019/20, transport was recorded to contribute 17 per cent of all carbon emissions in the Merri‑bek local government area and 13 per cent were from private motor vehicles.

Council resolved in December 2021 to adopt an interim target towards the Zero Carbon by 2040 goal of a reduction of emissions by 75 per cent by 2030.

**Victorian Road Safety Strategy 2021–2030**

The Victorian Road Safety Strategy 2021–2030 sets out the vision of zero road deaths by 2050 with the following objectives:

 Ensure all Victorians are safe and feel safe on and around our roads.

 Halve road deaths and progressively reduce serious injuries by 2030.

 Embed a culture of road safety within the Victorian community.

 Deliver a suite of initiatives that are achievable and have an impact in the short term, but also prepare Victoria for the future.

In the Action Plan for 2021 to 2030, the following actions have been identified by the Victorian Government to improve safety across the network:

 We’ll update our Speed Zoning Policy and technical guidelines. The updated policy and guidelines will be informed by the feedback from local governments and communities.

 Through the Safe Local Roads and Streets Program we’re working with local governments, as road managers and key partners in driving road safety, to fund and support projects that improve local road safety.

 We’re rolling out a road and roadside safety policy to help align projects with the Safe System approach and to prioritise proven infrastructure and treatments in road design.

 Through the Commonwealth Road Safety Program and Federal Blackspot Program, we are working with our Commonwealth partners to deliver targeted road safety infrastructure solutions across the network.

 Responding to keen interest from local governments and their communities, we’ll consider proposals for speed limit reductions in areas with significant interface between pedestrians and bicyclists and vehicles.

Also in the 2021 to 2030 Action Plan are actions the Victorian Government will take to support vulnerable and unprotected road users – pedestrians, cyclists, micromobility users and motorcyclists – to feel safe and be safe on and around our road network. This includes:

 We will improve the safety of signals at urban intersections that see a high interface between pedestrians and vehicles.

 We will use compliance and enforcement to support safety for vulnerable and unprotected road users.

 We will continue to invest in motorcycle safety infrastructure improvements on priority routes.

 We’re rolling out programs to provide Safe System compliant infrastructure for cyclists and pedestrians.

**2. Background**

On Thursday 25 July 2024 the Brunswick Residents Network (BRN) and Walk-On Merri-bek hosted a community forum named “Make Lygon Street SPARKLE”. Approximately 50 people attended including residents, traders, Brunswick MP, Council staff and Councillors.

Brunswick Residents Network circulated a survey following the forum and received 43 responses. In addition, they submitted a report “Make Lygon Street SPARKLE: Safe; Pedestrians; Accessible; Resplendent; Klassy Luminous; Enticing” to Council in which they outline the key themes discussed at the forum. The report included desired actions from Council, the survey responses and comments received, and Dr Bunting’s introduction talk at the forum about traffic safety and amenity on Lygon Street.

The advocacy of BRN and Walk-On Merri-bek was informed by their analysis of crash statistics on Lygon Street. This analysis shows that Lygon Street, East Brunswick is a traffic and safety hot spot for pedestrians, motorcyclists and cyclists. One in every 10 serious crashes involving pedestrians in Merri-bek occurs on Lygon Street, with similar proportions for cyclists and motorcyclists. For pedestrians, Lygon Street is particularly dangerous at night.

The “Make Lygon Street SPARKLE” report requests actions by Council, categorised into three themes that emerged during the forum: 1) Council communications and bureaucracy, 2) Traffic and transport issues, and 3) Amenity and attractiveness. Officers have reviewed recent projects and initiatives undertaken by Council in the Lygon Street precinct that relate to these themes as well as what additional action could be considered.

Lygon Street is a council-managed road. However the State Government has an interest in Lygon Street because of tram operations, and while Council enforces the peak-hour Clearways, installation, amendment and removal of Clearways requires State approval. These factors constrain Council’s ability to undertake wholesale changes to the way Lygon Street functions including kerb lane management.

Past and current advocacy to the state government has included measures that would enable Council to more effectively address issues on Lygon Street within the road carriageway and improve amenity and attractiveness of the street overall.

**3. Issues**

**Recent Council work on Lygon Street**

Some of the requested actions in the BRN report are either scheduled for delivery, in progress or have been completed. These issues and actions are detailed in the table below.

1. *Table 1 BRN Report Requests and Council work on items*

| **Issue raised in BRN report** | **Council work already undertaken** |
| --- | --- |
| Investigate speed reduction in order to limit traffic hazards on Lygon Street. | Following a fatality, the speed limit has been reduced from 50 km/h to 40 km/h between 6am and midnight. Council has advocated for a 24 hour speed reduction. Recently, advocacy has been done with the State Government to consider a 30 km/h speed limit trial in Merri‑bek, which could include the Lygon Street precinct. Approval of this would need to be granted by the state government and Yarra Trams would need to be involved in further discussions as a lower speed limit may impact tram timetables. |
| Advocate to DTP to “increase responsiveness of pedestrian lights at the Albert Street crossing” | This will be done as part of the Albert Street – Streets for People project that is currently in the design stage. Previous advocacy to improve signal operations to favour pedestrians at this location has also been undertaken. Officers discussed the relocation of pedestrian lights that belong to and are managed by DTP near Albert Street. DTP responded that relocation is not viable and therefore officers have advocated for improvement to the existing pedestrian lights. This advocacy work has happened over a long period of time with no successful outcome yet. |
| Review traffic hazards on Lygon Street. | The Transport Strategy Action Plan has an action to “Report to Council the first annual road safety report (for the 2023 calendar year) identifying trends in crash numbers and types and priority sites for future treatments.” This report is currently in development. |
| Requests Council “install raised thresholds crossings at intersections” | Council has continuously rolled out raised thresholds at side streets of Lygon Street in the past decade. This has been done at eight locations, for example Barkly Street, Weston Street and Jarvie Street. Council has now started to roll out zebra crossings on many of these raised thresholds and includes the zebra crossing at Hickford St installed in 2024. Designs for zebra crossings have been completed for Piera St, Evans St, Queen St. and St. Phillip Street. Approval from State Government has been obtained and four projects are now moving into the delivery stage. |
| “Urgently consider using parklets for greenery and seating rather than reverting to parking spaces; and review other public open space opportunities”. | Merri-bek developed a Parklet Guidelines and a new streamlined application process in 2024 which outlines that a business owner or representative is responsible for the design, construction and maintenance of a parklet. Council assesses the application and issues a permit when approved.  Council engaged closely with the businesses at the south end of Lygon Street prior to the removal of the temporary Council owned parklet in mid-2024 and is assisting several businesses through their application process to install their own parklets.  A new kerb extension, raingarden and street greening project is currently in design for the Pitt/Lygon Street intersection. However, this has been put on hold due to stormwater issues and a planned adjacent development that will take two years to complete. |
| “Increase greenery on Lygon Street” and to “review public open space opportunities” | A new seating area was created in front of the Maternal & Child Health Centre (318 Lygon Street) in 2016. Review of kerb lane usage on Lygon Street could unlock more significant opportunities for greening, outdoor dining and street furniture. |
| “Carrying out (already planned) review of lighting and doubling lighting in Lygon Street at least to Sydney Road levels” | A lighting assessment was undertaken by Council’s Public Lighting and Safety Officer in October 2024. Broken lights were fixed and some were upgraded to LED where required. The upgrading all lights along Lygon Street to LED was not feasible within the ongoing lighting program with the expected cost approximately $300-$400K. Officers have recommended to have Citipower change over lights under the existing Operational and Maintenance Replacement Agreement. Regardless, the lighting on Lygon Street now conforms to Australian Standards. Further consideration of lighting levels in activity centres will be considered in the review of Council’s Public Lighting Policy in mid-2025. |
| Requests “A council staff member available to give individual business owners help for applications”. | Since 2019, Council’s economic development officers have provided a concierge-style service to businesses, ‘[Business Approvals Merri-bek](https://www.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/building-and-business/business/starting-a-business/starting-a-new-business/#autoAnchor2)’ (BAM), to help businesses find out what permits they need and refer them to the relevant team(s) within Council. Officers work closely with the permit-issuing teams, including Council’s dedicated Commercial Priority Planner; and can arrange a ‘BAM Meeting’ if required. This service is regularly promoted via Council’s business e-newsletter; and will be promoted further in the second quarter 2025 with a new BAM promotional postcard.  Council also has its dedicated business pages on the website; as well as a ‘Business Hotline’ phone number (8311 4131) and e-mail ([business@merri-bek.vic.gov.au](mailto:business@merri-bek.vic.gov.au)) to support businesses with queries; and is preparing to further promote these services to Merri-bek’s 16,000+ businesses, including those in Lygon Street, throughout 2025. |
| “Review policies and strategies on graffiti removal (and general cleanliness) including council assistance, owner responsibilities, and vandalism prevention strategies.” | Council resourcing for graffiti removal currently targets activity centres and has had recent success in service improvements on Sydney Road as part of the “Love Sydney Road” program, which also addresses general cleanliness. Expanding this resourcing to Lygon Street and other activity centres may be something for Council to consider upon evaluation of the Sydney Road program at the end of 2025. Council is also working on a RenuWall (mural) project with the owners of 434 Lygon St. This program funds artists to paint walls commonly targeted for graffiti, as a means of preventing graffiti vandalism. |

**Infrastructure and street furniture audit**

A street furniture and signage audit is recommended along Lygon Street to identify opportunities to declutter pedestrian space. The removal of outdated signs and street furniture could improve the amenity of Lygon Street and create more space on the footpaths. Funding of $40,000 is required to undertake this audit and this may be referred to the 2025/26 budget process.

**Advocacy work: Call-up button and reduced pedestrian wait times**

Council has advocated for many years to reduce the wait time for pedestrians at Pedestrian Operated Signals (POS) at multiple crossings on Lygon Street. Council will continue actively seeking opportunities to progress this advocacy. As part of the Albert Street – streetscape improvement project, Council will specifically advocate for reduced pedestrian wait times at the POS just north of the Albert Street and Lygon Street intersection. In addition, Council will advocate for a bike call button to be installed on both legs on Albert Street at this intersection. This will allow cyclists to off-set the pedestrian crossing so they can cross Lygon Street more conveniently.

**Advocacy work: 30 km/h speed limit**

As part of the Moving Around Merri-bek Action Plan 2024-25, council has advocated to the state government for consideration of a 30 km/h speed zone to be considered in targeted areas of Merri-bek. Reducing the speed of Lygon Street to 30 km/h would improve road safety for all road users and amenity for visitors to the activity centre.

A 30 km/h speed limit on Lygon Street requires State Government approval. However, 30 km/h is not currently in the Victorian Speed Zoning Guidelines. Therefore Councils, including Merri‑bek, cannot implement this speed zone in their municipality, except under trial conditions.

A request to amend the Speed Zoning Guidelines was part of Merri-bek’s submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Vulnerable Road User Safety in 2023. The Victorian Government’s recently released Road Safety Action Plan responds to this advocacy with the following actions:

 We’ll update our Speed Zoning Policy and technical guidelines. The updated policy and guidelines will be informed by the feedback from local governments and communities.

 Responding to keen interest from local governments and their communities, we’ll consider proposals for speed limit reductions in areas with significant interface between pedestrians and bicyclists and vehicles.

Ahead of this Inquiry, Merri-bek City Council has worked with the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) in the past several years to plan for the delivery of a 30 km/h speed zone trial within Merri-bek. A pre-trial study was undertaken by Monash University Accident Research Centre and submitted to Council and DTP in June 2022. This study set out recommendations for identification, implementation and evaluation of 30 km/h speed limits in Merri-bek. Reducing the speed on Lygon Street requires additional negotiations with Yarra Trams as changes to speed limits require recalibration of tram operations and timetabling.

While speed limit changes alone have limited impact on real vehicle speeds, even small reductions in speed can improve road safety outcomes. When combined with additional streetscape improvements, traffic calming treatments, activation and vibrancy on Lygon Street, real vehicle speeds are more likely to drop to much safer levels.

**Advocating for accessible tram stops**

Council has advocated for all tram stops in the municipality to be accessible and for the State Government to commit to a timeline for delivery. Council’s recent advocacy regarding accessible tram stops has focussed on Sydney Road due to timing with future closures to the Upfield Line as part of Brunswick Level Crossing Removal Project. However, Council will continue to advocate for accessible tram stops, including on Lygon Street. This is in line with Council’s transport strategy Moving Around Merri-bek.

In order to deliver accessible tram stops on Lygon Street north of Weston Street, where the road width narrows, it would be necessary to either adopt ‘vehicle mounted’ footpath-level road pavement in the left hand lane (like Nicholson Street) or remove traffic altogether from the left lane at tram stops. A solution that also improves urban amenity would most likely require the latter.

If the kerb lane is not being used as a trafficable lane, Clearways would also be affected. Lygon Street has morning (7am to 9am) Clearways southbound and afternoon (4pm to 6pm) Clearways northbound, between Weston and Albion Streets. Even though Lygon Street is a Council-controlled road, Clearways are Major Traffic Control Items that require Department of Transport and Planning approval for installation, alteration (e.g. of times of operation) and removal.

Removing Clearways along all or part of the narrow section of Lygon Street to facilitate accessible tram stops would likely bring amenity improvements to the precinct. However, reduced peak-hour vehicle capacity would also impact on tram speeds and service reliability.

Officers consider that a holistic approach to kerb lane management is required for Lygon Street that accounts for tram stops, parking, loading, urban amenity and cooling improvements, trader ambitions, tram service impacts and the safety of pedestrians, bike riders, motorcyclists and other road users. Undertaking this work without the State’s involvement is considered unviable. Therefore, it is recommended that advocacy for this planning work and a commitment to accessible tram stops be sought from the State.

**Community impact**

Reducing the speed limit to 30 km/h on Lygon Street would significantly improve the health and safety of all road users on the street.

Installation of accessible tram stops would provide improved access to public transport for people with disability and those with level access boarding requirements.

**Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications**

Improving the safety and amenity of Lygon Street would likely induce more people to walk and ride to Lygon Street for transport trips, contributing to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

**Economic sustainability implications**

Council’s Economic Development team undertakes an annual vacancy audit. Audit data from November 2024 shows that 16.5 per cent of shops in Lygon Street in Brunswick East were vacant (either for lease, 5.2%, or otherwise unoccupied, 11.3%). This is 0.5 per cent more than the vacancy rate two years earlier in November 2022. The appearance, cleanliness and vibrancy of a shopping strip influences customer visitation and the desirability of the shopping strip for prospective businesses. A well-functioning and well-maintained street could be expected to have a positive economic impact on the strip.

**Human Rights Consideration**

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

Key sections in the Charter that are relevant to this report are recognition and equality before the law (section 8), freedom of movement (section 12) and taking part in public life (section 18).

The majority of the actions proposed in this report contribute positively to freedom of movement by making walking and bike riding safer and more accessible options for moving around Merri‑bek for more people.

Where treatments to improve the freedom of movement of people using some modes reduce the freedom of movement of other people, these impacts need to be weighed up and mitigated as much as possible. It is considered that the right to freedom of movement has not been unreasonably limited by the recommendations in this report.

**4. Community consultation and engagement**

No public consultation is proposed at this stage.

**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**

An infrastructure audit of Lygon Street between Park Street and Albion Street is expected to cost $40,000. This will be referred to the 2025/26 budget process.

All advocacy actions will be delivered using existing staff resources.

**7. Implementation**

All recommendations in this report can be implemented within the 2025/26 financial year.

**Attachment/s**

There are no attachments for this report.

7.5 Vicki Cleary Day 2025 and Family Violence Initiatives

**Director Community Eamonn Fennessy**

**Community Wellbeing**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes the information provided on current data, initiative and partnerships on prevention of family violence and gender based violence

2. Endorses the proposed program of support for the annual Vicki Cleary Day.

3. Requests that an evaluation, outcomes report, and future program proposal be presented to Council for consideration in the first half of 2027.

4. Refers support for Vicki Cleary Day in May 2025 to Quarter 3 budget deliberations.

5. Refers a funding request of $40,000 to the 2025/26 budget process for consideration.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

This report has been prepared in response to Council from their August 2024 meeting regarding addressing gender-based violence in the community.

One resolution called for a report into how Council can honour the memory of Vicki Cleary and financially support the annual Vicki Cleary Day at Coburg City Oval and anti-violence campaigns in the community, schools and sporting clubs. The other resolution called for a report detailing current statistics on family violence in Merri-Bek, along with various initiatives aimed at prevention and response, and to explore the potential for renewed partnerships with local stakeholders, including Victorian Police, family violence support services and community organisations. This resolution also requested consideration of implementing public awareness campaigns to educate the public on signs of family violence, available resources and services and to challenge harmful gender stereotypes and promote respectful relationships.

This report provides an overview of Council’s existing initiatives and recommendations for how this could be expanded. This includes building on our existing evidence-based approach that focuses on collaboration in key service settings to address gender-based violence, including in early years, with young people and in education settings, within diverse communities, community sports and older people.

It also outlines how following engagement and discussion with Phil Cleary, Council can honour the memory of Vicki Cleary and financially support the Vicki Cleary Day at Coburg Oval to grow as the centrepiece of the anti-violence campaign and springboard for new initiatives in the community to raise awareness.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Notice of Motion - Vicki Cleary Day -** 14 August 2024

*That Council:*

*1. Acknowledges that Vicky Cleary, an employee of the Shirley Robertson Children's Centre was attacked and killed outside her workplace in 1987 and expresses our deepest regret to her family.*

*2. Calls for a report into how Council can honour the memory of Vicki Cleary and financially support the Vicki Cleary Day at Coburg Oval to grow as the centrepiece of the anti-violence campaign and springboard for new initiatives in the community to raise awareness by organising speakers with lived experience and professional expertise to talk at schools, sporting clubs and businesses.*

**Notice of Motion - Family Violence Initiatives –** 10 July 2024

*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.*

**Notice of Motion - Support for Vicki Cleary Day 2018** - 14 March 2018

*That Council supports Vicki Cleary Day on 19 May 2018 by providing sponsorship up to $1,000 and purchasing tickets for Councillor attendance at the luncheon up to a value of $300.*

## 1. Policy Context

Council has a [legislative requirement](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/municipal-public-health-and-wellbeing-planning-2021-2025-advice-note-1) under the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan to report on measures taken to reduce family violence and respond to the needs of victims. Further, ‘preventing all forms of violence’ is one of the priorities in the [Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023-2027](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/victorian-public-health-and-wellbeing-plan-2023-27).

Further relevant at State level are the Victorian [Gender Equality Act 2020](https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/about-gender-equality-act-2020), which commenced in March 2021, and relevant Victorian Strategies, including [Free from Violence Strategy](https://www.vic.gov.au/free-violence-victorias-strategy-prevent-family-violence) and [Safe and Strong Gender Equality Strategy](https://www.vic.gov.au/safe-and-strong-victorian-gender-equality).

At national level, the Commitment is guided by the national [Change the Story](https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story/change-the-story-framework) prevention framework, which acknowledges the important role of local governments at the local level to influence change through providing leadership and model best practice.

In 2009, Merri-bek City Council began research and consultation to identify the key challenges in the provision of sport and active recreation for women and girls within the municipality. This resulted in the development of the [Active Women and Girls Strategy](https://merri-bek.vic.gov.au/my-council/strategies-policies-and-collected-data/policies-and-strategies/#A) in 2009, subsequently updated in 2011 and 2015.

To address the inequity found in the research, Council also introduced an [Allocation and Use of Sporting Facilities, Grounds and Pavilions Policy](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.moreland.vic.gov.au%2Fglobalassets%2Fkey-docs%2Fpolicy-strategy-plan%2Fallocation-of-sporting-grounds-and-pavilions-policy.doc&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK) in 2010, subsequently updated in 2012, 2016 and most recently in 2024. The policy requires clubs to be inclusive of women, juniors, people with a disability and people from culturally diverse communities, or risk losing allocation of a ground to clubs who do offer inclusive programs.

In August 2022, the Victorian State Government released the ‘Fair Access Policy Roadmap’ which includes requirements all Councils must adhere to in order to be eligible to receive grant funding.

The Fair Access Policy Roadmap aims to develop a state-wide foundation for gender equitable access to, and use of, community sports infrastructure for women and girls, to support participation in community sport and active recreation across Victoria.

Many of the requirements in the Fair Access Policy roadmap were adopted by Merri-bek.

## 2. Background

**Vicky Cleary Day**

Officers recommend that Council supports the annual Vicki Cleary Day in 2025 by ensuring it remains free and accessible to the community. As part of this commitment, it is proposed Council contribute sponsorship of $10,000 to cover entry fees and some value towards refreshments for the match in May 2025 between Carlton and the Coburg Lions (Vicki Cleary Day Round).

In addition, it is proposed that Council establish a ‘Think Tank / Community of Practice’ to develop a structured program that strengthens and expands the impact of Vicki Cleary Day. This initiative will incorporate a range of activities, including talks, film screenings, educational projects, and the continuation of an annual Violence Against Women Round in recognition of Vicki Cleary Day.

The Think Tank / Community of Practice will be chaired by an external party who assist in bringing together key stakeholders to ensure the event's ongoing success and growth. An Expression of Interest (EOI) will be distributed by Council to relevant working groups, community organisations, and experts for participation in an initial two-year term. The group will include representatives from local sports clubs, such as Phil Cleary, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) specialists, Violence Prevention Advocates, Merri Health, Our Watch, people with lived experience, youth ambassadors and Council representatives.

This approach has been determined in consultation with Phil Cleary.

**Family Violence Initiatives**

[Family violence data](https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/family-violence-data/family-violence-dashboard) provided by the Victorian Crime Statistics Agency for 2023-2024 indicates that:

 In total 3,635 family violence incidents were reported to Victoria Police in Merri-bek.

 Merri-bek had the second lowest reported incidence rate in the northern metro region, after Nillumbik

 The rate of reported incidents in Merri-bek decreased by 14 per cent compared to the previous financial year, whereas the rate had increased in all other municipalities, except Hume and Yarra.

Council’s work to address gender-based violence is aligned with the [Human Rights Policy 2016-2026](https://merri-bek.vic.gov.au/globalassets/website-merri-bek/areas/living-merri-bek/community-services/public-health-and-wellbeing/community-wellbeing-and-human-rights/human-rights-policy-2016-2026-revised.pdf) and guided by the [Gender Equality Commitment](https://merri-bek.vic.gov.au/living-in-merri-bek/community-services/public-health/community-and-personal-safety/#autoAnchor2), in particular the commitments:

2. All genders can access public space, sports and recreation and feel safe

4. All genders have access to safe and affordable housing

6. All genders are empowered to support the Gender Equality Commitment.

Council has a long-standing commitment to gender equality and family violence prevention and was one of the first councils in Victoria that endorsed a Family Violence Prevention Strategy in 2006. In addition, Council has strong connections with local organisations such as Merri-health and Victoria Police, and frequently engage community through local forums and joint initiatives with joint advocacy to decrease violence against women in Merri-bek.

Council’s current Gender Equality Commitment promotes collaboration in key settings where it can reach and engage community, including community services – Maternal and Child Health, Children’s and Youth Services, Aged and Disability Support Services, Sport and Recreation, Community Grants and Community Development and Social Policy.

The table below provides an overview of current action priorities and recent and ongoing activity:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Recent Outputs and Achievements** | **Current Action Priorities** |
| Commitment 2: all genders can access public space, sports and recreation and feel safe | |
| **Lead community activities for Respect Victoria’s** [**16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence**](https://www.respectvictoria.vic.gov.au/campaigns/16-days-activism-against-gender-based-violence), annually in November, including:  29/10/2024 - Walk against Family Violence for community and Council staff and promotion of Council-funded local prevention initiatives by [Dads Group](https://www.dadsgroup.org/dads-of-merribek) and [Northern Community Legal Centre](https://www.northernclc.org.au/take-the-next-step).  22/11/2024 - Council staff and community partners joined [annual Walk against Family Violence in the CBD](https://www.respectvictoria.vic.gov.au/campaigns/walk-against-family-violence-2023).  Council used $1,500 funding received by Respect Victoria to support community partners Dads Group and [YMCA](https://www.facebook.com/coburgleisurecentre/photos/-join-the-conversation-be-part-of-respect-victorias-16-days-of-activism-date-wed/1179782537206026/?_rdr) to conduct their own community events. | Continue to support training for workers, young people and their families to increase knowledge and confidence about the [affirmative consent laws](https://www.sasvic.org.au/consent) introduced in July 2023 in collaboration with local schools, Department of Education [Respectful Relationships program](https://www.vic.gov.au/respectful-relationships), [Women’s Health in the North](https://www.whin.org.au/what-we-do/preventing-gender-based-violence/taking-action/) and other community partners. |
| **Implementing Fair Access Policy** – further increasing participation by women and girls in organised sports and making clubs more equitable and inclusive  The most recent data shows that the percentage of women and girls participating in summer sports increased from around 11% in 2014 to almost 32% in 2024.  Council supports club leadership through:  Convening the Advancing Women’s Participation in Sports Network with 25 members training and funding lighting and facility upgrades.  Further, Council has been one of the partners of the [**We’re Game**](https://www.merrihealth.org.au/news/were-game-new-program-tackles-violence-against-women-through-sports/) **project** 2022-2025, led by Merri Health (soon to be Holstep Health), to support sports and leisure organisations to promote gender equity and address harmful attitudes and behaviours. Most recently partners collaborated for a successful [International Women’s Day event on 3 March 2024](https://www.merrihealth.org.au/news/celebrating-international-womens-day-and-sport/) in Fawkner. | Supporting local sports clubs through ongoing programs and partnerships and advocacy for upgraded infrastructure to enhance safety and amenity |
| Support Council teams to complete **Gender & Equity Impact Assessments under the Gender Equality Act 2020** when developing new or reviewing existing policies, programs and services to improve inclusion.  Council’s first Progress Report 2021-2023 included an overview of thirteen gender impact assessments and actions taken in response. | Supporting Council teams through advice and training and prepare for the second Progress Report 2023-2025. |
| Commitment 4: all genders have access to safe and affordable housing | |
| Council convenes the **Merri-bek Family Violence Network** for service frontline workers to facilitate information sharing, collaboration and joint advocacy. The network is part of the [Northern Integrated Family Violence Service Partnership](https://www.nifvs.org.au/about/networks-and-groups/) and has currently around 60 members from a wide range of support services for all genders, including Victoria Police. Active participation has increased since the introduction of online meetings during the pandemic. | Continue to support Network members regarding topics of interest with guest speakers, facilitating relationship building and sharing service/ program updates |
| **Support community groups to implement targeted programs** to assist those experiencing gender-based violence. Programs completed in 2023-2024 include:  [Take the First Step Merri-bek Project](https://www.northernclc.org.au/take-the-first-step-project) by Northern Community Legal Centre  [JUNO](https://juno.org.au/connectiongroup/) – Merri-bek Social Connect Group for women (trans and cis) and non-binary people who have experienced homelessness and family violence  [Rotary Inner Melbourne Emergency Relief Network Inc](https://www.rimern.org.au/) – donated furniture, appliances and homewares are collected from the community to help those who experienced homelessness, domestic violence etc.  [The Opportunity Lab Ltd](https://www.theopportunitylab.org.au/) – supporting young people and women who have experienced family violence and are disengaged from education and/ or employment | Continue to support applicants with advice and support regarding eligibility and preparing strong applications |
| **Active participation in professional regional and statewide networks** for information sharing, collaboration and joint advocacy, including:  Women’s Health in the North [Building A Respectful Community Partnership](https://www.whin.org.au/brc/)  [Working with Fathers Hume/ Merri-bek Professional Network](https://www.nifvs.org.au/about/networks-and-groups/)  Municipal Association of Victoria [Gender Equality and Preventing Family Violence Network](https://www.mav.asn.au/what-we-do/policy-advocacy/social-community/familyviolenceprevention/pvaw-network) | Support community partners to connect with relevant professional networks |
| **Support community-led programs, including:**  Dads Group’s [Dads of Merri-bek program](https://www.dadsgroup.org/dads-of-merribek) which provides peer support groups, training and referral to support services for new dads and has a total of around 900 members.   YMCA Merri-bek – [Men of Merri-bek](https://active.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/news-events/men-of-merribek-2024) – health and educational short-term program in collaboration with Nutrition Australia, Beyond Blue and Movember (2022-2024)   [Courageous Conversations with Men Forums](https://www.whsn.org.au/blog/spotlight-on-womens-health-in-the-north) 2022-2025 – a total of five sessions conducted in collaboration with Women’s Health in the North to engage men to reflect and share their experiences and to talk about what men can do to challenge sexism. This work has evolved and continues as a community led initiative to make meaningful change through allyship and empowering resources. |  |

### Community impact

### Family and gender-based violence continues to be prevalent in the community but targeted programs that address ⁠[the drivers](https://www.ourwatch.org.au/link-between-gender-inequality-and-violence) are making a difference. For community sports the Sport and Recreation Victoria framework ⁠[Safe and Inclusive Sport: Preventing gender-based violence](https://sport.vic.gov.au/resources/safe-and-inclusive-sport-preventing-gender-based-violence) guides this work and Merri Health's We're Game Project and others ⁠[received grants](https://sport.vic.gov.au/funding/preventing-violence-through-sport-grants-program) to trial the tools in local settings 2022-2025.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

### There is evidence that gender-based violence increases after disaster, including climate or environment-related incidents. Gender and Equity Impact Assessments conducted in connection with the development or review of relevant Council policies/ programs/ services provide an opportunity to consider how to support community around this issue.

### Economic sustainability implications

### Council’s proposal is evidence-based and focuses on addressing the drivers of gender-based violence to foster structural change.

### Legal and risk considerations

N/A

### Human Rights Consideration

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

Addressing gender-based violence is one of the priorities under the Gender Equality Commitment.

The proposal’s implications have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and no human rights under the charter have been identified which could be interfered with or limited by the recommended action/s.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

**Vicky Cleary Day**

Effective engagement and communication within the Think Tank / Community of Practice will be crucial in expanding the impact of Vicki Cleary Day and driving meaningful change in preventing violence against women. By fostering collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and coordinated action, this group will play a key role in shaping and sustaining an impactful program. Phil Cleary has been engaged in the development of this proposal.

**Enhancing Awareness and Education**

Bringing together gender based violence specialists, violence prevention advocates, people with lived experience, youth ambassadors, and community leaders ensures that diverse voices contribute to the conversation. Facilitating consistent messaging across local sports clubs, schools, and community groups will help broaden awareness and ensure the event’s message is reinforced year-round.

Coordinated efforts will enable the development of education campaigns, workshops, and public discussions that engage the community in meaningful dialogue about preventing violence against women.

**Strengthening Community Ownership and Support**

Open communication and engagement with local sports clubs, community organisations, and youth representatives will foster grassroots involvement, making the event more inclusive and representative of the broader community. Encouraging active participation will create a sense of shared responsibility in addressing gender-based violence, strengthening local advocacy efforts beyond the event itself.

**Improving Program Effectiveness and Sustainability**

Regular engagement will enable ongoing evaluation and refinement of initiatives, ensuring that the program remains relevant, evidence-based, and responsive to emerging challenges.

A structured communication framework will help identify gaps, share best practices, and align efforts between various stakeholders, leading to more coordinated and impactful initiatives.

Establishing an annual Violence Against Women Round with the support of sporting organisations and experts will ensure long-term sustainability and integration into broader community programs.

**Influencing Policy and Advocacy Efforts**

By amplifying the voices of those with lived experience and experts in the field, the group can contribute to policy discussions, funding applications, and strategic initiatives that address the root causes of violence against women. Coordinated engagement will strengthen partnerships with government bodies, health services, and advocacy groups, increasing the program’s credibility and influence.

## 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. Implementation and Financial and Resources Implications

This initiative will provide a platform for collaboration and advocacy, ensuring that Vicki Cleary Day continues to deliver meaningful community outcomes and raise awareness about the critical issue of violence against women.

Phil Cleary has been consulted and engaged in the development of this proposal and is supportive.

| **Budget Year** | **Action** | **Proposed Budget Required** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Year 2024/25 | 1. Council support and honouring of Vicki Cleary Day  2. Formation of the think tank/ community of practice | $10,000 |
| Year 2025/26 | 1. Council support with Violence against Women round as commitment and support to the efforts and outcomes formed through Vicki Cleary Day  2. 4x meeting per annum for think tank/ community of practice | $20,000 |
| Year 2026/27 | 1. Council support with Violence against Women round as commitment and support to the efforts and outcomes formed through Vicki Cleary Day  2. 4 x meeting per annum for think tank/ community of practice. With outcomes and program and evaluation to come back to Council for consideration in the first half of 2027. | $20,000 |
| **Total** |  | $50,000 (over 3 years) |

## Attachment/s

There are no attachments for this report.

7.6 Winter Allocations 2025

**Director Community, Eamonn Fennessy**

**Community Wellbeing**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Allocates sports grounds and pavilions for the 2025 annual and winter season to the clubs shown in Attachment 1 to this report.

2. Authorises the Director Community to make any necessary changes to the allocation of facilities for the 2025 annual and winter season if required and to inform Council of any changes.

3. Notes any club owing ground and pavilion fees from previous seasons, or owing any other debt to Council, will be informed that no ground allocation will be granted until payment is made, or a payment plan has been agreed to.

4. Notes current junior and female participation levels at sports clubs contained within this 2025 Annual and Winter Sports Ground Tenancy Allocations Report.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

Council is committed to providing a diverse range of active sport and recreation opportunities and associated facilities to support participation and a healthy and active community.

In the past year, the Merri-bek sporting community has experienced significant growth in participation, with greater numbers than in pre-pandemic years. This has been particularly evident within Football (soccer).

Council’s revised Allocation and Use of Sporting Facilities, Grounds and Pavilions Policy 2023 guides the annual and seasonal allocation of sporting grounds and pavilions to clubs through a tenancy agreement. In line with the Policy, facilities are allocated to clubs with sound governance structures, open membership for men, women and juniors, and a demonstrated commitment to social responsibility, including participation in club development programs.

This year, officers will begin working with winter clubs on championing gender equity and fair access pathways by assisting clubs implementing equitable scheduling of training for all participants and obtaining 50 per cent or above representation of women, girls, or gender diverse people on Committee/Board and/or Leadership roles *(implemented from September 2024).*

There were 31 annual and seasonal tenancy applications received from clubs.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Winter Allocations** – 12 March 2024

*That Council:*

*1. Allocates sports grounds and pavilions for the 2024 annual and winter season to the clubs shown in Attachment 1 to this report.*

*2. Authorises the Director Community to make any necessary changes to the allocation of facilities for the 2024 annual and winter season* *if required and to inform Council of any changes.*

*3. Notes any club owing ground and pavilion fees from previous seasons, or owing any other debt to Council, will be informed that no ground allocation will be granted until payment is made, or a payment plan has been agreed to.*

## 1. Policy Context

The Merri-bek City Council Allocation and Use of Sporting Facilities, Grounds and Pavilions Policy (the Policy), together with the Sporting Facilities, Grounds and Pavilions User Guide (the User Guide) provide a framework for the allocation for Council’s sports facilities and outline the terms and conditions of use.

**Theme: Healthy and Caring Merri-bek**

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.”*

## 2. Background

Council adopted a revised Allocation and Use of Sporting Facilities, Grounds, and Pavilions Policy in December 2023. The revision of the Policy, together with the User Guide, outlines the terms and conditions of use for Council’s sports facilities. For facilities to be allocated to clubs requires they are required to:

 Have sound governance structures

 Provide open membership for men, women and juniors

 Demonstrate a commitment to social responsibility

 Participate in club development programs

The Policy also contains conditions for leasing and allocation of Council facilities to clubs whose membership provide the following in their respective sporting codes:

 At least one junior team/side

 At least one female team/side

 Registered sport association development programs

 Female representation on club committee and/or board

Priority leasing and allocation of facilities will be given to clubs that:

 Are inclusive of people with disabilities, and actively support juniors, females and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) to participate in recreation

 Demonstrated participation by Merri-bek residents

 Comply with all previous occupancy requirements

 Completed approved capital work projects to the satisfaction of Council

The revised Policy now also provides concessions to clubs who ensure equitable scheduling of training for all participants and obtaining 50 per cent or above representation of women, girls, or gender diverse people on Committee/Board and/or Leadership roles. Clubs providing sport, recreation and physical activity opportunities must develop and demonstrate policies, strategies and active programs that increase the participation, general health and wellbeing of juniors, girls and women.

## 3. Issues

**Capacity of sporting grounds**

Tenancy and allocation applications are considered firstly in relation to the capacity of Merri-bek’s sporting grounds, and secondly with respect to the club’s compliance to the Policy.

This season, Council’s facilities (grounds and pavilions) are being fully occupied. Any vacancies throughout the season are being utilised to spread training loads and fixtures away from grounds where the condition of the surface may be deteriorating. With capacity maximised and no new facilities available, allocations are managed where possible to ensure they do not exceed ground capacity.

Excessive allocations result in overused and damaged playing surfaces. On average, most grounds can sustain 11-15 hours of use per week. Hours above this may create unsafe playing conditions, especially throughout the winter months which lead to temporary ground closures for all users. This can impact the community in the short term, club utilisation in the medium term and create additional maintenance requirements to ensure appropriate standards for training and competition.

**Grounds to watch**

CB Premier Pitch will need to be well managed this season following a significant renovation to prevent deterioration.

Raeburn Reserve has poor drainage and also needs to be managed carefully to ensure it remains useable.

Dunstan South will get a high amount of use and is predicted to wear early this season and will be monitored.

Reddish Reserve is also getting an extra high amount of use and will wear early.

Coburg City Oval - West Coburg Football Club are looking to utilise City Oval this season, which will put additional pressure on the ground on top of many other uses, this will be one to keep closely monitored so the ground is available for AFL finals use.

**Hosken Reserve**

The Hosken Reserve project has now been completed, and Pascoe Vale Soccer Club have returned to utilising their home ground. For this first season there are hours restrictions for utilising the ground as it will take time for the new turf to fully grow in. Given this, the Hosken North Pitch will be able to hold 15-20 hours per week of sport use, and the Hosken South Pitch will be able to hold 6 - 12 hours per week.

**Projects**

Richards Reserve pitch redevelopment is occurring throughout this winter season, meaning that Pascoe Vale Soccer Club do not have use of it. This will place an extra training load on their other allocated grounds.

Clifton Park synthetic pitch renewal is nearing completion, with all of the sub-base, shock pad and synthetic surface now laid. The cork infill shipment was delayed and is due in late March which is the final step to complete the project. The synthetic will be utilised almost every day, and this availability will relieve some pressure on other grounds in the south, notably Balfe Park, Dunstan Reserve and Sumner Park.

**Improved Outcomes**

Significant work has been undertaken to lift the condition of some grounds since last winter season, including CB Smith Premier Pitch, CB Smith Community, De Chene Reserve.

Several new sports lighting projects are underway or have been completed which will help grounds get a higher utilisation, while simultaneously spreading training load more evenly so grounds wear out slower.

New Floodlights: Allard Park, Raeburn Reserve, Cole Reserve South, JP Fawkner East and West Grounds.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

Officers monitor the hours of ground use to manage the sustainability and fit for purpose of each sports field. Recommended hours of use for each playing surface vary depending on the following considerations:

 Grass type

 Soil profile

 Suitable sports field lighting

 Infrastructure for drainage and irrigation

 Level of sport being played

 Storm water harvesting. Several reserves will have rainwater tanks in place to reduce the consumption of water for irrigation programs.

The management of each sports facility is also discussed regularly with clubs, to educate and facilitate the appropriate use of each sports field, pavilion, and other sports infrastructure (e.g. sports field lighting, training nets/facilities and turf wickets).

Clubs play an integral role in reactive management of these facilities, with routine checks for safe playing surfaces. Several pavilions also have solar panels installed through club initiative and grants programs to support renewable energy.

**Economic sustainability implications**

The clubs and associations applying for annual and winter allocations are not-for-profit organisations, predominantly operated by volunteers.

**Legal and risk considerations**

The governance audit ensures clubs maintain their incorporation, as State Sporting Association insurance policies would deny indemnity to clubs that have allowed their incorporation to lapse putting Council at risk to cover injury claims.

**Human Rights Consideration**

The implications of this report have been considered in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. Access to sport and physical activity reflects 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

Annual and winter applications opened on 6 January 2025 and closed on 7 February 2025. During this time, officers liaised regularly with clubs and associations providing advice and guidance on the application process, availability of facilities and grounds and answer any questions club committee members had.

While all annual and winter clubs have submitted their applications, registrations for players and teams have not yet been finalised by the relevant leagues and associations. State Sporting Associations and local leagues are responsible for managing the competitions Merri-bek clubs enter. Officers work closely with their staff to monitor team numbers, player registrations, and competition conditions. For the annual and winter allocations 2025, the following associations will be consulted to confirm participation numbers for this report:

 Lacrosse Victoria

 AFL Victoria

 Netball Victoria

 Tennis Victoria

 Essendon District Football League

 Baseball Victoria

 Victorian Amateur Football Association

 Yarra Junior Football League

 Football Victoria.

To ensure Council can provide appropriate facilities, regular communication and consultation occurs between Council operational areas to ensure suitability of facilities and grounds to meet competition standards. Supporting this, clubs communicate frequently with officers about their needs, and this is monitored as the season approaches.

### Communications

All clubs and associations will be notified of the Council resolution within 14 days.

Annual and Winter allocations will be approved for each club or association via IMS Reserves Manager as soon as the Policy and application compliance is confirmed.

A summary list of ground allocations will be available to view on the Active Merri-bek website. This list is subject to change based on the seasonal requirements for ground usage (e.g. preseason, in season fixtures, finals).

## 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 estimated fees and charges income for the 2024 annual and winter sports ground and pavilion allocations is $165,199.17.

**Outstanding fees**

Officers monitor the payment of fees, and clubs with outstanding debts are advised that these debts could affect future ground allocations. All clubs with outstanding debts receive in writing a request to finalise payment. Relevant state sporting associations are also advised. It is recommended that these clubs are not provided with an allocation until outstanding debts have been paid.

## 7. Implementation

Once adopted, clubs will receive written notification of their allocation within 14 days. Officers will work with clubs to ensure any outstanding documentation is received and outstanding fees are paid prior to allocation confirmation. Officers will continue to actively support clubs that do not currently comply with the requirements of the Policy to develop strategies and actions to establish female and junior teams.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | 2025 Annual and Winter Sports Facilities Ground Allocations | D25/97904 |  |

7.7 Planning for Baseball and Softball at Parker Reserve, North Coburg

**Director Community, Eamonn Fennessy**

**Community Wellbeing**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes the scope, estimated costs, engagement requirements, and timelines associated with developing a plan for baseball and softball at Parker Reserve.

2. Notes the previous engagement completed in 2024 for the Fawkner Merri Parklands Plan and Parker Reserve Concept Plan which will be considered and inform future planning.

3. Refers $80,000 to undertake planning for Parker Reserve to the 2025-2026 budget process for consideration.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

This report outlines a broad approach for future planning to enhance Parker Reserve North Coburg to meet the current and future needs of local baseball and softball communities.

The recommendation is to initiate a phased planning approach including feasibility studies, stakeholder and community engagement, and detailed design planning to ensure the facility is upgraded to be both sustainable and inclusive.

Funding to complete this planning work is projected at $80,000.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Notice of Motion - Planning for baseball and softball at Parker Reserve, North Coburg** –11 December 2024

*That Council resolves to receive a report at the March 2025 meeting on the scope, costs, engagement requirements and timelines to prepare a plan for Parker Reserve that considers how the current and future needs of baseball and softball could be accommodated and supported.*

**Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands Plan** –10 July 2024

*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.*

*4. Notes and acknowledges the principles and objectives of Merri Merri Wayi within the Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands implementation stages and that the subsequent projects consider aligning further engagement with Darebin City Council and the Traditional Owners of this land.*

## 1. Policy Context

## The proposed enhancement of Parker Reserve to better support softball and baseball is aligned with Council’s 2020 Sport and Active Recreation Strategy which recommends preparing a development plan for the reserve.

## 2. Background

## Parker Reserve is Merri-bek’s only facility for local baseball and softball activities.

## Participation in both sports is growing, particularly for female players. Parker Reserve also accommodates cricket during the Summer. In recent years, Council has invested in upgrading pavilions at the reserve to ensure they better support participation by women and girls.

## With increased participation in these sports, there is a need to review the current sport infrastructure at Parker reserve and develop a plan and funding considerations for future upgrades.

## This report has been developed to inform Council of the necessary planning processes, outline the associated costs, and propose a timeline to plan for a future-ready facility that meets both current usage and future growth.

## 3. Issues and Considerations

Recreation and sporting opportunities at Parker Reserve are limited due to the undulating nature of the baseball field and surrounding grounds. The condition of the ground impacts its playability, accessibility, and the potential for broader community use.

Previous community engagement through the Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands Plan and Parker Reserve Concept Plan have reinforced these concerns. These recently prepared plans provided valuable insights into community priorities, environmental concerns, and recreational needs.

Key issues raised by the community in recent Parker Reserve consultation:

 Environmental Protection and Biodiversity – Prioritising habitat restoration, wetland development, stormwater management, and litter reduction.

 Access and Connectivity – Rectification of playing field undulation,enhance pathways, ensure accessibility, and balancing safety with wildlife-sensitive lighting.

 Cultural Recognition – Strengthening engagement with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Traditional Owners, incorporating Indigenous heritage in signage, naming, and land management.

 Recreational and Social Infrastructure – Fixing sports facilities, creating nature-based play areas, and improving access to community amenities.

 Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour – Addressing illegal trail bike use, hooning, and safety concerns through design and enforcement strategies.

These findings will be integrated into the proposed sporting infrastructure plan to ensure alignment with past engagement while allowing for ongoing community input.

A focus on fit for purpose sporting assets, safety, sustainability, inclusivity, and long-term resilience will guide the development of Parker Reserve, ensuring it meets both current and future community needs.

### Community impact

### Enhancing Parker Reserve will provide significant benefits by offering a fit-for-purpose, safe, and accessible environment for sports and community gatherings. Improved facilities will encourage increased participation in recreational activities and enhance the overall quality of life for local residents and winder community.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

The planning process will incorporate sustainable design practices aimed at reducing environmental impact. Key considerations include energy efficiency, water conservation, and the use of eco-friendly materials, ensuring that the facility remains resilient in the face of climate change.

### Economic sustainability implications

Investments in Parker Reserve are expected to stimulate local economic activity by attracting community events and potentially generating new opportunities for local businesses. The long-term benefits include increased facility usage, enhanced community health outcomes, and improved local amenities, all of which contribute to economic sustainability.

### Human Rights Consideration

In accordance with the Merri-bek Human Rights and Inclusion Policy and the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 confirms that this proposal upholds fundamental human rights, particularly in relation to equality, community participation, and access to public spaces.

This project aligns with Merri-bek’s commitment to creating inclusive, safe, and accessible public spaces by prioritising universal design principles, considering the needs of underrepresented groups, and fostering opportunities for diverse community engagement.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

A detailed Community Engagement Plan will be developed to guide future planning and be guided by Council’s Community Engagement Policy (2024).

Given that this project is focused on the design and investigation of sports assets at Parker Reserve, engagement will be targeted towards gathering insights, identifying needs, and ensuring community alignment with the future vision for the site regarding the open space sports assets.

The North Coburg Rebels Baseball Club will be a key stakeholder within this engagement and consultation.

The below image is the proposed areas to be in scope for the planning.



Previous community engagement has been undertaken within Parker Reserve through the [Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands Plan](https://conversations.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/what-your-vision-fawkner-merri-parklands/parker-reserve-concept-plan) and [Parker Reserve Concept Plan](https://conversations.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/what-your-vision-fawkner-merri-parklands/parker-reserve-concept-plan) (2024) for the surrounding areas. The outcomes of this engagement are attached to this report and will inform the future planning.

## 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. Implementation and Financial and Resources Implications

The investigation and design process for Parker Reserve’s open space sports infrastructure will follow best practices in outdoor sports facility planning, incorporating technical site assessments, stakeholder consultation, and feasibility analysis to ensure that any future upgrades are evidence-based, financially viable, and aligned with community needs and Council priorities.

**Phased Approach and Cost Estimates**

The investigation and design phase will be structured into the following key steps:

| **Stage** | **Activities** |
| --- | --- |
| **Project Initiation and Scope Definition** |  Engage internal Council teams and external expertise to confirm scope and methodology.   Identify key constraints (e.g., zoning, environmental considerations, existing sports agreements).   Develop a project timeline and governance framework. |
| **Site Assessment and Sports Assets Audit** |  Geotechnical investigation (soil and drainage assessment for sports fields and infrastructure).   Condition assessment of existing infrastructure (playing fields, lighting, fencing, seating, pathways, car parking, drainage, etc.).   Accessibility and compliance audit (alignment with universal design and Australian sporting standards).   Environmental assessment (tree health, biodiversity)   Climate resilience |
| **Stakeholder Engagement and Community Consultation** |  Consultation with the local baseball club, casual park users, local schools, and nearby residents.   Conversations Merri-bek launch, understand current usage, demand trends, and future needs.   Engagement with peak sporting bodies (e.g., Baseball Victoria, Softball Victoria) and internal Council teams (e.g., planning, environment, open space).   Pop-up engagement sessions at the reserve. |
| **Sports Infrastructure Planning and Feasibility Study** |  Demand analysis (growth trends, participation rates, benchmarking against similar facilities).   Usage modelling (optimising field layout, playing capacity, scheduling efficiencies).   Feasibility study on potential upgrades (new playing fields, and diamonds, lighting upgrades, amenity improvements). |
| **Final Report and Council Review** |  Compilation of findings, preferred options, and funding sources   Final revisions, community feedback   Presentation to Council for review and decision making on future funding and delivery options. |

Funding of $80,000 is required for the development of a plan which is recommended for 2025-2026 budget process consideration. This cost estimate is based on industry benchmarks and Council projects to date.

If funded in the 2025/26 financial year this project would be completed in the second half of 2025 and presented back to Council in the first quarter of 2026. The plan will guide further Council consideration and budget allocations.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | OSDD Stage 2 Fawkner Merri Creek Parklands Plan Engagement Summary Report | D23/59681 |  |

7.8 Merri-bek Libraries Collection Management

**Director Community, Eamonn Fennessy**

**Cultural Development**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council notes the report on the management of book collections at Merri-bek Libraries.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

This report is a response to a March 2024 Council resolution that requested a report on the current management of book collections and any policy or practice regarding book reductions that are occurring in Merri-bek libraries.

The Library Selection and Collection Development Policy guides the acquisition and deaccessioning of materials in Merri-bek Library’s collection.

Merri-bek Library’s collection provides a wide range of materials for borrowing including books, magazines, newspapers, DVDs, streaming services, and e-books and e-magazines. Collections are constantly being refreshed to ensure that community needs and interests are met. In recent years Merri-bek Libraries have introduced ganbo marra (a First Nations collection), a Library of Things and explored book displays to better support browsing and borrowing.

The effectiveness and success of library collections is continuously measured. Removal of materials from the collection takes place when items are old, in poor physical condition, or no longer borrowed by the community. Removed items are refreshed by the purchase of new items. The size of Merri-bek's physical collections has remained stable for many years, and its digital collection is growing due to sustained increased usage.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Notice of Motion - Libraries Without Books** – 13 March 2024

*That Council:*

*1. Notes the important role the libraries play in local communities.*

*2. Notes with concern the international trend towards bookless and unstaffed libraries.*

*3. Receives a report on the current management of book collections and any policy or practice regarding book reductions that are occurring in Merri-bek libraries.*

## 1. Policy Context

 Library Services Strategy 2019 – Key Priority 2 – Curate – Tailoring Resources, technology and programs to the needs and aspirations of our community.

 Library Selection and Collection Development Policy (April 2015 – April 2025).

## 2. Background

## It is standard within the industry for libraries to have a Collection Development Policy which guides the development and maintenance of library collections and access to resources, including withdrawal of materials. Merri-bek has a Library Selection and Collection Development Policy that is authorised by the CEO.

## Merri-bek’s library service provides a wide range of materials within financial and space restrictions to satisfy the information, educational, cultural and recreational needs of the community. Its total expenditure on collections over the past five years was $6,373,086, with an average annual expenditure of $1,254,617.

## The success of library collections is measured by analysing performance data such as:

##  Circulation data (number of loans, returns and reservations)

##  Turnover statistics (number of loans divided by the total number of items held)

##  Online/digital usage and availability

##  Age of collection and percentage of items borrowed within a year of acquisition

## Community and staff feedback is also used to analyse the performance and relevance of the collections.

## 3. Issues

Industry context

Recent research and industry benchmarking has highlighted the changing identity of libraries and the need for non-traditional spaces, services and programs to be offered alongside collections in order to enrich the library's role as a cultural and social hub for the community, as well as a place of learning.

While a robust and high-quality collection is core to the role of the library, it is important to ensure that its presence is balanced with the need for other vital services and spaces that the community can access, such as meeting rooms, programming areas, study spaces etc to ensure the library can serve as a dynamic and flexible community resource.

Community expectations of contemporary libraries are changing. As homes become smaller, the demand for free community space is increasing. Loneliness and disconnection have created an increased demand for programming at libraries which support social connection, and our creative community have appreciated the introduction of Maker Spaces. Collections need to be able to share space with these other important library functions, and a careful management of collections is integral to this.

All Victorian Public Library Services participate in an annual benchmarking exercise. Recent figures demonstrate that Merri-bek has physical and digital collections which are being well used by the Merri-bek community.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Merri-bek statistics** | **Benchmarked position in Vic** |
| 1.2 physical items per capita | 29/50 |
| .3 digital items per capita | 20/50 |
| Total of 56,377 digital items | 9/50 |
| Total of 208,929 physical items | 12/50 |
| Turnover rate of 4.6 for physical items | 23/50 |
| Turnover rate of 4.3 for digital items | 27/50 |
| 67% of the physical collection was purchased in the last 5 | 14/50 |
| Collections expenditure per capita | 15/50 |

*ganbo marra - First Nations Collection*

Following consultation with Wurundjeri elders, a First Nations collection, ganbo marra, was launched when the new Glenroy Library opened at the Glenroy Community Hub in March 2022. The collection includes books and other resources for children and adults, by First Nations people.

*Library of Things*

A recent trend in library collections is expansion into a “library of things”, extending beyond traditional collections of books, magazines and e-books. Merri-bek Library has recently established its first library of things with Council’s Sustainability team, offering energy saver kits, thermal cameras and induction cooktops for loan. Other libraries across Victoria are loaning “things” of interest, from surfboards to sewing machines, that meet the needs of their communities.

**Collection evaluation and maintenance**

Evaluation reports produced from the Library Management System are periodically generated to provide responsible officers with data useful to maintaining collection currency, condition and relevance. Selection and deselection practices keep our collection current and relevant.

Deselection refers to the planned removal of unsuitable materials from the collection and is a logical consequence of collection evaluation. Deselection takes place regularly in small amounts throughout the year. Changes in the arrangement of furniture and shelving may also necessitate deselection in specific areas.

Criteria for deselecting or discarding an item are:

• Poor physical condition and/or age

• Obsolescence (superseded by a new edition, better source, or more accurate information)

• Insufficient use (including low borrowing)

• Subject matter is no longer of current interest, or irrelevant to current needs

• Unnecessary duplicate copies exist.

**Collection size**

The overall size of Merri-bek’s library collections has remained consistent over the past five years. In the 2023-2024 financial year, 79 per cent of the collection is physical items such as books and magazines, while 11 per cent of the collection is digital items such as e-books and e-magazines. Increasingly, magazines are only available in digital format and subscription packages allow access to many more titles than could be accommodated in the physical collection.

A graph of different sizes and colors

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

**Loans**

The past five years have seen considerable changes in loan patterns, impacted by the early years of the pandemic where loans of physical items decreased dramatically due to libraries being shut. Demand for digital items, which can be borrowed through the library’s website at any time of the night or day, continues to increase. Meanwhile, loans of physical items have bounced back and this year have increased for the first time since 2019.

A graph of a graph showing the number of loans

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

**Turnover**

Turnover refers to the number of loans divided by the number of items in the collection. A healthy turnover rate is between 4 and 5 loans per item. While the turnover for physical books decreased dramatically during the pandemic, matched by a similar increase in turnover for digital books, these rates are normalising.

A graph of numbers and bars

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

**Items added and deleted**

The past five years have been very unstable due to the pandemic, with supply chain issues affecting the availability of physical materials. The 2023-2024 financial year has seen this evening out, with slightly more items added to the collection (26,118) than those deleted from the collection (25,982).

A graph of items added and deleting

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

**Reader friendly non-fiction**

In 2021 Merri-bek Libraries began planning to reorganise its non-fiction collection into bookstore-style categories. This new approach, called “reader friendly non-fiction”, reorganises books from traditional Dewey classifications into more intuitive, customer-friendly displays.

Reader friendly non-fiction was introduced at the new Glenroy Library when it opened, after community engagement that invited community feedback and input into the change. Since its implementation the library has received positive feedback from the community who have noted the convenience of the system and its ease to browse.

In May 2024, Brunswick Library adopted a reader friendly non-fiction display. The conversion involved reducing the collection in line with usual deselection practices. Over six months, a number of items were deleted that had been purchased before 2016 and had not been borrowed in the past 12 months, and the overall size of the non-fiction collection reduced from 9280 items to 8900 items. The collection has since grown again and is currently sitting at over 9500 items.

In November 2024, Coburg Library introduced reader friendly non-fiction displays. Again, a number of items were deleted from the 10,920-strong collection in line with usual deselection processes, but the current non-fiction collection now includes over 11,500 items. Updating our collections, including deleting old and under-utilised items, has enabled the library to rejuvenate its collections and ensure that non-fiction categories remain contemporary.

Fawkner and Campbell Turnbull Libraries are in the process of introducing reader friendly non-fiction displays. Following this, the junior non-fiction collections at all libraries will be converted.

### Community impact

Merri-bek Libraries is planning an in-depth community engagement in 2025 to inform the development of a new Library Strategy. The community engagement will include specific questions and activities that invite feedback and ideas on Merri-bek Library collections, which will inform a review and update of the Library Selection and Collection Policy (CEO-authorised) at the same time.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

Library collections include relevant print material and have been enhanced through partnership with the sustainability team to introduce environment positive collection items such as portable induction cooktops for loan.

### Human Rights Consideration

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

Upcoming library community engagement will include approaches to Merri-bek’s Human Rights priority groups to ensure that diverse voices are heard in the development library strategies and policies. These groups include:

 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

 Migrant, Refugee and Faith Communities

 People with Disability

 Women, Girls and Gender Diverse Communities

 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Gender Diverse, Intersex, Queer and Asexual and Aromantic (LGBTIQA+) communities

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

Merri-bek Libraries is planning an in-depth community engagement in 2025, inviting input and ideas from existing library patrons and users, and non-library users too. The engagement will utilise a number of channels to reach the community including but not limited to:

 Conversations Merri-bek

 In-library events and surveys

 Inviting feedback from stakeholders and partners

 Inviting input from Council reference and advisory groups

A full community consultation and communications plan is being developed.

**Affected persons rights and interests**

A Gender Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the Library Collection and Selection Policy update in 2025.

## 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 not financial or resource implications as result of this report.

## 7. Implementation

 Community consultation to inform the Library Strategy and the Library Selection and Collection Development Policy will be undertaken May – July 2025.

 Library Selection and Collection Development Policy will be approved by the CEO in September 2025.

 The Draft Library Strategy will be presented to Council in October 2025 for endorsement to undertake a public exhibition for feedback.

 The Draft Library Strategy will be presented to Council in December 2025 for endorsement.

## Attachment/s

There are no attachments for this report.

7.9 Phasing out Gas Use in Council's Aquatic and Leisure Centres

**Director Community, Eamonn Fennessy**

**Community Wellbeing**

## Officer Recommendation

1. That Council:

1. Notes the status of Merri-bek’s aquatic and leisure centres (swimming pools) which are currently heated by gas how much gas they use.

2. Notes the proposed plans, cost estimates, timelines, complexity and recommended approach involved in shifting Council’s aquatic and leisure centres away from gas and to renewable energy for heating.

3. Resolves that the electrification of aquatic and leisure centres will be coordinated with other significant scheduled building renewal and service improvements to maximise community benefits, cost-efficiencies, and energy efficiency.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

At its 11 December 2024 meeting, Council resolved:

*That Council receives a report in March which outlines a plan to shift Council’s swimming pools away from gas and to renewable energy for heating. The report would outline which pools still use gas for heating, how much they use, and a timeline for shifting these pools off gas to renewable energy*

Merri-bek has six aquatic and leisure centres which attract a combined 1 million plus attendances per year. The following three currently use gas infrastructure to heat the pools and pool hall:

 Oak Park Sports and Aquatic Centre – (electric heat pumps installed to heat domestic hot water for showers)

 Brunswick Baths

 Coburg Leisure Centre

Council has a highly ambitious emissions reduction target range of between 80 – 100 per cent reduction by 2030 (precluding offsets), against a 2011/12 baseline for corporate operations. The current status (2023/24) of this target is 63 per cent below the 2011/12 baseline.

Gas consumption is responsible for 23 per cent of Council’s 2023/24 corporate carbon footprint. Council’s three gas-heated aquatic and leisure centres accounted for 87 per cent of Council’s total gas consumption (2023/24).

Merri-bek’s three gas-heated aquatic and leisure centres and their percentage contribution to Council’s 2023/24 carbon emissions through gas consumption includes:

 Oak Park Sports and Aquatic Centre (OPSAC) - 5%

 Brunswick Baths - 10%

 Coburg Leisure Centre - 6%

Council has recently completed a significant $37 million upgrade of Fawkner Leisure Centre which included full electrification of all aquatic infrastructure.

On 19 February 2024, Council was notified of success in a recent grant application for $739,850 (through the federal government Community Energy Upgrades Fund) to electrify Oak Park Sports and Aquatic Centre (OPSAC). Electrification is planned for winter of 2026.

The Investigation and design for the electrification of Brunswick Baths is currently planned for 2029/30.

Moving a centre to electric heat-pumps offers many technical challenges, such as upgrade of substations, spatial, noise and heritage considerations. These challenges can all be overcome but can increase project complexity, costs and time required.

Aside from the electrification of OPSAC, there is currently no funding allocated to electrification in Council’s forward Capital Works Program.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Notice of Motion - Phase out Gas in Council’s Pools** – 11 December 2024

*That Council receives a report in March which outlines a plan to shift Council’s swimming pools away from gas and to renewable energy for heating. The report would outline which pools still use gas for heating, how much they use, and a timeline for shifting these pools off gas to renewable energy.*

**Zero Carbon Moreland - 2030 Targets Review** - 8 December 2021

*That Council:*

*1. Notes the summary of updated climate science and the advice regarding the extent of emissions reductions required by 2030 to keep the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5C (above pre-industrial levels), alive.*

*2. Notes that the Zero Carbon Moreland (ZCM) 2040 Framework (ZCM Framework) and associated 5-year ZCM Climate Emergency Action Plan (endorsed in November 2019) are providing a solid foundation for Council to continue demonstrating local government leadership in responding to the climate crisis through:*

*a) progressively eliminating emissions from Council’s own operations*

*b) inspiring and enabling community and businesses to reduce emissions, with a focus on ensuring equity and co-benefits such as community health and resilience*

*c) facilitating collective advocacy calling for urgent and effective action by state and federal government.*

*3. Endorses interim and aspirational ZCM targets for the Moreland community:*

*a) 75 per cent emissions reduction by 2030*

*b) Net zero by 2035*

*c) Drawdown (‘negative emissions’) by 2040*

*4. Call on our community, businesses, state and federal governments to join Council in collective action towards these community targets and the safe and fair future that success would help to achieve.*

*5. Endorses the additional highly ambitious ZCM ‘target range’ for Council (corporate/ operational) emissions:*

* 80 – 100 per cent emissions reduction by 2030 (precluding offsets, against 2011/12 baseline). Note: Council has taken significant actions to reduce its operational emissions by 70 per cent from the 2011/12 baseline and that Council has been certified as ‘carbon neutral’ (or ‘net zero’) since 2012 under the national Climate Active scheme, whereby Council annually purchases carbon offsets for all its remaining emissions.*

*6. Note the following conditions related to achievement of corporate emissions target:*

*a) Achievement of 80 per cent emissions reduction by 2030 is contingent on additional funding allocation and re-scoped capital works forward plan (to bring forward a transition of Council’s light fleet to zero emissions and converting approximately 27 Council buildings to ‘all electric’). High-level cost estimate to deliver these actions may be up to $16M over the 9 years to 2030.*

*b) Progress beyond 80 per cent, towards 100 per cent reduction (the upper end of the target range) is also contingent on commercialisation and availability before 2030 of suitable new or emerging technologies (that is, zero emissions waste trucks and construction materials).*

*7. Pending adoption of corporate ZCM target range, develop business cases for referral to the 2022/23 budget process and consideration within Council’s long term financial plan (i.e., to enable accelerated transition to zero emissions light feet and accelerated transition off gas in Council buildings)*

*8. Endorse revisions to the ZCM Framework and Climate Emergency Action Plan as necessary to reflect the newly endorsed targets.*

*9. Acknowledges and thanks all community members, including those involved in the Moreland Climate Coalition, that are acting and advocating for the many local and regional and national systems changes required to ensure a safe, fair and resilient Moreland into the future.*

**Fawkner Leisure Centre Project - Concept for Consultation** - 13 October 2021

*That Council:*

*1. Endorses for the purposes of community consultation the scope of works and staged delivery model for the Fawkner Leisure Centre Project as attached to the report, to include:*

*a) Stage 1: Outdoor aquatic area including a 50 metre outdoor pool; new outdoor childrens leisure pool; landscaping works and BBQ area; indoor dry area redevelopment including new gym, program room, cycle studio, café and first aid room; refurbished change rooms; minor refurbishment to indoor aquatics including new spa, steam room and sauna; transition to* ***all-electric facility****;*

*b) Stage 2: Warm water program pool, family change village and remaining refurbishment/alteration works.*

**Petition – Stop Using Gas to Heat Moreland’s Pools –** 14 July 2021

*That Council:1. Receives the petition, requesting Council stop using gas to heat Moreland’s pools.*

*2. Refers the petition requesting Council stop using gas to heat Moreland’s pools to the Director Community Development for consideration and response.*

**Notice of Motion - Fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty –** 12 May 2021

*That Council:*

*1. Endorses the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty campaign that is calling on national governments to negotiate and ratify a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty to stop the expansion and begin phase out of fossil fuels and ensure a global just transition for all.*

*2. Writes to the Australian Foreign Minister and the Federal Member for Wills advising of this action and calling on the Commonwealth Government to support, negotiate and, eventually, ratify this treaty.*

**Zero Carbon Moreland Action Plan 2020/21 – 2024/25 - Adoption** – 13 November 2019

*That Council:*

*1. Notes the Zero Carbon Moreland – Community and Stakeholder Consultation – Outcomes Report at Attachment 1 to this report.*

*2. Adopts the Zero Carbon Moreland Climate Emergency Action Plan 2020/21 – 2024/25 at Attachment 2 to this report.*

*Subject to the following amendments:*

*a) On Page 26, under heading Waste a Circular Economy – That the Australian Government: Amend second dot point to read: “Expand the product stewardship scheme to include more products. For example, Packaging, making goods so that they can be repaired.”*

*b) On Page 26, under heading Waste & Circular Economy – That the Victorian Government: Add an additional dot point:*

*"Build a publicly-owned recycling facility to ensure the sustainability, the accountability and the safe operation of such a facility"*

*3. Refers the resources outlined in the Zero Carbon Moreland Climate Emergency Action Plan 2020/21 – 2024/25 to the 2020/21 budget process.*

*4. Acknowledges and thanks all involved in the development of the Zero Carbon Moreland Action Plan 2020/21 – 2024/25, which will contributes to the transition to a zero carbon city.*

**Notice of Motion - Phasing out gas in leisure centres** – 10 July 2019

*That Council:*

*1 Notes that the draft Zero Carbon Moreland – Action Plan 2020/21 – 2024/25 which includes an initiative to investigate the feasibility and timing of a planned ‘phase out’ of fossil gas from Council facilities (including aquatic centres) and replace it with renewable energy sources. Following the completion of the current community consultation process the Action Plan will be reported to the November 2019 Council Meeting.*

*2. Resolves that the Council Report and draft Zero Carbon Moreland – Action Plan 2020/21 – 2024/25 Action Plan include the investigation and feasibility of a planned ‘phase out’ of fossil gas and replacement with renewable energy sources in time for the redevelopment of the Fawkner Leisure Centre.*

## 1. Policy Context

Merri-bek Zero Carbon - 2040 Framework (revised February 2022 and October 2022), sets a corporate carbon target 80-100% reduction by 2030 (precluding offsets) against a 2011/12 baseline.

Zero Carbon Merri-bek Climate Emergency Action Plan (Ref 2.6, p. 15) states – “Ensure Council builds highly energy efficient facilities, including onsite renewables and ‘no new fossil gas’’ and ‘Consider outcomes of an investigation (during 2019/20) into the feasibility and timing of an accelerated ‘phase out’ of fossil gas from Council facilities (including aquatic centres), with particular consideration in the planned refurbishment of the Fawkner Leisure Centre.”

Merri-bek Sustainable Buildings Policy (CEO Endorsed May 2024) states*-* “As part of the Zero Carbon Merri-Bek framework and action plan Council is transitioning away from fossil gas to all-electric facilities. It is expected that all new council-owned buildings will be all-electric.”

Although not directed at aquatic centres, the [State Government planning scheme amendment](https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/guides-and-resources/strategies-and-initiatives/victorias-gas-substitution-roadmap) VC250bans gas connections to new dwellings, apartments and residential subdivisions requiring a planning permit from 1 January 2024, and is useful policy context. This is aligned with Merri-bek planning requirements.

State Government Gas Substitution Roadmap, updated 2023 is ‘helping Victoria move away from fossil gas’ (p.3).

## 2. Background

Council has a highly ambitious emissions reduction target range of between 80 – 100% reduction by 2030 (precluding offsets), against 2011/12 baseline, for corporate operations. The current status (2023/24) is 63% below the 2011/12 baseline.

Council has been certified carbon-neutral by Climate Active (previously National Carbon Offset Standard (NCOS)) since 2011/12 and is investing in Australian carbon credits.

Council has invested in a total of 1.32MW of solar panels across 42 Council sites and has plans for another 200kW by the end of this financial year (FY24/25).

All electricity purchased by Council (including that provided at our electric vehicle chargers) is backed by renewable energy certificates from the Crowlands Wind Farm, through the Melbourne Renewable Energy Project (14 organisations). This electricity is therefore zero-carbon.

Given Council’s work on reducing its operational emissions, one of the largest opportunities for further reduction is reducing gas consumption through electrification, allowing electricity to be sourced from renewable energy. Gas consumption is responsible for 23 per cent of Council’s 23/24 corporate carbon footprint. Two other key emission categories are fuel consumption by Council’s fleet (30%) (primarily from diesel consumed by heavy fleet) and contractor transport emissions (27%) (primarily from waste contractor diesel consumption). Fleet emissions are difficult to reduce because a larger number of assets to be upgraded, per vehicle costs are high and zero-carbon options are not currently available for all vehicle categories, especially heavy vehicles.

It would be very difficult to meet Council’s 2030 carbon target without electrification of several of these centres.

**Council aquatic centres**

Merri-bek has six (6) Aquatic and Leisure Centres which have a combined 1,000,000 + attendances per year

The following three (3) currently use gas infrastructure to heat the pools and pool hall:

 Oak Park Sports and Aquatic Centre – (Electric heat pumps installed to heat domestic hot water)

 Brunswick Baths

 Coburg Leisure

The following facilities do not use gas:

 Fawkner Leisure – (recently completed Fawkner Leisure Centre is now all-electric - the first such refurbishment in Victoria).

 Pascoe Vale – Solar heated

 Coburg Olympic – No heating

**Gas use at Council aquatic centres**

Council’s three gas-heated leisure centres accounted for 87% of Council’s total gas consumption (2023/24).

Council’s three gas-heated leisure centres are as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Site** | **Gas contribution at this site, as a percentage of Council’s 2023/24 carbon emissions** |
| Brunswick Baths | 10% |
| Coburg Leisure Centre | 6% |
| Oak Park Sports and Aquatic Centre (OPSAC) | 5% |

**Aquatic and leisure centres in Victoria**

As technology advances and aquatic and leisure centres undergo capital redevelopments to include new energy-efficient infrastructure, four heated centres in Victoria have gone all-electric, by replacing gas boilers with electric heat-pumps:

 Brimbank Aquatic and Wellness Centre (Sept 2022). Have kept gas boiler as back-up to maintain pool temperature.

 Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre (Nov 2023). Has had issues maintaining pool temperature because heat-pumps installed were under-sized and unable to maintain temperatures during winter.

 Fawkner Leisure Centre (Dec 2024). Commissioning and fine-tuning is on-going.

 Carnegie Memorial Swimming Pool (Jan 2025). Still being commissioned.

## 3. Issues

A summary of gas usage and estimated cost of electrification at each of the three centres is shown in the table below:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Site** | **Average annual gas consumption (GJ) (3 years average)** | **Current Capital Works year** | **Estimated budget ($) for electrification** |
| Oak Park Sports and Aquatic Centre (OPSAC) | 5,400 | 2025/26 | $1.85m (inc. $750k federal grant funding) |
| Brunswick Baths (BB) | 12,400 | 2028/29 (design works only)  2029/30 possible redevelopment, pending future budget decisions | $4 - $6m |
| Coburg Leisure Centre (CLC) | 7,300 | 2034/35 onwards  possible redevelopment, pending future budget decisions | Uncosted (c.$2-$3m, at today’s rates), not included in capital works budget |

**Status of council’s three gas using aquatic and leisure centres**

Over the last few years, studies have been prepared that further examine the sites and feasibility of electrification for Brunswick Baths and OPSAC and summarised below.

Oak Park Sports and Aquatic Centre (OPSAC)

Initial electrification study carried out in 2019; feasibility study in 2023; detailed design completed in 2024. Some details about this project:

 The site has a large service yard where heat pumps can be installed, an accessible plant room, located at a distance from residential areas, minimising likely noise issues.

 Additional heat pumps to support potential future increase.

 Based on lessons from other local government aquatic centres, and the significant lifespan of existing infrastructure, it is proposed to retain the existing gas boilers as back-up to ensure service continuity if required.

 The scope of the project currently includes electrification of the adjacent sports pavilion.

On 19 February, Council officers were notified of success in a recent grant application for $739,850 (through the federal government Community Energy Upgrades Fund) to electrify OPSAC.

Pending any new grant requirements, works at OPSAC are planned to be undertaken in the winter of 2026. A detailed design for the electrification of OPSAC is well progressed and includes the adjacent sports pavilion. The cost to electrify is estimated to be $1.85 million (including the $739k federal grant funding).

Brunswick Baths

Currently budget is only allocated for electrification design works in 2028/29. Electrification will need to align with future capital works projects at the site.

An initial electrification study completed in 2021 identified that:

 Brunswick Baths has significant sites constraints and heritage overlays making it difficult to find a location to house the floorspace required for the heat pumps.

 The site will likely need a substation upgrade to ensure the electrical capacity is available.

 The internal infrastructure will need to be upgraded to ensure it is energy efficient.

Council officers will apply for any available grant funding closer to the date of renewal of the facility.

Coburg Leisure Centre

The current Aquatic and Leisure Strategy recommends redevelopment of Coburg Leisure Centre from 2034 onwards. This is likely to be a very significant and costly capital works project depending on scope. The sites electrical supply will also need to be upgraded.

Any future building works (new or modifications) to this facility would be all-electric and in line with Council’s Sustainable Buildings Policy.

**Considerations when electrifying an aquatic centre**

Electrification of OPSAC and Brunswick Baths would keep council on track to meet Merri-bek’s corporate carbon target (80-100% reduction by 2030). Meeting the carbon target will also require a suite of other initiatives, including reduction in fleet and waste contractor fleet emissions.

There is always a significant up-front cost to convert centres from gas to all-electric, however it reduces gas costs to zero. While electrification does increase electricity costs, it eliminates the risk of future increases in the price of gas which are considered to be significant.

Ideally, electrification of a facility should be scheduled to coincide with other building and service improvements to achieve cost benefits and minimise disruption. However, such alignment is not always possible.

It is recommended that gas boilers be retained as backup for future electrification projects, to ensure required pool temperatures are maintained in extreme weather conditions. Any decision to use the boilers would sit with Council officers, not pool operators and would only be used in cases where service continuity was impacted.

Electrification is often faced with grid capacity constraints, which require additional investment by Council to upgrade substations.

Moving a centre to electric heat-pumps offers certain technical challenges which are listed here for information:

 Heat pumps need significant space and access to fresh air, which can be a challenge if they are not provided by the existing plant rooms;

 The noise from heat-pump fans can disturb nearby residents, so noise attenuation may be needed;

 Additional ongoing maintenance and capital costs are needed (over and above those of a gas boiler);

 The aquatic and leisure industry is still building capability and understanding of electrification of swimming pools, particularly for maintenance and operational personnel.

These challenges can all be overcome but do increase project complexity, costs and time required to plan and deliver.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

No community engagement has been undertaken as part of the development of this report.

### Communications

Any communications regarding aquatic centre electrification will occur when relevant project milestones are agreed and achieved. We will continue to celebrate and share achievements as we reduce our carbon emissions through established channels.

## 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

Apart from OPSAC, the funding required for the electrification of Merri-bek aquatic and leisure centres is not currently included in the forward capital works program. The following summarises the budget estimates for electrification works (only):

 Oak Park Sports and Aquatic Centre - $1.85 million (including recently announced $739,000 federal grant funding)

 Brunswick Baths – estimated at $4 to $6 million but requires further detailed investigation to confirm costs

 Coburg Leisure – uncosted, but anticipated to be circa $2 to $3 million at today’s rates if undertaken as part of a significant facility renewal

## 7. Implementation

Subject to Council’s decision in relation to any revised Zero Carbon Merri-bek (ZCM) targets, grant funding agreement requirements and budget processes, next steps include:

 Proceeding with Oak Park Sports and Aquatic Centre electrification in Winter of 2026.

 Undertake further analysis of costs and benefits regarding the electrification of Brunswick Baths 2029/30 given the high capital cost expected.

 Planning to schedule electrification of aquatic centres to coincide with other significant building renewals and service improvements to customers and to maximise cost-benefits and improved energy efficient infrastructure.

## Attachment/s

There are no attachments for this report.

7.10 Submission to parliamentary inquiry into the redevelopment of Melbourne's public housing towers

**Director Place and Environment Pene Winslade**

**City Strategy and Economy**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Endorses the submission to the inquiry into the redevelopment of Melbourne’s public housing towers as contained in Attachment 1 to this report.

2. Authorises the Director Place and Environment to make minor edits and corrections, as necessary and submit the endorsed Merri-bek City Council submission to the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

The September 2023 State Government Housing Statement included an announcement that it would redevelop all of Melbourne’s 44 high-rise public housing estates by 2051. A Parliamentary inquiry into the redevelopment of Melbourne’s public housing towers is being held by the State Government, with submissions being invited until 31 March 2025.

In October 2023, Council made a number of resolutions about the state’s intention to redevelop high-rise public housing, including resolutions specific to the estate in Barkly Street, Brunswick. The draft submission aligns with these previous Council resolutions and makes the following recommendations:

1. That the towers demolition program be halted and a transparent, evidenced-based process be established to evaluate to best options for all older public housing assets.

2. Recognition that relocation can have profound negative impacts on the wellbeing of public housing residents should inform options for renewal of the towers.

3. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) should publish detailed data and analysis of resident outcomes relating to recent projects requiring compulsory long-term relocation.

4. Consultation with affected residents and local communities should be part of the early planning process for renewal of public housing estates.

5. The State Government to support Recommendation 2.3 of the Social Housing Regulation Review in full to improve transparency and accountability to residents and all stakeholders in the operation of the public housing system.

6. The State Government undertakes to publish a systematic review of asset planning and tenancy projections and demonstrate how this information will inform best outcomes for current and future residents of renewal projects.

7. Public housing renewal projects should demonstrate that current and future residents and neighbouring communities have had an opportunity to provide informed input into the quality, design and scale of new housing.

8. The State Government should draw on local and international best practice approaches to public housing renewal to maximise social, economic and environmental benefits.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Notice of Motion - Oppose Public Housing Demolitions** – 18 October 2023

*That Council:*

*1. Strongly opposes the Victorian Government’s plans to demolish 44 public housing towers across the state, including 351 Barkly Street, Brunswick and privatise the majority of public housing land at these sites.*

*2. Notes that the plan will lead to the displacement of 116 residents from 351 Barkly Street, Brunswick, uprooting an entire community, their families and livelihoods.*

*3. Notes that the State Government has an appalling record on public housing redevelopments, which are so disruptive and poorly planned that around 80% of public tenants can’t or don’t return.*

*4. Describes this situation for what it really is; the abandonment of public housing by the State Government and the privatisation of public land by stealth.*

*5. Writes to the Minister for Housing and the Premier Jacinta Allan, opposing the announcement, with the above words included in the letters, and seek to be informed about:*

* The timeline for when the residents at the public housing tower in Merri-bek at 351 Barkly Street, Brunswick are to be relocated and when the tower is targeted for demolition; and*

* Seeking guarantees from the Minister for Housing, that all of the current tenants of 351 Barkly Street, Brunswick will be allowed to return and that if they are relocated, that they are relocated into public housing, not time-limited private tenancies.*

*6. Issues a public statement via its website and social media channels, and a media release, opposing the announcement, noting its particular impact on residents of 351 Barkly Street, Brunswick.*

*7. Updates its advocacy positions to clearly oppose the demolition and privatisation of public housing in Merri-bek.*

**Notice of Motion - Housing** – 18 October 2023

*That Council:*

*1. Seeks information from Minister for Planning Sonya Kilkenny on what type of affordable housing a developer can include in order to bypass council, and under what circumstances can the planning minister waive the requirement for a developer to include affordable housing as a condition of bypassing council.*

*2. Requests information from the Minister for Housing Harriet Shing about the status of public housing across Merri-bek. Information sought should include:*

* Information about public housing that is scheduled to be redeveloped, decommissioned or sold off. It is known that public housing in Glenroy is to be decommissioned. What is happening with this housing.*

* Whether any public housing redevelopments planned will be for public housing (defined as owned and managed by the state government with the tenants on public housing leases) or community housing or privately owned.*

*3. Write to the State Government to:*

* Abandon plans to demolish the 44 public housing towers in Melbourne and instead use the Retain Repair and Reinvest model which is being used in France where public housing towers are being renovated without tenants being forced to move out.*

* Cease plans to use the Ground Lease Model to privatise public land that public housing estates are on.*

* Adopt a position that any developments on public housing estates be for public housing exclusively.*

*4. Writes to the Minister for Housing to build public housing on disused state government sites such as the disused Kangan Batman TAFE sites in Coburg and Coburg North*

*5. Seeks support from the Municipal Association of Victoria to oppose the demolition of the 44 public housing towers in Melbourne and instead support plans for the Retain, Repair and Reinvest model of refurbishing public housing towers without tenants being required to move out, as occurs in France.*

## 1. Policy Context

The Council Plan 2021-25 states:

*We want to create welcoming, unique spaces that are for everyone. Our goal is to bring people together and make sure they feel Merri-bek is a great place to be. We want to improve people’s access to community facilities and affordable housing.*

The Plan also commits to building community resilience to the impacts of climate change with a goal to reduce the council’s and the community’s greenhouse gas emissions.

Council’s Affordable Housing Action Plan 2022-26 aims primarily to increase affordable housing in Merri-bek. It includes actions relevant to this inquiry such as:

*2.3 Work with Homes Victoria, registered housing providers, Not For Profit organisations, philanthropy and private organisations to partner on affordable housing developments and renewal projects*

*3.3 Work on relevant campaigns and advocacy [including} existing and renewed public housing*

## 2. Background

The September 2023 State Government Housing Statement included an announcement that it would redevelop all of Melbourne’s 44 high-rise public housing estates by 2051, commencing with the towers in Flemington, North Melbourne and Carlton.

This announcement outlined that the redevelopment is needed because the towers are reaching the end of their lives and do not meet current minimum standards for housing, and that substantial investment would be needed to retrofit the towers.

The redevelopment will include social housing, affordable housing and market housing, with a commitment to boost the overall number of social homes across the sites by 10 per cent. The Statement notes that the number of people living in the estates will increase from 10,000 to 30,000 once all of the sites are redeveloped.

On 30 September 2024, a Parliamentary inquiry into the redevelopment of Melbourne’s public housing towers was announced by the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee. The Committee will look at a range of issues including the rationale and cost of demolition versus alternatives like refurbishment, the impact on public housing residents, and the relocation of residents. It will also assess the adequacy of consultations with residents, stakeholders, and government entities, and evaluate the proposed financial and legal models.

## 3. Issues

As of June 2023, there were 2,339 social housing properties (3% of dwellings) in Merri-bek, comprising 1,747 public housing, 492 community housing and100 transitional and crisis housing. Merri-bek has one public housing tower site at 351 Barkly Street, Brunswick. There are 116 houses at this site, and it is almost exclusively populated by older, single residents.

Council has not received responses from the Premier or Ministers that it wrote to in actioning the October 2023 Council resolutions.

The draft submission to the inquiry notes that well-evidenced contributions by architects, planners, designers and community advocates on alternative approaches to addressing the need to make older public housing buildings safer, more sustainable and accessible. It further states that the decision to demolish all 44 public housing towers in Melbourne appears to be one taken without the reasonable consideration of actual need, negative social, environmental and economic consequences, and alternative approaches.

In relation to the displacement of residents from the towers, the submission draws on the experience of the redevelopment of Gronn Place in Brunswick West and recommends that the impacts on the wellbeing of public housing residents should inform options for renewal of the towers and that detailed data and analysis of resident outcomes relating to projects requiring compulsory long-term relocation should be published.

In regard to the public housing site at 351 Barkly Street Brunswick, the submission notes that the residents were informed generally of the towers redevelopment program in the days after the State Government announcement but have not been given answers then or since on when the planned demolition will take place. Transparency and early consultation with residents are also recommendations of the submission.

The submission notes that generational underinvestment in public housing will not be addressed, or market failure reversed, by this marginal short-term boost. Therefore, the commitment to increase "social housing" (not public housing) by 10 per cent on the 44 tower sites is wholly inadequate given the scope and depth of development options which the state government has as the existing landowner.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

The submission makes note the sustainability implications of redevelopment of the public housing towers as opposed to retrofitting the existing towers.

### 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 was found to be in line with these requirements. This report seeks endorsement of a submission to the State Government that in particular has regard to the impact of the redevelopment of the public housing towers on the residents of the existing towers.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

Members of the public are able to make a submission to the inquiry up until 31 March 2025.

**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 submission notes the lack of consultation with the existing residents of the Barkly Street public housing estate.

### Communications

Once endorsed by Council, a copy of the submission will be made available on Council’s website.

## 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 resources required to prepare the submission have been met within existing base budgets.

## 7. Implementation

Once Council has endorsed the submission, the Director Place and Environment will submit it to the Committee on Council’s behalf.

The Committee is expected to table its report by December 2025.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Merri-bek City Council submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the redevelopment of Melbourne’s public housing towers | D25/80551 |  |

7.11 Central Coburg Program - Scenarios for further investigation

**Director Place and Environment, Pene Winslade**

**Central Coburg Program**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes the update provided in this report on the Central Coburg program.

2. Requests scenario modelling and sensitivity testing for three broad outcomes and three delivery mechanisms as outlined in this report, in order to explore a range of community benefit outcomes, including different rates of provision for social and affordable housing, and the possibility of staging.

3. Receives a report at the May Council meeting on the findings of the further investigation into the endorsed scenarios with consideration of community benefit, cost, financial return, risk, level of certainty, timing and staging.

**REPORT**

**Executive summary**

Council has a long-held ambition to use its significant landholdings in the heart of the Coburg Activity Centre to revitalise Coburg. In 2024 following extensive community engagement, Council set six objectives for Central Coburg:

 A new library in the heart of Coburg

 New inviting public spaces

 More greening and cooling

 High quality housing, including social and affordable housing

 People friendly streets

 A thriving local economy.

Since that time, a range of work has begun to inform decision making – including work to develop a new library and piazza, geotechnical and flooding studies, market and housing sector analysis, and community needs analysis.

The next stage of work will examine a range of scenarios to allow Council to consider different possible outcomes and determine which outcome best balances viability of project delivery, and maximises community benefit.

To test this, an approach is proposed which will look at three scope scenarios (the “what”), alongside three potential delivery models (the “how”):

 The three “what” scenarios include a very localised project, a moderate or neighbourhood program across the sites, and a higher scale, more intense program.

 The three delivery models are: Council-led delivery; a ground lease model (ie, a long-term lease with Council retaining ownership of the land); and partnering with others by selling sites with conditions to deliver specific community benefit outcomes.

Some key factors will be assumed within all scenarios, including minimum levels of performance for matters within Council adopted policy, such as environmental performance standards, and design excellence.

Other elements (such as mix of social and affordable housing, mix of commercial and housing uses, and so on) will be subject to sensitivity analysis in each of the scenario models, to understand the impact of different levels of provision.

This range of scenarios will be modelled and evaluated against criteria including:

 How well the scenario performs against Council’s objectives and principles for central Coburg, with particular reference to the potential impact on housing (broken down by housing and tenure type), the local economy, the public realm, environmental resilience and greening, and other forms of community benefit.

 Consideration and modelling of the outcomes Council requested in December 2024, including long term leasing arrangements with public housing, federal government partnerships around affordable housing, options to keep the sites under public ownership, and other options to achieve social and affordable housing outcomes – aligning with state and federal housing initiatives and reforms and funding opportunities.

 Understanding how each scenario would play out in terms of timing, how long it would take to see change, and what might be delivered when.

 Consideration of scenarios against acceptable levels and types of risk, including considering prudent financial arrangements for a local government organisation.

 The likelihood of success, for example how well the scenario aligns with potential funding programs, projected interest and/or capacity of delivery partners, etc.

Once these scenarios have been modelled, the results and a recommended scenario and way forward will be presented to a future meeting of Council.

**Previous Council decisions**

The four key recent Council decisions are listed below.

**The Coburg Library and Piazza project** – 12 February 2025

*That Council:*

*1. Endorses the vision, objectives and scope for a new Coburg Library and Piazza as outlined in Attachment 1.*

*2. Investigates the southern part of the Waterfield Street West site as the potential preferred location for the Coburg Library and Piazza.*

*3. Receives a report at the April 2025 Council meeting on the outcomes of further site location exploration and a recommended site for the Coburg Library and Piazza.*

*4. Endorses the indicative financial modelling to be undertaken for the upcoming Council 10-year Financial Plan which supports a funding strategy of up to $60 million, and:*

*a) Notes that the funding strategy comprises of a mixture of reserves and borrowings and explores opportunities to derive revenue from the existing library site once it is no longer needed as a library building, either through sale or long-term commercial lease and utilising the proceeds as a part of the funding strategy.*

*b) Refers the indicative funding strategy of up to $60 million to the 2025-2029 budget process.*

*5. Endorses the commencement of a design competition to procure the Coburg Library and Piazza concept design, and notes that a draft concept design will be returned for Council consideration and endorsement following the design competition and prior to community engagement.*

*6. Continues to advocate to Federal and State Government, as well as any other appropriate funders, for grants and funds to realise the project.*

**Affordable housing in Coburg** – 11 December 2024

*That Council:*

*1. Notes that the Coburg Conversation project undertook extensive community consultation about future use of six council-owned sites in central Coburg.*

*2. Notes that Council endorsed the resulting six objectives of “Revitalising Coburg” including: quality housing; a new library; public space; more greening; friendly streets; and a thriving economy.*

*3. Acknowledges that the housing crisis is having immediate impacts on our community.*

*4. Acknowledges that in relation to Objective 4 (New high-quality housing, including social and affordable housing) the Coburg Conversation project consultation process concluded that:*

*a) There is a need for diverse, high-quality housing in Coburg to meet the needs of a growing population.*

*b) When it comes to housing, people need to be able to access different types of housing at different stages across their lives.*

*c) There is a growing need for social and affordable housing in Merri-bek, particularly in Coburg. Since 2003, the median weekly rent has risen more than twice the rate of inflation, from $200 to $500.*

*d) Central Coburg, with its close proximity to shops, services and public transport, is an ideal location for social and affordable housing. Today, 4,341 households in Merri-bek (6.4%) are in need of affordable housing, 84 per cent of which are low or very-low income.*

*5. Commits to progressing the objectives of the Coburg Conversation Project within this term of Council with a focus on creating urgently needed social and genuinely affordable housing, alongside a new Coburg library and community hub.*

*6. Notes that Council is commissioning detailed feasibility work, supported by a federal Housing Support Program grant, to inform options to realise the objectives of Revitalising Coburg including providing advice on site locations of preferred uses, potential delivery models and potential project partners; and asks that the council receive either the final report or progress report by March 2025*

*7. Notes that state and federal governments have a key role to play in the provision of public housing, which is a genuinely affordable form of housing as rents are capped at 25 per cent of household income, with resident’s rights protected by state legislation.*

*8. Resolves that the feasibility work include consideration of options including:*

*a) Long term leasing arrangements with state government to build public housing;*

*b) A partnership with the Federal government through the Housing Australia Future Fund to construct housing where rents are capped at 25 per cent of household income;*

*c) Options that keep all sites under public ownership, including taking expressions of interest from not-for-profit developers to redevelop suitable sites with land secured via long term leasing arrangements with council.*

*d) Other models to achieve social and affordable outcomes in central Coburg, including the option to call for an expression of interest from not-for-profit developers.*

*e) Alignment with state and federal housing initiatives and reforms, and state and federal funding opportunities, for all options.*

**Support for Central Coburg businesses and community** – 11 September 2024

*That Council:*

*1. Notes the long-term planning underway to revitalise Central Coburg, as kickstarted by the recent Coburg Conversation community engagement*

*2. Notes Council’s existing and strengthening relationship with the Central Coburg Business Association, recognising the importance and value of thriving local businesses for economic development, placemaking and creating a sense of community.*

*3. Notes the complex and intersectional needs of some of the people frequenting the Victoria Street Mall and acknowledges that punitive approaches to managing complex needs does not resolve issues.*

*4. Organises a meeting for Council officers, local businesses, Victoria Police and the Central Coburg Business Association and any other relevant stakeholders to discuss possible short and medium-term interventions to increase both actual and perceived safety and create a more inviting space for the Coburg community in Victoria Mall and receives a report on the outcomes of this meeting, officer recommendations and possible next steps in the first half of 2025.*

**The Coburg Conversation engagement findings and precinct objectives** – 10 April 2024

*That Council:*

*1. Notes the feedback provided from the community about the future of central Coburg captured in ‘The Coburg Conversation – Summary of Community Engagement for Revitalising Coburg’ (Attachment 2)*

*2. Thanks the many community members, local groups businesses and organisations who took the time to share their views and ideas for the future of the area*

*3. Amends objective 5 on page 29 in Attachment 1 to this report adding the italicised words to read:*

*Safe, green, inviting, and accessible journeys that link key destinations and open space, and all types of transport to, from and within the precinct, giving clear priority to pedestrians, cyclists and those living with mobility issues.*

*4. Includes the concept of a community centre as part of the Coburg Library project in the next round of community consultation on Revitalising Coburg. Such a community centre would include a kitchen that the public is allowed to use, a shower and lockers, an additional meeting room or rooms, which could facilitate the Library opening up this additional space during extreme heat periods.*

*5. Adopts ‘Revitalising Coburg: Objectives’, that sets out Council’s high-level objectives for achieving the revitalisation of central Coburg, (Attachment 1) and will act as a guide for the next stage of detailed planning for this program.*

## 1. Policy context

### Council Plan 2021-25

 Theme 2: Moving and living safely in Merri-bek

 Strategy 2.6: Collaborate with the community to improve pedestrian and cycling infrastructure on a case by case basis.

 Theme 3: A healthy and caring Merri-bek

 Strategy 3.2: Strategically invest in Council’s community services and assets to increase our resilience and adapt to climate change risks and impacts that are now unavoidable (such as severe heatwaves, flash flooding, unreliable rainfall)

 Theme 4: Vibrant spaces and places in Merri-bek.

 Strategy 4.9: To revitalise Merri-bek’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.

 Theme 5: An empowered and collaborative Merri-bek

 Strategy 5.2: Increase community access and capacity to meaningfully participate in council decision-making and civic life.

 Major Initiative 25: Revitalise the Coburg Activity Centre.

 Major initiative 4.7: To review and implement the Affordable Housing Action Plan including the development of affordable housing on council land.

**Council Action Plans**

 2024-25 – Carry out research, technical studies, strategic planning, partnership building, engagement planning and affordable housing, to guide the future of central Coburg.

**Merri-bek Open Space Strategy 2024**

 Council is also exploring open space needs in central Coburg near the Coburg Train Station as part of the Heart of Coburg project [Central Coburg Program], which will likely see the creation of new housing and business in this dense part of the suburb, which will likely see the creation of new housing and business in this dense part of the suburb.

## 2. Background

### Central Coburg context

Central Coburg is a vibrant place known for its rich history and diverse community, but which is often viewed as lacking investment and needing upgrades. Sydney Road and Victoria Street Mall offer a variety of well-loved local shops, cafes and restaurants. The area is well-connected to public transport, with Coburg Station, the Sydney Road tram and a range of bus services, that make it easier to reach other parts of Melbourne.

Coburg also benefits from its existing network of community infrastructure, offering facilities that serves the needs of residents across various age groups. This includes the Coburg Leisure Centre, the Coburg Library, the Coburg Senior Citizen’s Centre, the Coburg Town Hall, the Coburg Courthouse and the Coburg Children’s Centre. There are also a number of large outdoor sports facilities including Bridges Oval and McDonalds Reserve.

In 2020, the new Coburg Station opened to the public after the level crossing was removed at Bell Street in Coburg. As part of this project, a section of the Upfield Shared Use Path was upgraded and new community open spaces were created including playgrounds, exercise equipment and a dog park.

In 2021, Council made the decision to sell the site next to the Coburg Town Hall to enable the delivery of the Coburg Health and Community Services Precinct in response to growing shortfalls in local health services and the need to generate local employment. The precinct will house an extensive array of healthcare facilities, including GPs, childcare, allied health services, and will create over 1,000 new construction and healthcare jobs, increasing the range of services accessible to all members of the Merri-bek community.

There are also upcoming projects planned to upgrade key streets in central Coburg including Louisa Street and Munro/Harding Streets to improve the safety, accessibility and the quality of the public realm.

### Strategic context

Central Coburg is identified as a Principal Activity Centre under the Victorian State Government’s strategic planning policy.

As part of this designation, Merri-bek City Council adopted the Central Coburg 2020 Structure Plan which includes goals to deliver new jobs, housing and commercial uses in central Coburg. In 2015, the Coburg Activity Centre Zone became part of the planning scheme after it was approved by the Minister for Planning. Since then, there has been an increase in mixed use buildings delivered in the Coburg Activity Centre, the majority of these new buildings have been delivered in Pentridge.

On 27 February 2025, the State Government identified Coburg Station as part of the next tranche of the Activity Centre Program.

### Project context

Council has long term aspirations to improve quality of place in central Coburg, through the Planning Scheme and through its landholdings. There have been previous attempts to deliver projects on Council-owned land that have not proceeded. As a result, these sites have remained underutilised. Given the central location of these sites, Council is committed to finding better ways to use them to deliver more community benefit, improve quality of place and future-proof central Coburg.

There are six Council-owned sites that form the Central Coburg Program, each of which have different characteristics (see Figure 1).

|  |
| --- |
| A map of a city  AI-generated content may be incorrect.A close-up of a white background  AI-generated content may be incorrect.  **Figure 1: Council-owned sites in central Coburg.** |

### Six objectives for Central Coburg

The six objectives for Central Coburg were confirmed by Council following an extensive community engagement known as The Coburg Conversation in late 2023. Over 1,300 people participated and shared their views on the future of the area. The six objectives are:

1) A new library in the heart of Coburg

2) New inviting public spaces

3) More greening and cooling

4) High quality housing, including social and affordable housing

5) People friendly streets

6) A thriving local economy.

Work is already in train on several of these objectives. Council has brought forward the delivery of Objectives 1 and 2, a new library in the heart of Coburg and new public spaces. At the February 2025 Council meeting, the vision, objectives and scope for a new Coburg Library and Piazza were endorsed, including a funding envelope of up to $60 million for the project. Council also endorsed the commencement of a design competition to procure the Coburg Library and Piazza concept design.

The new library will replace the current library which is no longer fit-for-purpose, given it was originally constructed in the 1960’s as a supermarket and was repurposed as a library approximately 40 years ago. A new piazza in the heart of the neighbourhood will provide essential gathering spaces and increased tree canopy coverage, given the current shortage of open space in Coburg.

At the February Council meeting, Council also resolved to investigate the southern part of the Waterfield Street West site as the potential preferred location for the library and piazza. This location is within one of the Council owned six parcels of land in central Coburg. A final recommendation on the site for the new Coburg Library and Piazza will come to Council in the coming months.

Council is also working to deliver on delivering on Objectives 3 and 5, including working towards key streetscape upgrades, including urban greening. This work would be likely to include:

The permanent design for the streetscape improvements is expected to include:

 safer pedestrian crossings and better footpaths for pedestrian access

 street landscaping, including trees, raingardens, and garden beds

 new street furniture including seating, bins and drinking fountains

 speed humps and raised crossings to slow down traffic.

The Central Coburg program will seek to address all six objectives.

### Key challenges in Central Coburg

#### Quality of place

A key problem affecting central Coburg is the quality of its urban environment, which has large areas of surface carparking, a lack of open space, accessibility issues and a relatively narrow retail offer. The heart of the activity centre is dominated by large carparks which disperse activity and make it harder for people to safely move through the area.

‘Coburg currently doesn’t feel special. It feels outdated and run down. It’s not a comfortable, safe and appealing space to sit and have lunch anywhere and enjoy the surroundings.’ - The Coburg Conversation

The Central Coburg program represents a significant opportunity to improve quality of place in central Coburg to create a safe, welcoming and climate resilient place for the local community.

#### Housing

There is growing demand for housing across Merri-bek City Council including market housing, affordable housing and social housing. Council’s high-level housing demand analysis of Coburg indicates that 2,600 additional dwellings will be required by 2036 to meet housing demand. With approximately 1,700 dwellings currently planned, this creates a shortfall of approximately 900 dwellings.

The State government’s recently announced planning reforms set a housing capacity target of 69,000 new dwellings across Merri-bek by 2051. It is not yet known what specific target has been set for the Coburg Activity Centre.

Across Merri-bek, there are 4,341 households in need of affordable housing (6.4 per cent), 84 per cent of which are low or very-low income. This includes people living alone (1,181), families (837) couples (361) and group households (470). This need is projected to grow by 57 per cent between 2021 and 2041.

#### Local economy

We heard during The Coburg Conversation that many people love the local businesses in central Coburg but that there is a desire for more variety in the mix of shops and businesses and for more activity at night.

Many people who live in Coburg are currently travelling elsewhere for shopping, dining and entertainment. A significant number of locals are drawn to popular destinations outside of Coburg such as Preston Market, Barkly Square, and Moonee Ponds. Approximately 90 per cent of spending by Coburg residents currently occurs outside of the suburb or online. There is an opportunity to attract more locals to the centre, creating a vibrant and convenient place for shopping, dining and entertainment.

Many buildings in central Coburg remain vacant for long periods of time. The vacancy rate is high among small footprint retailers (2.48 per cent) indicating potential economic pressures of competition impacting smaller businesses.

Currently, the limited housing in central Coburg has an impact on the local economy. Increasing housing in this area would help address housing needs while also generating flow-on benefits to the local economy, like more customers for local businesses and increased activity both day and night.

#### Climate resilience

Improving climate resilience in central Coburg is critical to mitigate the risks of extreme weather events, including heatwaves and flooding. At the moment, a large proportion of the area is dedicated to surface carparking and there is limited shade. On high temperature days, heat radiates from the surface of these carparks, increasing the temperatures locally and creating an unpleasant and unsafe environment. During high rainfall events, there are also stormwater management issues in the area.

Any future projects will need to address these challenges and embed climate resilience into the design of buildings and public spaces. The introduction of new public spaces, such as the piazza, will contribute to mitigating the impacts of heat. To improve water management, a mix of design interventions will be required including rain gardens, pipe upgrades and underground storage tanks.

#### Transport

Central Coburg offers a range of transport options, including the Upfield Train line and shared path, Route 19 tram, seven bus routes, and several council-managed car parks.

The precinct planning will follow best practice design principles, incorporating wide, level pathways, safe crossings, designated drop-off zones and car parking, traffic calming measures, adequate lighting, integrated cycling infrastructure, and clear wayfinding signage. A comprehensive access audit has already been conducted to identify current challenges and develop a prioritised list of recommended improvements to inform future development.

#### Car parking

Central Coburg has a substantial amount of Council-owned at-grade car parking. While parking is important for local businesses, the current at-grade layout prioritises large expanses of hard paving over any other uses, including greening. The result is hot, unshaded spaces that feel uninviting and unsafe. This also makes it unappealing and difficult for pedestrians, particularly those with limited mobility, to move through the area, ultimately diminishing its vibrancy and economic potential.

## 3. Issues

### Precinct scenarios

Several precinct scenarios are proposed to test the different outcomes that can be achieved across the six sites in central Coburg. The precinct scenarios would test both what can be delivered and how it can be delivered. Figure 2 illustrates the three scenarios and three delivery models that are proposed to be tested through the scenarios work.

A diagram of a diagram

AI-generated content may be incorrect.*Figure 2: Precinct scenarios*

#### Fixed/non-variable elements

Although elements of each scenario will differ, there are fixed outcomes that will remain the same across all scenarios. Each scenario will:

 Align with the six Revitalising Coburg objectives and principles.

 Incorporate a new library and piazza, consistent with the vision, objectives, and scope endorsed at the February 2025 Council Meeting.

 Incorporate the additional public infrastructure required to support the library and piazza.

 Provide adequate public parking to service existing uses and new developments.

 Deliver significant streetscape improvements including urban canopy and greening outcomes and other improvements to key streets and walkways.

 Embed best practice and environmentally sustainable design initiatives into future projects.

 Include commercial uses aligned with current and anticipated market demand.

 Include a mix of housing types, including social and affordable housing.

 Ensure high quality built form and design standards.

 Consider and respond to the needs of Council’s human rights priority groups.

 Ensure designs support improved safety and perception of safety.

### Social and affordable housing

The scenarios will test a range of housing types, including social and affordable housing. The testing will the testing will look at the financial implications, the timing implications and also consider what is possible in relation to the likely level of interest and capacity of funders and partners.

This will include consideration of options requested by Council in December 2024, including:

 Long term leasing arrangements with state government to build public housing.

 A partnership with the Federal government through the Housing Australia Future Fund (or similar future vehicles) to construct housing where rents are capped at 25 per cent of household income (affordable housing).

 Other models to achieve social and affordable outcomes in central Coburg, including the option to call for an expression of interest from not-for-profit developers.

 Alignment with state and federal housing initiatives and reforms, and state and federal funding opportunities, for all options.

The amount of housing that can be delivered, and the mix of housing types that are feasible, will vary across each of the scenarios.

#### What the scenarios will model

Three different options have been developed to form the basis for further testing. Table 1 provides a summary of their characteristics.

|  | | **Place impact** | **Sites** | **Housing impact** | **Economic impact** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | **Minimum requirement**  *Minimum interventions that focus on the sites that most need improvement* | Place improvements right in the heart of Coburg, where it is most needed, with a focus on delivering the upgrades required to support the new Coburg Library and Piazza.  Asset management for specific sites, and maintenance for all sites. | A, D | A small increase in housing, in close proximity to Coburg Station | A small increase in economic activity, mostly due to an increase in visitors to the new Coburg Library and Piazza. |
| 2 | **Moderate**  *Moderate density development across all six sites* | More substantial change across each of the six sites, changing the look and feel of Coburg and bringing new residents and businesses to the area. | A, B, C, D, E, F | A moderate increase in housing | A moderate increase in economic activity, mostly due to an increase in local residents and increased footfall for local businesses. |
| 3 | **Significant**  *Significant density development across all six sites* | A more intense urban environment with increased vibrancy, diversity and activity, both day and night. | A, B, C, D, E, F | A significant increase in housing | Major uplift to local businesses from an increase in residents and an increase in the diversity of businesses, including businesses that contribute to a night-time economy. |

*Table 1: Precinct scenarios*

Testing and evaluating different design outcomes is an important stage in the design process. It ensures that the advantages of different options are thoroughly considered before deciding on a preferred direction. Once the preferred design outcome is determined, it will serve as the foundation for the precinct masterplan.

Three different delivery approaches will also be tested against the three scenarios. Table 2 provides a summary of their characteristics.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Council-led** | A council-led approach would involve Council taking the lead in planning, funding and managing projects. |
| **Ground lease** | A ground lease model entails Council leasing land to a partner over a long-term period while retaining ownership. This means that Council would retain ownership of the land but that a partner would take the lead in planning, funding and managing projects. |
| **Sell with requirements** | Sell with requirements entails Council selling land with specific conditions in place, such as design requirements or housing affordability targets, to ensure that outcomes align with community aspirations. |

*Table 2: Precinct scenarios – the “how”*

### Scenario evaluation

Each feasible scenario will be assessed based on a set of criteria (refer to Table 3). This evaluation will enable an analysis of the benefits and disbenefits of various approaches, helping Council make a well-informed decision regarding the future of these sites.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Community benefit** | What community benefits will be delivered – against the six Central Coburg Objectives? |
| **Level of certainty** | How much control would Council have over the outcome and what elements would be determined by partners? |
| **Timing** | What would happen when? |
| **Cost** | What is the estimated cost to Council? |
| **Financial return** | What is the likely financial return to Council? |
| **Risk** | What types of risks do Council need to be aware of and how can they be managed? |

*Table 3: Precinct scenarios evaluation criteria*

Subject to Council’s decision on the scenarios, the findings from the evaluation would inform the masterplan and delivery model for the precinct.

The scenarios are a useful framework to test what is feasible across a very complex set of sites and options. It is unlikely that a single scenario will be identified as the preferred pathway forward. It is more likely that a combination of different scenarios will emerge, creating a hybrid approach that balances Council’s priorities to achieve the best possible community outcomes.

### Community impact

The precinct scenarios will explore various potential outcomes and delivery models, and feed into the adoption of a vision for Coburg, made up of a precinct masterplan and delivery model for how it will be achieved. Council will consider this vision, and its impact on the community, at a future meeting.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

The precinct scenarios will explore various approaches to incorporating best practice and environmentally sustainable design initiatives into future projects in central Coburg. This will encompass high environmental performance standards in alignment with Council policies, enhanced greening of streets, a substantial increase in tree canopy coverage, water-sensitive urban design and interventions to support biodiversity.

### Economic sustainability implications

The precinct scenarios will explore various potential design outcomes and delivery models, but the economic impact will not be clear until a preferred vision for central Coburg is defined. The economic impacts of each of the precinct scenarios will be evaluated with consideration of their economic contribution to central Coburg. This evaluation will help shape and refine the approach moving forward.

### Legal and risk considerations

There are no significant legal or risk considerations associated with the endorsement of scenarios for further investigation. Legal and risk considerations identified through the further investigation will be included in the report to the May Council meeting.

### 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 Coburg Conversation had a focus on the human rights priority groups outlined in Council’s Human Rights Policy, namely:

 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

 Migrant, refugee and faith communities

 People with disabilities

 Women, girls and gender diverse people

 LGBTIQA+ communities

The engagement program targeted these priority groups and developed specific strategies and activities to ensure we heard from each of them throughout the process. High levels of participation across all of these groups were achieved as a result.

*Revitalising Coburg Objectives* includes six principles which describe our approach to delivering change in central Coburg. Of these six, two are of particular relevance to meeting the requirements of the Victorian Charter of Human Rights:

Principle 2: Inclusive of Future and Current Communities

*Continuing to listen to the diverse communities of Coburg to deeply understand needs, aspirations, and lived experience, while also considering the needs of future generations.*

Principle 5: Accessible to All

*Services, programs and facilities that are accessible to all people in our diverse community.*

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

### Community Engagement

The Coburg Conversation community engagement program has shaped the Revitalising Coburg Objectives, which will guide the investigation of the proposed scenarios.

If Council adopts a draft vision for Central Coburg at its May meeting, a community engagement program will take place in mid-2025 to gather community feedback on the draft vision.

### Communications

A detailed communications plan will be prepared prior to Council adoption of a draft vision in mid-2025.

## 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 action this resolution are budgeted for within the current year budget of the Central Coburg Program.

## 7. Implementation

Officers will investigate the endorsed scenarios, including financial feasibility modelling, and evaluate the alignment of possible outcomes with the Revitalising Coburg Objectives.

A further report to Council will be prepared for the May Council meeting, outlining the findings of that investigation as the next step towards a draft vision for Central Coburg and a preferred delivery model.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Confidential Attachment 1 - Precinct Scenarios  *Pursuant to section 3(1)(a) and (c) of the Local Government Act 2020, this attachment has been designated as confidential because it relates to Council business information, being information that would prejudice the Council's position in commercial negotiations if prematurely released, and land use planning information, being information that if prematurely released is likely to encourage speculation in land values.* | D25/111835 |  |

7.12 Footpath Capital Works and Maintenance Plan

**Director City Infrastructure, Anita Curnow**

**Capital Works Planning and Delivery**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Refers to the 2025/26 budget process the reinstatement of an allocation of $2 million for renewal of footpaths and bike paths each year.

2. Notes that the Council’s Road Management Plan will be reviewed by 31 October 2025 in accordance with the requirement of the Road Management (General) Regulation 2016 which includes review of intervention levels and response time to address the identified hazards.

**REPORT**

## Executive Summary

This Council report is prepared in response to a Notice of Motion resolved by the Council at September 2024 Council meeting seeking a report on a footpath improvement plan through review of capital expenditure and the Road Management Plan.

For the last 4 years, Council has been spending approximately $2 million per year on renewal of footpaths and bike paths. In the 2024/25 budget, this amount was reduced to $1.8 million in light of budget pressure on the Capital Works Program.

In addition to this specific funding, some road reconstruction projects and transport projects also have footpath, bike path and shared path renewal as part of a larger capital works project (estimated at average of $0.8 million per annum over the last 4 years).

Council is required to have financial valuations of its infrastructure assets every year. Council’s average annual depreciation in financial valuation of footpaths, bike paths and shared paths is approximately $4.7 million. However, the depreciation amount is a financial indicator and does not reflect the actual renewal requirement.

Council undertakes condition audits of all footpaths and bike paths every few years. This was last audited 4 years ago. A condition assessment is a more realistic basis for making decisions about the level of renewal required in any given year.

In addition to renewal, Council also spends more than $300,000 of operational funding repairing hazards and defects in footpaths and bike paths, whether they are raised by residents or observed by our own teams undertaking inspections of these assets under our Road Management Plan. These measures keep the assets safe, they don’t add to the life of the assets.

The Road Management Plan is up for review this calendar year (by 31 October 2025) and it is proposed that stakeholder feedback be gathered to inform the review and a statutory public exhibition period will apply for wider community engagement.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Notice of Motion - Footpath Improvement Strategy** – 11 September 2024

*That Council receives a report no later than February 2025 that details a plan for referral to the 2025/26 budget process and to the process for preparing the new Council Plan and Road Management Plan on an improvement strategy for Council in the delivery of footpath renewal and responses to footpath hazards, to improve the safety of pedestrians in Merri-bek, including for consideration:*

*1. Reviewing the prioritisation of footpath renewal spending so that it accounts for usage of the footpath, community feedback, and condition reports.*

*2. Review the adequacy of the forecast capital budget for footpath and cycling renewal, to meet renewal need, noting current budget expenditure for current financial year of $2.112m, which reflects a renewal : depreciation ratio of 48%.*

*3. Reviewing current demand and capacity for hazard response and inspections and the adequacy of current resources, with a view to recommendations for improved plan, adequate resourcing and budget recommendations.*

*4. Strategies for improved engagement with the community to respond to differing needs of users and help guide priorities.*

## 1. Policy Context

### Road Management Plan

Council’s maintenance of footpaths, particularly in relation to responding to hazard and risk minimisation is guided by the Road Management Plan, adopted in accordance with the *Road Management Act*. The Road Management Plan outlines the maintenance and defect management standards for all roads, footpaths, bike paths and shared paths within Council’s jurisdiction.

The Road Management (General) Regulations 2016, require road authorities to review the Road Management Plan. For local government, the review is required no later than 31 October in the year following the Council election.

### Council Plan 2021 to 2025

Under Council Plan Theme 2: Moving and living safely in Merri-bek, item 9 is a major initiative and priority to “Implement footpaths and bike paths capital works program”.

### Financial sustainability indicators

The Victorian Auditor-General oversees Local Government performance with respect to financial sustainability. In order to report annually to the Auditor-General, Council needs to undertake annual financial valuation of all asset classes including footpaths, bike paths and shared paths.

Importantly, the Auditor-General’s guidance on financial sustainability indicators provides that it is the full picture provided by a range of indicators that points to sustainability, over a number of years. In its guidance information on indicators of financial sustainability, the Auditor General states that: “indicators should be considered collectively and are more useful when assessed over time as part of a trend analysis.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Condition assessment of these assets is undertaken every 4-5 years. Financial indicators based on valuations are less important than the condition data collected in working out the level of renewal required for footpaths and bike paths.

## 2. Background

In September 2024 Council meeting, a Notice of Motion was raised and Council resolved to receive a report that outlines review of prioritisation of footpath renewal works, the adequacy of renewal budget and maintenance response.

While the report was requested for no later than February 2025, it is being presented in March 2025 following review of officer priorities. This timing still allows Council to consider the level of funding for footpath and bike path renewal in the 5 Year Capital Works Program that will be presented with the draft budget in April 2025.

### Funding for renewal of footpaths, bike paths and shared paths

Council allocated $2 million in each of the years 2020/21 to 2023/23 for renewal of footpaths, bike paths and shared paths. In 2024/25, this figure was reduced to $1.8 million because of pressure on the overall capital works program budget.

Several other projects listed in the capital works program have footpath, bike path and shared path component which is in addition to the above allocation.

Council is required to have financial valuations of its infrastructure assets every year. Council’s footpath, bike path and shared path are currently valued at approximately $149 million. With an assumed life of 43 years, the average annual depreciation for the next 5 years is approximately $4.7 million. The depreciation amount is a financial indicator and does not reflect the actual renewal requirement.

Council officers are currently drafting the 2025/26 to 2029/30 Capital Works Program which includes for consideration of Council a return to $2 million per annum for footpath, bike path and shared path renewal.

### Funding for repairs to footpaths, bike paths and shared paths

Council also spends more than $300,000 of operational funding repairing hazards and defects in footpaths and bike paths, whether they are raised by residents or observed by our own teams undertaking inspections of these assets under our Road Management Plan. These measures keep the assets safe, they don’t add to the life of the assets. This funding is not capital in nature and it does not contribute to the calculation of financial sustainability indicators.

## 3. Issues

### Rationale for not renewing footpaths to match the level of depreciation

Council has spent on average $2 million annually on targeted renewal of footpaths, bike paths and shared paths. In addition, there are other projects that have portion of footpath, bike path and shared path renewal capitalised as part of these projects and valued at an average $0.8 million per annum.

Council’s current rate of annual depreciation is approximately $4.7 million. For the same period, including footpaths delivered as part of other projects as well as the targeted renewal program, the average annual renewal spending as reflected in Council’s capitalisation data, has been $2.8 million. The replacement rate is therefore approximately 57 per cent of annual depreciation.

However, the depreciation is a financial indicator and does not generally reflect the actual renewal demand.

The depreciation is based on average useful life of 43 years for footpath, bike path and shared path. However, the overall average useful life before Council replaces a footpath based on the condition and priority is more than 43 years.

The footpath replacement priority is based on several factors including condition of the footpath, usage and hierarchy of footpath. For example, for footpath with similar condition, the one in major activity area gets a higher priority over the ones that provide local access.

Council undertakes condition assessment of entire footpath, bike path and shared path network every 4-5 years, which provides a more realistic renewal requirement. As per Council’s most recent audit, the current annual renewal requirement is approximately $2.2 million. As such, it is deemed that the current level of renewal expenditure is appropriate.

The intervention level for asset replacement, based on the actual condition data, is where the footpath asset has deteriorated by 80 per cent. Ahead of reaching this 80 per cent target, repairs are made under the Road Management Plan to ensure safety and to address defects that would lead to safety hazards or accelerate asset deterioration.

### Road Management Plan Review

Council is preparing to undertake the Road Management Plan review this year to meet the required timeline (31 October 2025). This is the appropriate vehicle for a review of the adequacy of maintenance and response times.

The review will assess adequacy of intervention levels and response times based on available resources and industry benchmarking. This will include engagement with the Sustainable Transport Advisory Committee. Members of other Advisory Committees and Reference Groups (including the Shared Mobility (E-Scooter) Reference Group) will also be invited to provide input ahead of the development of the draft revised Road Management Plan.

When the proposed revised Road Management Plan is exhibited for public comment, this will present an opportunity for the wider community to provide feedback on the level of service for repairing footpaths to address hazards and defects.

As mentioned above, the Road Management Plan currently prioritises issues in activity centre footpaths over other locations. Stakeholder and the community may wish to engage Council on other factors that could contribute to differently prioritising the inspection and response regime that applies to footpaths, bike paths and shared paths.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

Infrastructure that supports active transport is crucial for building climate resilience and environmental sustainability.

Limiting the impact of construction on environmental sustainability, the renewal cost for these assets includes use of sustainable materials and recycled product.

It is also noted that Council’s Urban Forest Strategy, which increases canopy cover from trees, also has a bearing on footpaths as tree roots can displace footpaths and footpaths can inhibit tree root propagation and tree health. As such, Council is continually seeking solutions that allow for these competing demands to be managed more effectively and efficiently.

### 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 it does not impact on these rights or responsibilities.

The Road Management Plan will require a more robust assessment of human rights and gender equality impacts.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

The preparation of this report does not require consultation or engagement. However, the renewal funding allocation for footpath, bike path and shared path will form part of the capital works program of the Council budget, which will go through the normal consultation and engagement process which includes public hearings.

As indicated above, the Road Management Plan review will go through the required statutory engagement process and specific stakeholder groups will be further engaged ahead of the preparation of the revised 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 proposal to revert to an annual spend of $2 million per annum for footpath and bike path renewals is part of 2025/26 Budget considerations, and is consistent with the 5 Year Capital Works Program that was adopted with the Budget in 2024/25.

Apart from this, there is no financial and resource implication associated with this report. Operating costs relating to footpath maintenance and the cost associated with the review of the Road Management Plan have been included in Council’s budget and Long-Term Financial Plan.

## 7. Implementation

The footpath, bike path and shared path renewal funding will form part of the capital works program and will go through the annual budget development process with the proposed budget presented in April 2025 and the final budget for adoption in June 2025.

The Road Management Plan review will be undertaken before 31 October 2025 as required under the Road Management (General) Regulations 2016 and a report presented to Council for consideration.

## Attachment/s

There are no attachments for this report.

7.13 Amendment C235 Mbek - Revised Public Open Space Contribution Rate for the Planning Scheme - Decision Gateway 1

**Director Place and Environment, Pene Winslade**

**City Strategy and Economy**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Endorses the report *Merri-bek Public Open Space Contributions Refresh: Open Space Contributions Schedule* *(HillPDA, 4 February 2025)*, as shown in Attachment 1 as part of Amendment C235mbek.

2. Seeks authorisation from the Minister for Planning to prepare Merri‑bek Planning Scheme Amendment C235mbek in accordance with Section 8A of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987.*

3. Subject to the Minister’s authorisation, prepares Amendment C235mbek, generally in accordance with the documentation provided at Attachment 1.

4. Exhibits Amendment C235mbek in accordance with Section 19 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and as outlined in the Consultation section of this report.

5. Authorises the Director Place and Environment to make changes to the Amendment prior to exhibition based on any conditions imposed in the authorisation granted by the Minister for Planning and to make administrative changes to correct errors and grammatical changes.

**REPORT**

**Executive summary**

Amendment C235mbek seeks to introduce an updated public open space contribution rate into the Merri-bek Planning Scheme. This amendment is one of the ways in which the Merri-bek Open Space Strategyis being implemented. The new rate is informed by technical analysis that demonstrates the merits of the proposed rate. Inclusion of the new rate in the Merri-bek Planning Scheme will mean that payment of the contribution is payable as part of the subdivision process.

The revised contribution rate improves Council’s ability to meet community expectations for the city’s evolving open space network and infrastructure. A 10 per cent minimum rate is proposed for strategic redevelopment sites and urban renewal precincts. For all other locations the proposed rate is 8.68 per cent.

This report is for Decision Gateway 1 and recommends that Council resolves to request the Minister for Planning authorise Amendment C235mbek. Public exhibition of the amendment would follow the Minister’s authorisation.

**Previous Council decisions**

**Amendment C231mbek – Introduction of the Moving Around Merri-bek Transport Strategy and Merri-bek Open Space Strategy – Decision Gateway 3 – Consideration of Panel Report and Decision on the Amendment –** 12 February 2025

## *That Council:*

*1. Notes the findings and recommendations of the C231mbek Panel included at Attachment 1 to this report.*

*2. Adopts Amendment C231mbek to the Merri-bek Planning Scheme pursuant to Section 29(1) of the Planning and Environment Act 1987, as exhibited and with the changes recommended by the Planning Panel and discussed at Section 3 of this report and shown at Attachment 2.*

*3. Submits Amendment C231mbek to the Merri-bek Planning Scheme to the Minister for Planning for approval, pursuant to section 31 of the Planning and Environment Act 1987.*

*4. Endorses the updated Open Space Technical Report and 20-Year Open Space Projects List as shown at Attachments 2 and 3 to support the open space contribution rate review.*

*5. Notes that the Open Space Strategy will be updated with the corrected Open Space Framework Plan as shown at Attachment 2.*

**Adoption of New Merri-bek Open Space Strategy** – 10 April 2024

*That Council:*

*1. Endorses as final the Merri-bek Open Space Strategy (Attachment 1) and associated Action Plan (Attachment 2), with the following changes to the Action Plan:*

*a) Insert a new action for 2024/25 in the Action Plan under Direction 1: Providing parks close to home and enhancing existing open spaces after action 1.9 to “Prepare a municipal-wide view of priority of gap areas in addition to the suburb by suburb view, in preparation for the refresh of the Park Close to Home Framework”*

*b) Amend action 1.10 listed for 2025 to 2029 under Direction 1: Providing parks close to home and enhancing existing open spaces so that it reads “Refresh the Park Close to Home Framework to guide land acquisition and prioritisation of projects across Merri-bek, taking into account the Open Space Background Technical Report, the Merri-bek Strategic Property Framework, consideration of the Merri-bek Planning Scheme and ensuring the framework is practical to apply.”*

*c) Amend action 4.13 listed for 2024/25 in the Action Plan under Direction 4: Providing open space for everyone to add “d) consideration of whether additional land is required under the Park Close to Home Framework for new sporting facilities.”*

*d) Insert a new action for 2024/25 in the Action Plan under Enabling Actions after action 6.8 to “Develop and present to Council principles and a procedure to govern the management of the Public Resort and Recreation Land Fund so that it holds adequate funding to support significant strategic property purchases.”*

2. *Authorises the Director City Infrastructure to make minor editorial changes in finalising the documents for publication, including graphical design and numbering of actions, that do not change the meaning of the Strategy or Action Plan.*

*3. Notes the Community Engagement Report (Attachment 3) detailing the methodology and findings of community engagement, including from the Hearing of Submissions, on the Merri-bek Open Space Strategy and Action Plan and thanks the community for their participation throughout the process of preparing the Open Space Strategy.*

*4. Endorses the approach to open space planning represented in the Open Space Technical Background Report (Attachment 4) and 20-year Project List (Attachment 5), noting that these documents align with the Open Space Strategy and Action Plan.*

## 1. Policy context

The Council Plan 2021-2025 has a major initiative to implement a new Merri-bek Open Space Strategy (Open Space Strategy). This initiative is supported by the Council Action Plan 2024-2025, which has Action 223 to start a planning scheme amendment for a new open space levy.

The Victorian Government’s Practice Note 70 helps to inform the preparation of an open space strategy, however there is no state government guidance for determining or reviewing an open space contribution rate. Instead, councils are guided by legislation and recommendations by planning panels.

The *Subdivision Act 1988* requires public open space contributions to be justified by an assessment of need, having regard to the supply of public open space and the demand for subdivisions.

The Merri-bek Planning Scheme (Planning Scheme) has a strategy in Clause 19.02-6R to develop a network of local open spaces that are accessible and of high quality and include opportunities for new local open spaces through planning for urban redevelopment projects.

## 2. Background

Council currently collects open space contributions from new development as set out in the Schedule to Clause 53.01 ‘Public Open Space Contribution and Subdivision’ of the Planning Scheme. These contributions are collected at the time land is subdivided.

The Open Space Strategy was accompanied by a technical report with data and analysis for open space gap areas. The report also has a suite of projects to service the City’s residential and worker population growth for the next 20 years.

The Open Space Action Plan includes Actions 6.4 and 6.13 to review the existing open space contribution rate and progress a planning scheme amendment to implement the new rate into the Planning Scheme.

A separate amendment, known as C231mbek, adopted by Council on 12 February 2025, is implementing the Open Space Strategy’s strategic intent into the Planning Scheme. This is being done by updating:

 Clauses 2.03-8 and 2.04 of the Municipal Planning Strategy with a revised Open Space Framework Map and Strategic Directions aligned with the Open Space Strategy.

 Clause 19.02-6L of the Planning Policy Framework with revised Strategies and Policy Guidelines aligned with the Open Space Strategy.

 Introducing the Open Space Strategy and its associated technical report as policy background documents.

When Council adopted amendment C231mbek at its February meeting, it also endorsed an updated Open Space Technical Report and 20-Year Open Space Projects List. These documents will support the open space contribution review amendment.

## 3. Issues

### The need for new public open space contribution rates

The existing public open space contribution rates in the Planning Scheme were established over 10 years ago. With the endorsement of the Open Space Strategy and accompanying Action Plan, there is a need to review the public open space contribution rates to ensure they align with the community’s changing needs and demands for open space across the municipality.

The amendment proposes introducing a new:

 10 per cent minimum contribution rate, only for Strategic Redevelopment Sites or Urban Renewal Precincts.

 8.68 per cent contribution rate for the balance of the city.

**Methodology to prepare new contribution rates**

The proposed new rates are informed by the Open Space Strategy, the Open Space Technical Report, a 20-year project list and additional technical analysis.

Technical experts informed the preparation of the proposed new rates. The technical analysis demonstrates the merits of the proposed rates:

 A 10 per cent minimum rate for strategic redevelopment sites and urban renewal precincts is reasonable because this minimum is aligned with the Victorian Government’s *Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines: New Communities in Victoria (*Victorian Planning Authority, October 2021*),* which set a minimum benchmark rate of 10 per cent for residential areas and activity centres. The ultimate public open space provision for strategic development sites and urban renewal precincts will be informed by the future strategic planning process that identifies and defines these locations when rezoning is proposed.

 An 8.68 per cent rate for the balance of the city is reasonable because it is aligned with an analysis of Council’s future open space investments, to manage changing needs and demands across the city.

Having a city-wide rate is reasonable because the method apportioned the cost of city-wide, planned open space investments, against the expected city-wide value of land expected to be developed. This approach has been supported by previous Victorian Government appointed Planning Panels for other councils.

**Attachment 1** includes the background document that underpins the technical merits of the proposed contribution rates. The amendment was prepared in consultation with the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP).

**Changes to the Planning Scheme**

The following Planning Scheme changes are proposed by the amendment, and are shown in full in **Attachment 1**:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Clause No.** | **Proposed Change** |
| Particular Provisions | |
| Schedule to Clause 53.01 Public Open Space Contribution and Subdivision |  Deletes the existing contribution rates from sub-clause 1.0 and replaces them with the following new contribution rates:  o A minimum 10% contribution rate for strategic redevelopment sites or urban renewal precincts.  o An 8.68% contribution rate for all other areas.   Deletes Map 1 to the Schedule. |
| **Clause No.** | **Proposed Change** |
| Operational Provisions | |
| Schedule to Clause 72.08 Background documents | Inserts reference to the:   *Merri-bek Public Open Space Contributions Refresh: Open Space Contributions Schedule* (HillPDA, 4 February 2025) |

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

The proposed contribution rate does not generate adverse climate and environmental sustainability implications. Instead, the proposed rate will enable Council to more effectively fund public open space acquisitions and infrastructure works which help to improve stormwater quality, enable urban greening and sustain local parklands for a changing community.

### Legal and risk considerations

The proposed contribution rate will replace existing rates in the Planning Scheme. The existing rates will stay in the Planning Scheme until they are replaced.

The Planning Scheme is a legal instrument that prompts action by land developers when a planning permit is required or issued. Including the proposed contribution rate in the Planning Scheme will retain a statutory obligation for land subdividers to make a fair contribution to Merri-bek’s public open space network.

### Human Rights consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed by the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. Future notice for Amendment C235mbek will be done and the proposed change to the public open space contribution rate will not limit or interfere with any Human Rights, including ‘Section 13: The right to privacy and reputation’, ‘Section 18: The right to take part in public life’, and ‘Section 20: Property rights’, because Amendment C235mbek:

 Is changing the public open space contribution rate to Council’s ability to service the needs of all landowners, workers and visitors to Merri-bek.

 Is not depriving any legal or proprietary interest in land, or the ability to use and develop land.

 It is not introducing any new provisions into the Planning Scheme. Instead, it is updating an existing provision for the payment of developer contributions when land is subdivided.

 Will enable public exhibition of the proposal. Submitters will be able to express their concerns at a future independent Planning Panel.

### Gender impact consideration

A gender impact assessment is not required because Amendment C235mbek does not relate to a new policy, program or service that directly or significantly impacts the community.

The change proposed by the amendment is revising an existing public open space contribution rate in the Planning Scheme and is implementing Council’s endorsed Open Space Strategy.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

Exhibition of Amendment C235mbek will be done after the Minister for Planning has given authorisation and any conditions imposed by the Minister’s authorisation have been fulfilled.

Following Section 19 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (the Act), notice of the amendment via direct mail (or email) will be given to:

 Relevant Victorian Government departments

 Prescribed Ministers

 All abutting councils.

To comply with other notice requirements in section 19 of the Act and to reach the wider community, the following will also be done.

 Give notice in the *Government Gazette*, the *Herald Sun* and *The Age* newspapers.

 Inclusion of the amendment documents on Council’s website.

 Communication on Council’s social media platforms.

 Inform consultants who regularly work on behalf of subdivision applicants.

Under section 19(1A) of the Act, it is considered impractical to individually notify owners and occupiers throughout the municipality of changes proposed under Section 3 of this report.

## 5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

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

## 6. Financial and resources implications

**Financial**

Administrative costs associated with the processing of the amendment will be met within the base budget of the Strategic Planning Unit.

**Resources**

The amendment will have minimal impact on Council’s resources because Council already has processes in place to administer the collection and use of developer contributions for public open space.

## 7. Implementation

The following timelines for the amendment are broken down into the key ‘decision gateways’ for Council. The timeline is approximate and subject to Ministerial approval timelines and Planning Panels reporting and assumes a July/August 2025 exhibition period.

 Decision Gateway 1: Authorisation and exhibition (current report).

 Decision Gateway 2: Consider submissions and request a Panel (late 2025).

 Decision Gateway 3: Review Panel report and request the Minister’s approval (mid-2026).

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | C235 Amendment Documents | D25/82389 |  |

7.14 Review of the Design Excellence Scorecard

**Director Place and Environment, Pene Winslade**

**City Development**

## Officer recommendation

That Council:

1. Acknowledges results of the Design Excellence Scorecard.

2. Discontinues the Design Excellence Scorecard following a changing external context – including (1) the downturn in the residential apartment market, (2) much greater applicant incentives of recent Ministerial approval pathways for significant development, which remove rights of appeal to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT), and (3) the removal of delegated officer decision-making as part of the Scorecard process which have all resulted in low take up in recent years.

3. Notes that the Council’s urban planners will continue to seek to influence high quality land use and development in Merri-bek through contemporary planning systems and high quality advice.

4. Continues the Better Quality Two Dwelling Program, which seeks to raise the quality of housing in Merri-bek beyond the acceptable requirements of the Planning Scheme by ensuring that developments are well designed, accessible, environmentally sustainable and comfortable to live in, with reduced running costs.

**REPORT**

**Executive summary**

The Victorian planning legislative framework limits both the Council and VCAT to determining whether planning permit applications will achieve acceptable outcomes. Merri-bek City Council aims to be a leader in the planning sector by consistently seeking to enhance planning and development outcomes for the community. Past initiatives such as the Moreland Apartment Design Code, Towards Zero Carbon in the Planning Scheme, Good Design Advice Sheets, and the Design Excellence Scorecard have explored how Council can influence better quality planning outcomes while continuing to operate within existing resources.

This report focuses on the Design Excellence Scorecard (the Scorecard), a voluntary tool developed to incentivise high-quality buildings and deliver community benefits through the planning permit process.

The 2018 Council Plan sought to deliver excellence in urban design and development, and the Design Excellence Scorecard was a response to this. The Scorecard provided a clear Council resolved definition of what was considered to achieve design excellence in Merri-bek and was implemented at a time when there was rapid development growth in Merri-bek.

The Scorecard was initially adopted by the Council in 2019 for a 12-month trial. The trial was extended twice, and adopted on a permanent basis on February 2022, with a change to remove the officer delegation to decide scorecard compliant planning applications. The ability for a delegated decision by Council officers acted as an incentive for take up of the Design Excellence Scorecard, as it was perceived as providing a higher level of certainty of decision-making for planning permit applicants and also reduced the timeframe for a decision associated with reporting applications to a Planning and Related Matters Council meeting.

In accordance with the February 2022 Council resolution, there has been continued monitoring of major planning permit applications to help evaluate the ongoing operation of the Scorecard. Since the adoption of the Scorecard on a permanent basis in 2022, without the incentive of increased certainty and time savings associated with delegated decision-making, no new projects seeking to achieve the Scorecard have been received.

Another factor contributing to the lack of uptake of the Scorecard is the overall reduction in development activity and particularly the downturn in residential apartment development throughout Victoria. State planning reforms, which now provide for a Ministerial fast tracked planning approval pathway for significant housing projects containing a proportion of affordable housing, have provided even greater process and approval certainty by removing the rights of any objector (including Council) to review of a planning decision at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. As a consequence of this State planning reform, the Minister for Planning is now deciding many of the applications that were previously processed through Council’s Design Excellence Scorecard.

Given the current context and the significant incentive that now exists to seek Ministerial planning approval for major residential developments and thereby avoid the uncertainty and up to 9 month delays at VCAT, it is recommended that the Design Excellent Scorecard program be discontinued.

However, in recognition of the downturn in the residential apartment market since 2018/19, Council has focussed efforts on other initiatives that influence better quality planning and design outcomes for the greater number of medium density developments that continue to be submitted for planning approval in Merri-bek. The outcomes of Council’s Better Quality Two Dwelling (BQ2D) planning application stream are discussed in this report.

**Previous Council decisions**

The following previous Council decisions are of relevance to Council’s past work in seeking to influence better quality development:

 Moreland Apartment Design Code (Council Report DED70/15 – 12 August 2015)

 Various amendments to the Merri-bek Planning Scheme by introducing Design and Development Overlays that provides specific built form and design guidelines.

 Better Planning and Development Outcomes (Council Report DED25/18 – 9 May 2018).

 Amendment to the Merri-bek Planning Scheme to increase tree canopy and landscaping outcomes (Council Report DCF22/20 – 10 June 2020)

 Amendment C190 incentivising two lot dwelling applications through a streamline permit process (Council report 8.1 – 3 November 2021)

 Towards Zero Carbon in Planning (Council Report 7.8 – 8 December 2021)

 Design Excellence Scorecard - Trial Outcomes and Recommendations (Council Report 7.2- 2 February 2022). The resolution included that Council:

*“Receive a report in early 2025 based upon the active monitoring of the following considerations. This report will include the number and percentage of mixed use or residential developments valued over $7 million that:*

o *Provided affordable housing (noting the current Scheme requirement is zero);*

o *Provided accessible housing above the Moreland Planning Scheme’s minimum requirement;*

o *Provided gas free builds (noting the current Scheme requirement is zero);*

o *Exceeded the acceptable BESS (or other equivalent ESD tool) requirements of the Moreland Planning Scheme;*

o *Exceeded discretionary height limits by more than three levels;*

o *Proceeded to a Planning and Related Matters Meeting;*

o *Proceeded to VCAT (challenged by objector or applicant to be noted);*

o *Were called in by the Planning Minister;*

o *Were called in by Councillors; and*

o *Received over 50 objections.*

*Include in the aforementioned report how the above 8(a)-(e) compared with the results achieved in applications that were deemed Scorecard compliant during its trial from 2019-2021.*

This report responds to this resolution by reviewing significant housing and mixed-use proposals submitted between 2022 and the end of 2024, highlights the outcomes of these developments and evaluates those against the outcomes delivered in the Design Excellence Scorecard trial period 2019-2021.

## 1. Policy context

**Victorian planning legislative framework**

The Victorian planning legislative framework confines both Council and VCAT to deciding whether a planning permit application will produce *acceptable outcomes* in terms of the Planning Policy Framework, the purposes and decision guidelines of the zone and overlays and any other decision guidelines in Clause 65 of all Victorian Planning Schemes.

In seeking to encourage development that achieves better than acceptable outcomes for the Merri-bek community, Council must look to other levers beyond the Planning Scheme.

**Council Plan**

The Council Plan 2021-2025 includes themes and strategies that seek to elevate the quality of development in Merri-bek, including Strategy 4.8:

Influence the delivery of better-quality private developments through providing clearer guidance for environmentally responsive design, promoting and negotiating improved quality of development through the planning permit application process.

## 2. Background

**Design Excellence Scorecard**

To improve excellence in urban design and development, Council resolved to prepare the Design Excellence Scorecard (the Scorecard). The Scorecard is a voluntary tool for planning permit applications in Merri-bek. It sets a benchmark for design excellence in medium and high-density developments, aiming to encourage high-quality buildings and streetscapes that benefit the community.

The Scorecard was developed in 2018 in consultation with Councillors, Council’s (then) Urban Environment Committee and key industry stakeholders. The Scorecard was adopted by Council in February 2019 (Council Report DCF3/19) for a 12-month trial period.

The trial was extended twice and adopted on a permanent basis in February 2022 subject to further enhancements to the Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) criteria, and changes to remove the incentive of delegated decision-making by Council officers. This change meant that Scorecard applications would be decided by Council at a Planning and Related Matters Council Meeting (Council Report 7.2). The ability for a delegated decision, by Council officers, acted as an incentive for take up of the Design Excellence Scorecard as it was perceived by planning permit applicants, as providing a higher level of certainty of decision-making, based on the professional planning advice provided throughout the application process. A delegated officer decision also reduced the timeframe for a decision associated with reporting applications to a Planning and Related Matters Council meeting. Across Victoria generally 95%+ of planning permit applications are decided by officers under powers delegated by Councils.

During the trialling of the Scorecard in 2019- 2021, the residential apartment activity was already starting to experience a decline, however seven (7) developments managed to achieve the design excellence benchmarks of the Scorecard, and many more applications were improved in attempting to achieve the design excellence criteria.

Outcomes that were achieved across the seven (7) Scorecard fully compliant projects include:

· 36 affordable housing dwellings;

· 285 dwellings meeting accessibility standards (104 more dwellings than what was required under the Planning Scheme);

· An average 7.5 star energy rating; (being higher than the 7 star energy rating required at the time)

· All gas free dwellings and a contribution of 145kw of Solar PV; and

· Community benefits that have included upgraded streetscapes, new pedestrian connections and a commercial tenancy that is to be leased to a social enterprise.

Council can be proud to have realised these achievements in a planning system that seeks to deliver merely acceptable outcomes. The Scorecard was an excellent alternate planning pathway for its time and its foundations of delivering excellence in exchange for planning process certainty has been a feature of the more recent State planning reforms.

**Attachment 1** includes the Design Excellence Scorecard Guidelines for Applicants.

**Attachment 2** includes a list of the compliant Scorecard developments which were supported during the trialling period 2019 – 2021.

## 3. Evaluation of the Design Excellence Scorecard

The development of the Scorecard firstly involved Council defining "design excellence" to establish clear, measurable benchmarks for permit applicants to achieve. With these criteria in place, the Council then explored methods to incentivise planning permit applicants to pursue "Design Excellence," thereby elevating planning outcomes beyond merely acceptable. This approach successfully influenced the lodgement of higher quality developments at Merri-bek, as demonstrated by seven Scorecard-compliant projects that delivered excellent outcomes and benefits not achievable through the standard planning process.

Unfortunately, since the permanent adoption of the Scorecard in February 2022, there have been no additional Scorecard compliant applications lodged with Council. That said, the design excellence benchmarks resolved by Council as part of the Scorecard has assisted officers, in advocating for design excellence, in respect to architectural design and quality materials, accessibility, ESD and other negotiated public benefit.

The active monitoring of 17 significant development applications, each with a development value of over $7 million, has seen some of the design excellence benchmarks of the Scorecard being achieved, even when the Minister for Planning and not Council, is the Responsible Authority. These positive outcomes are noted below:

 Nine of these 17 applications (52%) provided affordable housing

 15 of these applications (88%) provided accessible apartments that exceeded planning scheme requirements

 14 of these applications (82%) were gas free buildings, noting that the Victorian Government banned natural gas connections in all new homes that require a planning permit from 1 January 2024.

 There was one application that did not exceed the Built Environment Sustainability Scorecard (BESS), as they used the Green Star tool (an alternative sustainability rating system). There were 7 applications meeting the Scorecard BESS target.

The outcomes achieved highlight that some of these applications met certain Scorecard criteria, such as environmental sustainability, increased accessible apartments or affordable housing.

Most significantly however, none of the developments since the ending of the trial in 2022 have fully met all of the Scorecard requirements to achieve Council’s benchmark of design excellence.

*How many major developments exceed the discretionary height limits by more than 3 levels?*

Out of 17 applications, there were four (24%) exceeding the discretionary height by more than three levels, three of these applications were approved by the Minister for Planning. Whilst none of these applications fully met all the Scorecard requirements, there are some positive design elements being delivered including:

 All 4 applications included an affordable housing contribution.

 3 of the applications included publicly accessible links through the site.

 All 4 application exceeded the accessible housing and BESS requirements in the Planning Scheme.

It appears that the removal of officer level delegation when adopting the Scorecard permanently in 2022, and other State planning reforms have reduced the incentive for permit applicants to commit to achieving all of Council’s design excellence benchmarks to go beyond the acceptable requirements in the Planning Scheme.

*How many major developments were reported to the Planning and Related Matters Council Meeting?*

Out of the 17 significant housing applications, 13 (76%) were reported to a Planning and Related Matter Council meeting. Of these, 7 were applications now being determined by the Minister for Planning, following State Planning Reforms.

Of the 4 major applications not reported to Council:

 3 were refused by officers under delegated authority from Council; and

 1 is still awaiting a decision.

*How many major developments proceeded to a VCAT challenge?*

Of the 17 applications, 6 (35%) were subject to a VCAT review being:

 One by the permit applicant against refusal;

 Four by the permit applicant as the decision was not made within 60 statutory days; and

 One by the permit applicant was against permit conditions.

The major applications considered by the Minister for Planning are exempt from VCAT reviews by objectors, including Council as discussed further below. This will have reduced the number of possible VCAT appeals since September 2023.

While six appeals were lodged by permit applicants, no appeals against the Council decisions on the 17 major applications lodged since the 2022 adoption of Scorecard, have been lodged with VCAT by objectors.

*How many of the major applications were called in by Councillors for a decision at the Planning and Related Matters meeting?*

None of the 17 major applications were called in by Councillors for a decision at the Planning and Related Matters meeting.

*How many major developments were called in by the Minister?*

Of the 17 applications, one was called in by the Minister for Planning. Additionally, in 2023 a state planning reform has made the Minister for Planning the decision-maker when a significant development includes affordable housing. This provision has been used seven times, resulting in a total of eight applications being considered by the Minister for Planning with no right of appeal to VCAT by objectors or Council.

*How many major developments received more than 50 objections?*

Only one of the 17 major applications received since the 2022 final adoption of the Scorecard received more than 50 objections noting some applications are yet to proceed to public notice.

It appears that the additional investment required for commitment to higher levels of design quality, environmentally sustainable design, accessible apartments and delivery of other public benefit is no longer being realised without the increased certainty of decision-making on the application.

The Scorecard process also included a best practice requirement of permit applicants conducting consultation with surrounding neighbours and key stakeholders, prior to lodging an application with Council. Without an incentive to undertake this process and with no process time savings, associated with the requirement to now report Design Excellence Scorecard applications to a Planning and Related Matters Council meeting, it seems that applicants are reluctant to take up the voluntary Scorecard that adds additional time to the planning process.

It is evident that the planning policy context and the development industry has shifted significantly from when the Scorecard was first introduced in 2019. Whilst the Scorecard delivered many excellent outcomes, it is clear that the take up and therefore influence of the Scorecard has been diminished and is further impacted by much reduce residential apartment development activity.

Positively advancement in planning provisions to now require ‘gas free’ development, results in this benchmark now being met outside of the Scorecard process.

*Recent State planning reforms to incentivise affordable housing*

In September 2023, all Victorian Planning Schemes were amended to make the Minister for Planning, rather than Councils, the Responsible Authority for residential developments that include a minimum of 10 per cent affordable housing.

While the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* has always enabled the Minister to ‘call-in’ and decide applications of state significance, this new provision provides the Minister with the Responsible Authority status to decide the applications without the need to use Ministerial powers of intervention.

The Minister’s decision on these proposals is exempt from VCAT reviews by objectors, including Council, delivering much greater certainty and removing up to 9 month delays, as well as cost savings associated with VCAT reviews, in return for greater investment in affordable housing outcomes. This level of incentive far exceeds the increased certainty of a delegated officer decision that was committed to as part of Council’s trial of its Design Excellence Scorecard.

The consequence of this state reform means that the Minister for Planning is now deciding many of the application types that were previously processed through the Design Excellence Scorecard. Since the adoption of the Scorecard in 2022, 8 significant housing applications have delivered affordable housing, 7 of which were approved or are being considered by the Minister.

While the Scorecard was effective in delivering affordable housing during its trial period from 2019 to 2022, the new Ministerial approval pathways, with no delays or uncertainty associated with VCAT reviews, now far exceed any incentive that Council could offer a permit applicant to also strive for the other design excellence elements of Council’s Scorecard.

*Future Homes*

In April 2023, the Future Homes Program was launched by the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP), including an amendment to the Planning Scheme to introduce Clause 53.24. This clause provides a streamlined planning pathway for three storey apartment developments that apply the Future Home exemplar designs in eligible locations. Applications made under this provision will be subject to public notice requirements and will be determined by Council but will be exempt from VCAT reviews. While there have been no applications lodged with Merri-bek City Council under this program, this is another government initiative that has an impact on the uptake of the Design Excellence Scorecard particularly through its streamlining of the planning assessment process.

*Decline in the apartment market*

It is noted six out of the seven Scorecard compliant developments during the trial period were apartments.

Since the pandemic in 2020, there has been a decline in the apartment market which can be attributed to several factors including, tighter controls on overseas investment, rising costs of construction, higher interest rates and economic uncertainties which has made these significant residential developments less financially viable. To illustrate this decline, Council received 35 applications exceeding a development cost of $7 million, in 2017 to 2018 which was the period the Scorecard trial commenced. In contrast in 2022 to 2023 there were just 13 applications exceeding a development cost of $7 million.

## 4. What would be needed to maintain the Design Excellence Scorecard

In light of recent changes to the Planning Scheme and shifts within the development industry if Council was to resolve to continue the voluntary Scorecard program, it will be necessary to review the design excellence benchmarks that were originally established. Notably since the Scorecard was developed in 2018/19, the requirement for ‘gas free’ developments is now incorporated as industry requirements.

Moreover, offering process incentives would appear to be crucial, including revisiting officer delegations for perceived increased certainty in exchange for a commitment to meeting higher benchmarks. This is recognised as now especially challenging in light of the incentives available through Ministerial approval pathways.

## 5. Other Council initiatives to achieve better quality developments

Merri-bek City Council has sought to be a leader in the planning industry by continually pursuing improvements to planning and development outcomes for the community by exploring various initiatives that seek to deliver better quality developments in Merri-bek. Some examples of these include the Moreland Apartment Design Code, Towards Zero Carbon in the Planning Scheme and Good Design Advice Sheets.

Recent decisions such as the Better Quality Two Dwelling program and the Affordable Housing Action Plan 2022–2026 also seeks to achieve better quality developments. Additionally, regular monitoring of the Merri-bek Planning Scheme continues to be undertaken in the pursuit of improving the quality of developments within the Municipality. Of relevance to this report is the Better Quality Two Dwelling program which is discussed below.

**Better Quality Developments- 2 dwellings**

The Council resolution that permanently adopted the Scorecard in February 2022 also included the following resolution:

*“Receive a report in the second half of 2022 outlining further ways in which better quality developments can be encouraged and bad quality developments can be discouraged in Moreland (Merri-bek), including information on what initiatives other Councils have undertaken to improve the quality of development.”*

This supported the officer’s commitment to explore ways to influence better quality developments in Merri-bek City Council and resulted in the creation of the Better Quality 2 Dwelling (BQ2D) program. BQ2D aims to improve the quality of two house developments that represents a significant portion of the medium density planning applications the Council receives each year.

The program aims to raise the quality of housing in Merri-bek beyond the acceptable requirements of the Planning Scheme by ensuring that developments are well designed, accessible, environmentally sustainable, and comfortable to live in. To incentivise participation, permit applicants are guaranteed a decision within 6 weeks, inclusive of public notice. A mandatory pre-application planning meeting is part of the program, where Council officers assist applicants in shaping their proposals to meet the Planning Scheme and achieve BQ2D compliance.

The trialling of the BQ2D program commenced in January 2024. So far, 29 pre-application planning meetings have been held, leading to 9 planning applications being lodged. Council has reviewed and issued permits for 7 applications that comply with the BQ2D program.

In September 2023 and October 2024, the State Government announced changes to the Planning Scheme aimed at supporting housing delivery in Victoria. These reforms may include consideration of fast-tracking approvals, streamlining the assessment of two dwelling development applications, or even eliminating the need for a planning permit altogether.

While these changes may have an impact on the BQ2D program, Council’s on-going commitment to influencing, better quality, rather than merely acceptable development will continue with aim of current and future Merri-bek residents having greater opportunities to live in are well designed, accessible, environmentally sustainable and comfortable homes, with reduced running costs.

### 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 it was found that it does not contravene any of these sections and supports the following rights:

 Section 18: Taking part in Public Life

 Section 13: Privacy and Reputation

 Section 20: Property Rights

## 6. Community consultation and engagement

No consultation was required to inform the preparation of this report.

## 7. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

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

## 8. Financial and Resources Implications

There are no financial or resource implications as a result of this report.

## 9. Implementation

This report recommends that the Design Excellence Scorecard be discontinued in light of planning scheme advancements and the significant downturn in the residential apartment development the since its adoption and the much greater certainty now available to permit applicants through Ministerial approval pathways, with no VCAT review opportunity.

Should Council adopt the officer recommendation, the following action will be implemented:

 Updates to the Council website and other customer facing material to remove reference to the Design Excellence Scorecard.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Design Excellence Scorecard Guidelines | D22/454126 |  |
| **2** | Design excellence scorecard compliant developments | D25/84458 |  |

7.15 Open Council Resolutions Report

**Director Business Transformation, Sue Vujcevic**

**Governance and Strategy**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council receives and notes the Open Council Resolutions Report provided as Attachment 1 to this report.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

The Open Council Resolutions Report provided as **Attachment 1**, has been prepared to inform Councillors and the community of the actions taken to date to implement Council resolutions that are currently open and not yet finalised.

There is currently 51 Open Resolutions, with 1 of these relating to a Petition, 29 relating to Council officer reports, 20 relating to Notices of Motion and 1 relating to Urgent Business.

The Open Council Resolutions Report is presented to Council on an ongoing basis, promoting transparency of how Council resolutions are being implemented.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Open Council Resolutions Report** – 11 September 2024

*That Council receives and notes the Open Council Resolutions Report provided as Attachment 1 to this report.*

## 1. Policy Context

Section 46(2) of the *Local Government Act 2020* states:

(a) That Chief Executive Officer has responsibility for ensuring that the decisions of the Council are implemented without undue delay.

(e) When requested by the Mayor, reporting to the Council in respect of the implementation of a Council decision.

This report also supports Council’s continuing commitment to transparent management of resources on behalf of ratepayers, key stakeholders and the broader community.

## 2. Background

The purpose of the Open Council Resolutions Report, provided as **Attachment 1**, is to inform Councillors and the community of the actions taken to date to implement the Council resolutions that are currently open.

## 3. Issues

The Open Council Resolutions Report (shown at **Attachment 1**) outlines the open resolutions and indicates that there is a total of 51 Open Resolutions, with 1 of these relating to a Petition, 29 relating to Council officer reports, 20 relating to Notices of Motion and 1 relating to Urgent Business. Each open resolution in **Attachment 1**, also includes a target date for full completion.

The table below provides a breakdown of the open resolutions that have been allocated to each directorate for action:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Directorate** | **Petitions** | **Council Reports** | **Notices of Motion** | **Urgent Business** |
| Business Transformation | - | 3 | 1 | - |
| City Infrastructure | 1 | 6 | 6 | 1 |
| Community | - | 8 | 10 | - |
| Place and Environment | - | 12 | 3 | - |

**Attachment 1** excludes resolutions relating to Confidential items and items relating to Planning and Related Matters.

An Open Council Resolutions report is presented to Council on an ongoing basis, to promote the transparency of how Council resolutions are implemented.

### Community impact

Community impact is addressed through the Council Plan 2021-2025 under strategic objective 5: To build community trust through encouraging participation, evidence-based decision making, stewardship of resources and being accessible and responsive.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

There are no climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications associated with the preparation of this report.

### Economic sustainability implications

There are no economic sustainability implications associated with the preparation of this report.

### Legal and risk considerations

There are no legal and risk implications associated with the preparation of 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

Community consultation and engagement is not required for this report as it reflects the current status of the implementation of Council Decisions that have been previously made.

**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. There are no individual rights or interests affected.

## 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

Any financial implications associated with the preparation of this report have been met within existing resource and budget allocations.

## 7. Implementation

The reporting of the Open Council Resolutions will continue on an ongoing basis, with the next report to be presented to Council in June 2025.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Open Council Resolutions Report - March 2025 | D25/108166 |  |

7.16 Financial Management Report for the period ended 31 January 2025

**Director Business Transformation, Sue Vujcevic**

**Finance and Procurement**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council notes the Financial Management Report for the period ended 31 January 2025, 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 January 2025. A detailed financial review was undertaken across the organisation at the end of December 2024. The results of this review are included in this report as the Full Year Revised Forecast.

The 31 January 2025 Income Statement shows that Council has recorded a surplus of $107.6 million, $6.4 million higher than the year-to-date budget of $101.2 million, 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 Balam Balam Place, Brunswick. Use of surplus is restricted by legislation and must be used for future infrastructure investment.

Council has spent $56.8 million on capital expenditure, which is tracking below the year-to-date (YTD) budget of $59.6 million, with $35.9 million budget remaining.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**2024/25 Second Quarter Financial Review** – 12 February 2025

*That Council:*

*1. Notes the 2024-25 Second Quarter Financial Report for the period ending 31 December 2024, including operating performance and capital performance at Attachment 1.*

*2. Notes the status of the capital works program for 2024-25.*

*3. Notes the decrease to the full-year forecast for operating income of $5.3 million and the decrease to operating expenditure of $2.7 million arising from the 2024-25 Second Quarter Financial Review.*

*4. Endorses the full-year capital expenditure forecast of $107.1 million, arising from the 2024-25 Second Quarter Financial Review.*

*5. Carries forward the following capital project funding to the 2025-26 Capital Works Program:*

*a) Grant funded projects to be carried forward if the funding is secured and received this financial year:*

* Oak Park Sports and Aquatic – Electrification (83% grant funded) - $900,000*

* Cole Reserve Upgrade Masterplan – Groundworks - $816,132*

*b) Rates funded projects:*

* Shore Reserve – Football & Cricket - $1,207,629*

* McBryde St Reserve (Moomba Park) – Pavilion Gender Inclusive Facilities - $1,000,000*

* Replace Council Fleet - $928,755*

* Dunstan Reserve Childcare (8% grant funded) - $700,000*

* Holbrook Reserve Female Friendly Change Rooms - $700,000*

* Glenroy Activity Centre Upgrade – Wheatsheaf Rd - $600,000*

* Sylvester St Oak Park Land Slide - $600,000*

* Narre Narre Stadium Floor Renewal - $400,000*

* Coburg Bluestone Cottage Complex Redevelopment - $400,000*

* McBryde St Reserve (Moomba Park) – Social Room Amenities & Kitchen - $350,000*

* O’Hea St Bike Path Extension – Sussex to Derby St - $313,850*

* Hadfield Depot Masterplan Development & Drainage - $300,000*

* Shared Zones – Victoria St and Albert St - $200,000*

* Merri Trail – Flood Mitigation – Bridge to Darebin - $200,000*

* Coburg Library Redevelopment - $100,000*

* Hosken Reserve Stage 3 Football Pitches - $80,000*

*c) Reserve funded projects:*

* York Street Park Close to Home - $600,000*

* Park Renewal – McCleery Reserve - $23,800.*

*6. Brings forward the following capital project funding to the 2024-25 Capital Works Program:*

* Sim Cr & Victoria St – Engeny Hot Spot No 8 - $381,000*

* Gowanbrae Dr & Birk Ct – Engeny Hot Spot No 6 - $99,000*

* Kerbside Waste Reform – $48,300.*

*7. Approves funding for new projects in the 2024-25 Capital Works Program:*

* Woodlands Bridge (50% externally funded) - $38,939.*

*8. Approves additional funding for the following existing projects:*

* Waste Truck Additional – Walter St Depot (waste charge funded) - $1,587,441*

* Greenbank Crescent Retaining Walls - $831,118*

* Coburg North Sports Hub Upgrades - $372,559*

* Brunswick Activity Centre Upgrade Works - Stewart St - $294,667*

* Accommodation Changes to Meet Service Demand - $261,436*

* Gowanbrae Dr & Birk Ct – Engeny Hot Spot No 6 - $201,000*

* Feasibility Study/Investigation/Design - Forward Planning - $200,000*

* Street Landscape Improvements (69% reserve funded) - $162,183*

* Richards Reserve Natural Turf Renewal - $148,000*

* Sim Cr & Victoria St – Engeny Hot Spot No 8 - $140,829*

* Shore Reserve – Football & Cricket - $123,400*

* CB Smith Reserve Passive Irrigation Trial (fully grant funded) - $122,073*

* Dawson St Bike Lanes - $114,500*

* Toilets Lake Reserve – Adjoining Tool Shed - $70,298*

* Bonwick St Toilets, Fawkner - $62,875*

* Carlisle Street – Nicholson – Glenora, Coburg - $60,752*

* Park Close to Home – 260 Sydney Road (fully reserve funded) - $55,000*

* Resurfacing Program – Various - $50,000*

* Derby St Kindergarten Children’s Centre - $50,000*

* Park Renewal – HW Foletta Park (fully reserve funded) - $37,000*

* Sportsfield & Ovals Minor Capital Program - $30,582*

* Sumner Park – 3 Alister Street, North Fitzroy - $22,525*

* Gillon Oval Cricket Practice Nets - $18,010*

* Wallace Reserve – North - $11,622*

* Merri Creek Trail – Seating Installation - $10,000*

* De Carle Street – The Grove to Rennie – Coburg - $556.*

*9. Notes savings realised from the following existing projects in the 2024-25 Capital Works Program:*

* Replace Council Fleet - $1,587,441*

* Oak Park Kindergarten - $200,000*

* Transport Trial Sites – bike lanes & shared zones - $114,500*

* Allard Park Sportsfield Redevelopment - $70,138*

* Paisley Court from Bluebell Kerb Line to Dead End - $33,795*

* Mitchell Pde Retaining Wall - $27,319*

* Kerb and Channel Repairs – Various Locations - $25,000*

* Bridge Programmed Maintenance – Various Locations - $25,000*

* Lorn St – Kiddle – Wilson, Fawkner - $18,350*

* Holbrook Reserve – Netting - $4,055*

* Chiller Unit – Civic Centre - $2,296.*

*10. Notes, as at the end of the second quarter, as per Section 97 (3) of the Local Government Act 2020, the Chief Executive Officer is of the opinion that a revised budget is not required, however impacts to the full year forecast will continue to be closely monitored.*

**2024-25 First Quarter Financial Report** – 11 December 2024

*That Council:*

*1. Notes the 2024-25 First Quarter Financial Report for the period ending 30 September 2024, including operating performance and capital performance at Attachment 1.*

*2. Notes the status of the capital works program for 2024-25.*

*3. Notes the increase to the full-year forecast for operating income of $12.7 million and the increase to operating expenditure of $4.9 million arising from the 2024-25 First Quarter Financial Review.*

*4. Endorses the full-year capital expenditure forecast of $114.1 million, arising from the 2024-25 First Quarter Financial Review.*

*5. Carries forward the following capital project funding to the 2025-26 Capital Works Program:*

*a) Grant funded projects to be carried forward if the funding is secured and received this financial year:*

 *Brunswick Early Years Hub - $2,100,000*

*b) Rates funded projects:*

 *Dunstan Reserve Childcare - $2,000,000*

 *Kendall/Harding Footbridge over Merri Creek - $800,000*

*6. Brings forward the following capital project funding to the 2024-25 Capital Works Program:*

 *South Street from Jensen to West, Road Reconstruction - $952,380*

 *Yungera Street from Wyuna to Mutton, Road Reconstruction - $744,244*

 *Fawkner Leisure Centre Redevelopment - $642,000*

 *Kerbside Waste Reform - $103,510*

 *Charles Mutton Reserve - $50,000.*

*7. Approves funding for new projects in the 2024-25 Capital Works Program:*

 *Property Purchase (fully reserve funded) $3,245,000*

 *Coburg North Sport Hub Upgrades (transferred from operating) - $1,780,152*

 *Sylvester Street Oak Park Land Slide - $750,000*

 *Pedestrian Improvements (fully grant funded) - $598,140*

 *Blackspot Project East Street and North Street, Hadfield (fully grant funded) - $88,464*

 *Edgars Creek Corridor Connection Project (fully grant funded) - $77,302*

 *Shade Sail Installation – Anne Sgro Children’s Centre (86% grant funded) - $48,295*

 *Immunisation Room – Minor Capital - $18,000*

 *Oxygen Youth Centre – Accessible Door Installation - $12,000.*

*8. Approves additional funding for existing projects in the 2024-25 Capital Works Program:*

 *Hosken Reserve Stage 4 Open Space and Civil Work (fully reserve funded) - $1,678,799*

 *Park Close to Home Frith Street (50% grant funded, 50% reserve funded) - $650,136*

 *Dunstan Reserve Stormwater Harvesting (fully grant funded) - $375,000*

 *Snell Grove – Public Toilet, Oak Park – $155,000*

 *Raeburn Reserve – Lights - $142,150*

 *Shore Reserve – Public Reserve – Reynard Street – $142,000*

 *Fawkner Community Hall – CB Smith Reserve - $120,000*

 *Lake Reserve Toilets – Adjoining Tool Shed - $40,000*

 *Temple Park Public Toilet Renewal – 24 Gray Street - $30,000*

 *Coburg Olympic Pool – Pool Plant and Building Works - $20,000*

 *Commercial Tenancy Maintenance Obligations - $20,000*

 *Hadfield Depot Internal Break Out Area Works - $20,000*

 *Oak Park Kindergarten - $20,000*

 *Parker Reserve – Pavilion South - $10,172*

 *Municipal Art Collection: Various - $8,200.*

*9. Notes savings realised from existing projects in the 2024-25 Capital Works Program:*

 *Hosken Reserve Stage 3 Football Pitches - $512,836*

 *Gym Equipment Replacement Program Fawkner Leisure Centre - $374,900*

 *McPherson Street from Dead End to Reynard - $320,628*

 *Carnarvon Street from Blyth to Dorothy, Road Reconstruction - $172,028*

 *Pascoe Vale Community Centre – Children’s Area Refurbishment - $164,266*

 *Kent Road from Bawden to Derby, Road Reconstruction - $158,183*

 *Park Renewal – Evans Reserve - $154,000*

 *Bain Avenue from Plaisted to Boundary, Road Reconstruction - $151,458*

 *Paisley Court from Bluebell Kerb Line to Dead End, Road Reconstruction - $126,978*

 *Beccles Street from Anderson Kerb Line to Lowson Kerb Line - $122,212*

 *Carnarvon Street from Dorothy to Stewart, Road Reconstruction - $110,000*

 *Londsdale Street from Ohea to Murray, Road Reconstruction - $102,559*

 *Chris Court from Devereaux to Dead End, Road Reconstruction - $59,660*

 *Allard Park Sportsfield Redevelopment - $47,362*

 *Carbon Management Strategy: Various - $20,000*

 *De Carle Street: The Grove to Rennie – Coburg - $7,509*

 *De Carle Street: The Avenue to The Grove – Coburg - $5,492.*

**2023-24 Financial Statements and Performance Statements** – 11 September 2024

*That Council, in accordance with the recommendations of the Audit and Risk Management Committee, and having considered Council’s Financial and Performance Statements for 2023/24 Statements at Attachments 1 and 2 to this report:*

*1. Approves ‘in principle’ the Financial and Performance Statements 2023/24.*

*2. Authorises the Mayor, Cr Adam Pulford, Deputy Mayor, Cr Lambros Tapinos, and the Chief Executive Officer, Cathy Henderson, to certify the Financial and Performance Statements for 2023/24 in their final form.*

*3. Notes the unrestricted surplus of $1.141 million transfers to the Significant Projects Reserve.*

*4. Carries forward the $536,978 of tied grant funding or contributions that were not spent as of 30 June 2024.*

*5. Carries forward the $41.377 million of capital project funds into the 2024/25 Capital Works Program.*

 *Noting that this does not include a carry forward for the Brunswick Velodrome community pump track due to the funding source being grant funding which was not successful.*

*6. Authorises the Principal Accounting Officer to implement any minor administrative changes to the Financial and Performance Statements for 2023/24 if recommended by the Auditor-General upon final review, for approval by the Chief Executive Officer.*

## 1. Policy Context

The 2024-2028 Budget was adopted by Council on 26 June 2024. The Budget sets out the resources required to deliver the Council Plan, Services and Capital Works Program for the 2024/25 financial year.

This report supports Council’s continuing commitment to open and accountable management of the financial resources of Merri-bek 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 ended 31 January 2025. The actual results are compared to the budget in the Executive Summary and compared to the revised forecast in all other parts of the report, which include carry forwards from 2024-25 and the outcomes of the First and Second Quarter Financial Reviews.

## Relevant Council Plan action, strategy, policy, or resolution

## This report supports Council’s continuing commitment to open and accountable management of the financial resources of Merri-Bek on behalf of its ratepayers.

## 3. Issues/Discussion

Council ended January 2025 with a surplus operating result of $107.6 million which is $1.9 million (2%) more than the year to date (YTD) revised forecast of $105.7 million. These differences are considered largely timing in nature.

It is important to note that the $107.6 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 Balam Balam Place, 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 2025. 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

 **Contributions – Monetary** ended $0.6 million (8%) unfavourable due to the variable timing of receipt of Public Open Space Contributions (timing).

### Expenditure

 **Employee Benefits** ended $1.2 million (2%) favourable due to higher than anticipated vacancies across Council arising from timing of recruitment (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

Council has spent $56.8 million on capital expenditure year to date which is tracking $10.6 million (22%) below the YTD forecast of $67.4 million, with $50.3 million (47%) of the revised budget remaining.

### Cash

Council’s cash assets were $85.1 million as at 31 January 2025. This is a $21.3 million decrease on 30 June 2024 cash levels, mainly as a result of both a property purchase, reimbursement of the fire services property levy back to state government as well as an on-track spend against the capital works program.

Cash fluctuates frequently over the year due to a number of factors, mainly due to the timing of when the rates instalments fall due. It is expected that cash levels will increase during February due to the third rates instalment due on the 28 February.

### Solvency Assessment

Council officers have reviewed Council’s liquidity (Current Assets divided by Current Liabilities) at 31 January 2025 as 5.0. The Victorian Auditor General’s Office (VAGO) recommends that this ratio be 1.5 or higher. This is a positive result and shows that Council is solvent.

### 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

Community consultation and engagement was not required for this report as it reflects the performance against the budget and delivery of the capital works program.

**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. There are no individual rights or interests affected.

## 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 2024-25 budget with the best possible outcome for Council and the community and in line with the approved revised forecast targets.

## 7. Implementation

The financial position of Council will continue to be monitored and managed. The progress of the capital works program will continue to be monitored and managed.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Council Monthly Financial Management Report - January 2025 | D25/100285 |  |

7.17 Governance Report - March 2025 - Cyclical Report

**Director Business Transformation, Sue Vujcevic**

**Governance and Strategy**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes the summary of minutes from the Advisory Committees and Groups to Council, at Attachment 1 to this report, as follows:

a) Friends of Aileu Community Committee held 12 December 2024

b) Sustainable Transport Advisory Committee held 4 February 2025

c) Friends of Aileu Community Committee held 11 February 2025

d) Merri-bek First Nations Advisory Committee held 17 February 2025

e) Arts Advisory Committee held 20 February 2025.

2. Notes the Records of Meetings, at Attachment 2 to this report.

3. Notes responses to questions taken on notice during Public Question Time at the 12 February 2025 Council meeting, provided as Attachment 3.

4. In the exercise of the powers conferred by section 147(4) of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and section 313 of the *Local Government Act 2020*:

a) Appoints and authorises Council staff referred to in the Instrument at Attachment 4 to this report, as set out in the instrument.

b) Determines the instrument comes into force immediately, the common seal of Council is affixed to the instrument, remains in force until Council determines to vary or revoke it, and revokes the previous Instrument executed on 18 December 2024.

c) Authorises the affixing of Council’s common seal.

5. Endorses the motions regarding Retaining Aged Care Services within Local Government, Enhancing Federal Support Social Cohesion Initiatives with On-Site Support Workers in Housing Complexes; and Supporting People Seeking Asylum within our Communities, provided at Attachment 5 for submission to the 2025 National General Assembly of Local Government.

6. Notes that the Chief Executive Officer will be attending the Australian Local Government Association’s (ALGA) National General Assembly from 24 to 27 June 2025.

7. Amends the commencement time for the Council meeting dates scheduled for Wednesday 9 April, 14 May, 11 June, 9 July, 13 August, 10 September, 8 October, 12 November, 19 November (Election of the Mayor) and 10 December 2025, to 6.30 pm.

8. Publishes the amended Council meeting schedule and updates all relevant Council meeting webpages on Councils website, to reflect the new Council meeting commencement time of 6.30pm.

9. Adopts the amended Public Transparency Policy provided as Attachment 6.

10. In accordance with the recommendation of the Independent Member Review Panel, reappoints Marilyn Kearney as an independent member of the Audit and Risk Committee for the period 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2028.

11. Notes the quarterly report on key customer service measures for the second quarter 2024/25, at Attachment 7 to this report.

12. Notes the Strategic Risk Review.

13. Adopts the reviewed Chief Executive Officer Employment (CEO) and Remuneration Matters Policy at Attachment 8.

14. Adopts the reviewed Chief Executive Officer Employment and Remuneration Matters Advisory Committee Terms of Reference at Attachment 9.

**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 Advisory Committees and Groups.

 Records of Meetings, with a recommendation that Council notes the records.

 Responses to Public Question Time items taken on notice at the 12 February 2025 Council meeting, with a recommendation that Council notes the responses.

 A recommendation that Council appoints and authorises the Council officers referred to in the Instrument of Appointment and Authorisation (*Planning and Environment Act 1987*).

 Proposed topics for the Australian Local Government Association National General Assembly in June 2025.

 A recommendation to alter the commencement time for Council Meetings to 6.30 pm.

 A recommendation to adopt the Public Transparency Policy as amended.

 The reappointment of Marilyn Kearney as an independent member of the Audit and Risk Committee for the period 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2028.

 Quarterly Key Customer Service Measures Report.

 The annual Strategic Risk Review.

 The reviewed Chief Executive Officer Employment (CEO) and Remuneration Matters Policy and associated Terms of Reference for adoption.

**Previous Council Decisions**

Governance Report – December 2024 – Cyclical Report - – 11 December 2024

*That Council:*

*…*

*2. In the exercise of the powers conferred by section 147(4) of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 and section 313 of the Local Government Act 2020:*

*a) Appoints and authorises Council staff referred to in the Instrument at Attachment 2 to this report, as set out in the instrument.*

*b) Determines the instrument comes into force immediately, the common seal of Council is affixed to the instrument, remains in force until Council determines to vary or revoke it, and revokes the previous Instrument executed on 16 September 2024.*

*c) Authorises the affixing of Council’s common seal.*

*3. Notes the quarterly report on key customer service measures for the first quarter 2024/25 at Attachment 3 to this report.*

*….*

**Adoption of Council Meeting Dates for 2025** – 20 November 2024

*That Council:*

*1. Sets the dates and times for Council meetings in 2025 as printed in the agenda and designates those meetings indicated for consideration of Planning and Related Matters in accordance with the Governance Rules.*

*2. Sets the date and time for the election of the Mayor for 2025/26 as 19 November 2025 at 7 pm.*

*3. Appends the schedule of Council meetings to the minutes, publishes it on the Council website and makes it available at Customer Service Centres.*

**Notice of Motion - Customer Service Reporting** – 12 June 2024

*That Council:*

*Receives a quarterly report on key customer service measures (including but not limited to CRS’s) to commence from 1 July 2024. For the purpose of context, Customer Requests (CRS’s) will include:*

 *Category/type*

 *Date received*

 *Date completed (inside/outside SLA)*

 *In progress (overdue/not overdue).*

**Chief Executive Officer Employment and Remuneration Matters Policy and associated Terms of Reference –** 12 July 2023

*That Council:*

*1. Adopts the reviewed Chief Executive Officer Employment (CEO) and Remuneration Matters Policy at Attachment 1.*

*2. Adopts the reviewed Chief Executive Officer Employment and Remuneration Matters Advisory Committee Terms of Reference at Attachment 2, with an amendment to the wording of section 10, titled “Any other relevant information” which is to be written as follows:*

*“Committee activities and Council decisions relating to the employment matters for the CEO will be guided by the CEO Employment and Remuneration Matters Policy. At all times, all information and decisions relating to the employment matters for the CEO are to be treated with the strictest confidentiality.”*

**Chief Executive Officer Employment and Remuneration Matters Policy and associated Terms of Reference** – 10 November 2021

*That Council:*

*1. Adopts the Chief Executive Officer Employment and Remuneration Policy at Attachment 1 with the following amendment:*

*Under Item 3.1 Membership of the committee shall consist of the following:*

• *Mayor; and*

• *All other Councillors*

*The committee must be chaired by –*

*a) The Mayor; or*

*b) If the Mayor is not present at the committee meeting, the Deputy Mayor; or*

*c) If the Mayor or Deputy Mayor are not present at the meeting, a Councillor who is present at the committee meeting and is appointed by agreement of the Committee to chair the meeting*

*d) A quorum is 6 Councillors*

*2. Adopts the Chief Executive Officer Employment and Remuneration Advisory Committee Terms of Reference at Attachment 2 incorporating amendments as outlined in Point 1 above.*

**Implementation of *Local Government Act 2020* - Governance Rules, Public Transparency Policy and Council Expenses Policy - for Adoption** – 12 August 2020

*That Council:*

*…*

*3. Adopts the Public Transparency Policy at Attachment 2 to this report.*

*4. Determines the commencement date for the Public Transparency Policy to be 1 September 2020.*

*…*

**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.

Council’s Governance Rules contains provisions which enable the Chairperson to take a question On Notice, with a considered written response being provided to the questioner, in circumstances including where the question requires information that is either not available or accessible at the time of that meeting, or where the time allowed for Public Question Time has elapsed.

Authorisation of planning officers under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* is done in accordance with said Act.

Victorian Councils are required under section 57 of the *Act*, to adopt and maintain a Public Transparency Policy.

The Quarterly Key Customer Service Measures Report relates to the following key objectives and strategies:

 Council Plan 2021-2025: Theme 5: An empowered and collaborative Merri-bek

Build community trust through encouraging participation, evidence-based decision making, stewardship of resources and being accessible and responsive.

Create a customer experience where community members feel Council is helpful, engaged, accountable, respectful and timely.

 [Merri-bek Service Promise](https://www.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/my-council/contact/more-information-about-our-customer-service/customer-service-commitment/#autoAnchor0)

* [Merri-bek Service Timeframes](https://www.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/my-council/contact/more-information-about-our-customer-service/customer-service-commitment/#autoAnchor3).

The CEO Employment and Remuneration Policy is a requirement under Section45(1) of the *Local Government Act* 2020 (the Act); Section 45(2) of the Act includes that the Policy must:

*(a) provide for the Council to obtain independent professional advice in relation to the matters dealt with in the Chief Executive Officer Employment and Remuneration Policy; and*

*(b) provide for the following —*

*(i) the recruitment and appointment process;*

*(ii) provisions to be included in the contract of employment;*

*(iii) performance monitoring;*

*(iv) an annual review; and*

*(c) include any other matters prescribed by the regulations.*

## 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.

The current CEO Employment and Remuneration Matters Policy (the Policy) was adopted by Council at its meeting on 12 July 2023. The proposed amendments to the policy seek to meet the requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020* and ensure smooth processes and support effective relationships between Councillors and the Chief Executive Officer.

## 3. Issues

**Advisory Committee minutes**

A summary of the minutes of Advisory Committees is provided at **Attachment 1** for Council’s information:

a) Friends of Aileu Community Committee held 12 December 2024 and 4 February 2025

b) Sustainable Transport Advisory Committee held 4 February 2025

c) Merri-bek First Nations Advisory Committee held 17 February 2025

d) Arts Advisory Committee held 20 February 2025.

The summaries of the Friends of Aileu Community Committee, Sustainable Transport Advisory Committee and Arts Advisory Committee minutes do not contain any recommendations from the committees to Council.

The summary of the minutes of the First Nations Advisory Committee held 17 February 2025 recommends Council allocates $500,000 to install a temporary building on the Ballerrt Mooroop site; and allocates funds to the Ballerrt Mooroop project in the next 3 years as part of the capital works program.

**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 previous Council Meeting are presented at **Attachment 2** as follows:

 Councillor Bus Tour and Council Plan Workshop – 8 February 2025

 Councillor Briefing – 10 February 2025

 Councillor Briefing – 17 February 2025

 Councillor Budget Briefing – 19 February 2025

 Planning Briefing – 24 February 2025

 CEO Employment and Remuneration Matters Advisory Committee – 25 February 2025

 Councillor Briefing – 3 March 2025.

### Responses to Questions taken On Notice at Council meetings

At Council meetings, questions are taken On Notice during Public Question Time, where persons submitting questions are not in attendance or where the maximum allowable time for public questions has elapsed.

Questions taken On Notice are provided with a written response following the meeting for which they are submitted and reported to Council at the next practicable meeting. The question subject is recorded in the meeting minutes.

The responses to questions taken On Notice at **Attachment 3** to this report relate to questions from 12 February 2025 Council meeting regarding:

 Hosken Reserve

 Bench seats Coburg Library.

 Leave of absence, conflicts of interest and federal election 2025

 Palestinian flag

### Appointment and Authorisation to enforce the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*

The appointment of Authorised Officers facilitates the administration and enforcement of any Act, regulations or local laws which relate to the functions and powers of the Council. Authorisations are made to specific Council officers in accordance with their roles and responsibilities.

In accordance with the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, Authorised Officers can only be appointed by the Council as the Act prohibits delegation of the power to appoint Authorised Officers.

Council staff can only take action to enforce provisions of legislation where they have been properly and lawfully authorised. The authorisation proposed appoints the staff member as an Authorised Officer which will enable that Officer to take action and commence proceedings against people who have breached permit conditions or otherwise not complied with the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* or regulations.

The Instrument of Appointment and Authorisation at **Attachment 4** is a routine, administrative update to ensure all Planning staff have a correct and up-to-date authorisation. Updates are reviewed internally each quarter to ensure relevant staff are authorised. The last update was presented to Council at the May 2024 meeting. The next update will be presented to a future Council as required.

On the updated Instrument coming into force, the previous Instrument executed 16 December 2024 will be revoked.

**2025 National General Assembly of Local Government**

The Australian Local Government Association’s (ALGA) National General Assembly (NGA) is held annually and provides an opportunity for Mayors and Councillors, as representatives of their municipalities, to come together at a national forum. In 2025 the NGA will be held at the National Convention Centre in Canberra from 24 to 27 June. The Chief Executive Officer will be attendance at the NGA with the Mayor and Councillors.

The purpose of the NGA is to identify and determine ways local government can engage with the Federal Government, to inform the development of national policy and influence the future direction of councils and communities.

***Motions***

The NGA will consider motions submitted by councils. A discussion paper setting out the criteria for motions provides guidance for development of motions. The theme for the 2025 event is ‘National Priorities Need Local Solutions’ and the discussion paper provides data and analysis that identifies critical areas for local government to consider.

Motions must meet strict eligibility criteria and be clear they are aligned to the theme.

During January, Councillor ideas were sought in relation to proposed motions and this report presents for Council consideration, motions relating to Retaining Aged Care Services within Local Government and Enhancing Federal Support Social Cohesion Initiatives with On-Site Support Workers in Housing Complexes. Further to this, Council has also been asked to endorse a joint motion from the Mayoral Taskforce on Supporting People Seeking Asylum within our Communities. These motions are provided as **Attachment 5**.

Council must submit any motions to ALGA by 31 March 2025.

**Amendment of Council Meeting Commencement Time**

Council at its meeting of 20 November 2024, set it annual meeting schedule for the 2025 year. At that time, the Council meeting dates for Wednesday 9 April, 14 May, 11 June, 9 July, 13 August, 10 September, 8 October, 12 November, 19 November (Election of the Mayor) and 10 December 2025, were all scheduled to commence at 7 pm.

It is now common for Council meetings to require extensions of time in order to ensure that all business on the agenda can be transacted, with some meetings running beyond 10.30 pm. Therefore, this report recommends that the Council meetings originally scheduled to commence at 7 pm, now commence at 6.30 pm.

**Public Transparency Policy**

Council officers have undertaken a review of the existing Public Transparency Policy which was initially adopted by Council in August 2020 to meet the requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020*.

Local Government Victoria plans to publish a Model Public Transparency Policy by July 2025 following IBAC’s Operation Sandon recommendations.

While a model policy is expected to be enacted in the near future, it remains prudent for Council to proceed with the scheduled review of its existing Public Transparency Policy, ensuring that our existing policy remains up-to-date, relevant and compliant with existing Regulations.

As such, a review of Council’s existing policy confirms that Council’s policy continues to meet current legislative requirements, however the following key changes are proposed:

a) The template has been adapted to fit Council's new template structure.

b) References to Moreland City Council have been updated.

c) Position Titles have been updated where required.

d) Section 4.4.2 Council information – Council Documents

i) Deleted references to “Delegated Committees and Community Asset Committees” as Council does not utilise these types of committees.

ii) Deleted “Register of Interests until 24 October 2020” as this reference was time limited and has since become redundant.

e) Section 4.6 How we will be transparent – Access to Information.

Corrected the reference in dot point one from section 4.3.3 to section 4.4.2.

If adopted, the amended Public Transparency Policy provided at **Attachment 6**, will be made publicly available and published on Councils website.

### Reappointment of Independent Member, Marilyn Kearney to the Audit and Risk Committee

At its meeting on 10 August 2022, Council appointed Independent Member Marilyn Kearney to the Audit and Risk Committee for a three-year term, concluding on 30 June 2025.

In accordance with Section 6 of the 2023 Audit and Risk Committee Charter – *Evaluating Performance*, the Chair, in collaboration with the Director Business Transformation, has conducted an independent review of Marilyn Kearney’s performance. This review included a skills assessment aligned with the position description for independent members.

Based on the findings of the assessment, it is recommended that Marilyn Kearney be reappointed for a second three-year term, from 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2028.

### Quarterly Key Customer Service Measures Report

Council resolved to receive a quarterly report (**Attachment 7**) on key customer service measures (including but not limited to Customer Requests) to commence from 1 July 2024. Customer requests (CRS’s) include:

 Category/type

 Date received

 Date completed (inside/outside Service Level Agreement)

 In progress (overdue/not overdue).

Request volumes:

 For FY24/25 Q2 the total completed volume of customer requests was 28,255

 Approximately 84.5% of customer requests were to City Infrastructure, followed by Place and Environment at 5% and all other directorates at 12%.

 There has been a slight upward trend with increasing volumes of customer requests each quarter since FY22.

 Overall, there continues to be increasing activity for CRS online requests received and this quarter represents approximately 48%. This includes (Snap, Mobile and E-pathway).

Timeliness:

 For FY24/25 Q2, compliance with service delivery times was 83.1%. This is on par with the previous quarter of 83.4%

 The overall average calendar days to completion for customer requests was 16 days. This is an improvement since the entire previous financial year where the overall average calendar days to completion was 27.5.

 Currently there are 4,729 open customer requests.

 All data is confined to the reporting period 01/10/2024 – 31/12/2024

 Information excludes quick entry requests.

**Strategic Risks**

Council’s Strategic Risks are presented to Council annually. Council currently has 9 Strategic Risks that consist of 3 high and 5 medium and 1 low rated risk. The controls assigned to the 9 Strategic Risk continue to be monitored and Council officers are progressing risk treatments assigned across the 9 Strategic Risks.

The following table represents the current 9 Strategic Risks by Risk Area and Risk Rating.

| **Risk Description** | **Residual Likelihood** | **Residual Consequences** | **Residual Risk (with controls in place)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Risk Area: Business Transformation*** |  | | |
| Council’s cyber security is breached | Possible | Major | High |
| Council does not properly plan or prepare for disruption, change and transformation | Possible | Moderate | Medium |
| Council’s financial sustainability is not maintained | Unlikely | Major | Medium |
| Failure to attract and retain a skilled and competent workforce | Unlikely | Minor | Low |
| ***Risk Area: Place and Environment*** |  | | |
| The impacts of climate change, including physical and transition risks, are not appropriately planned for or responded to | Likely | Major | High |
| The impacts of population growth are not effectively managed | Unlikely | Moderate | Medium |
| ***Risk Area: City Infrastructure*** |  | | |
| Council’s infrastructure or assets become unfit for purpose | Possible | Moderate | Medium |
| ***Risk Area: Community*** |  | | |
| Ineffective management of stakeholder relationships | Likely | Moderate | High |
| Ineffective management of Council’s reputation and brand | Unlikely | Moderate | Medium |

**Chief Executive Officer Employment (CEO) and Remuneration Matters Policy associated Advisory Committee Terms of Reference**

The key proposed changes to the Policy are generally administrative in nature, the changes include:

 Amend Section 1, Purpose of Policy and Section 4.8 Acting CEO: To include references to recruitment of the CEO and Acting CEO; section 45(2)(b)(i) of the Local Government Act 2020 requires the policy to provide for the process of appointing a CEO, therefore the policy has been amended to also reference appointment of an Acting CEO, given that section 3 of the Act defines the ‘Chief Executive Officer’ to include any person acting in that position (note: the CEO can appoint an Acting CEO under delegation, as long as that appointment does not exceed 28 days, which is set out in this policy, so, the Policy will not apply to all appointments of an Acting CEO);

 Amend Section 4.1, CEO Employment and Remuneration Matters Advisory Committee: To remove content that is already covered / repeated in the Terms of Reference, such as who chairs the committee. Removing reference to ‘a quorum is 6’ is also recommended to facilitate meetings proceeding in the case quorum of 6 is not reached or lost during a committee meeting (note: the committee makes recommendations, it is Council that determines whether any or all of the committee’s recommendations are accepted).

 Amend Section 4.5, Remuneration and Expenses: To refer to any Public Sector Wages Determinations;

 Amend Section 4.5, Remuneration and Expenses: To include that all CEO credit card expenditure will be reviewed and approved by the Chief Financial Officer and that Council’s Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) will receive quarterly reports on all CEO corporate credit card transactions. The Chief Financial Officer already reviews and approves CEO credit card transactions, these transactions are already reported to the ARC, however the frequency of reporting will increase to quarterly, from 6 monthly reporting (note: this change aligns with Victorian Auditor-General’s Office advice that this is a best practice approach);

 Amend Section 4.9, Dispute Resolution: To embed into the policy a dispute resolution process rather than refer to a separate developed process;

 Amend Section 4.11, Administrative Processes: To refer to roles providing a governance role and support to the Committee;

 Other minor amendments to remove repetition, adjust numbering and improve readability.

The Terms of Reference for the CEO Employment and Remuneration Matters Advisory Committee was reviewed, the recommended changes are generally administrative in nature, and to align with proposed changes to the policy as follows:

 Amend Section 3, Scope: Amended to include reference to appointment of an Acting CEO, if required (to align with recommended policy changes);

 Amend Section 4, Membership, Chairperson and Quorum: Aemended to remove reference to quorum to align with proposed changes to policy as described above;

 Other minor amendments to improve readability.

The amended policy is provided at **Attachment 8** and the amended Terms of Reference is provided at **Attachment 9**.

**Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications**

There is no direct climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications resulting from Council endorsing a CEO Employment and Remuneration Policy (and associated Terms of Reference for the advisory committee).

**Economic sustainability implications**

The main cost associated is the remuneration of a person to provide independent advice to the advisory committee and cost of any legal advice. The *Local Government Act 2020* provides for Council to obtain independent professional advice in relation to the matters dealt with in the Chief Executive Officer Employment and Remuneration Policy.

**Legal and risk considerations**

The amended CEO Employment and Remuneration Matters Policy and associated Terms of Reference presented to Council for decision has been developed to reinforce Council’s commitment to good governance practices and seeks to provide a consistent, fair and transparent framework for employment matters relating to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) including recruitment, appointment, remuneration, performance monitoring and annual review.

**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.

The review of the Public Transparency Policy is limited to administrative amendments only, therefore community consultation is not required.

**Affected persons rights and interests**

Councillor feedback was sought on the CEO Employment and Remuneration Matters Policy and associated Terms of Reference, which was discussed at a CEO Employment and Remuneration Matters Advisory Committee meeting held on 25 February 2025.

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. As such, the CEO provided feedback on the proposed changes to the Policy, which was considered at the Advisory Committee meeting held on 25 February 2025.

Council's Community Engagement Policy states that for policy matters related to Council’s internal organisational operations, and/or that have no impact, or a negligible impact on the community; Council will not carry out community engagement.

Therefore, as the amended Policy and associated Terms of Reference primarily articulates Council’s legislated responsibilities, and cannot be influenced significantly by the community, Council has not carried out community engagement.

**Communications**

The current CEO Employment and Remuneration Matters Policy is available for public access through Council’s website. Subject to Council’s decision, the amended Policy will be updated on Council’s website to replace the current version.

## 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

There are no financial implications associated with 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.

Subject to Council’s decision the next steps include:

 Executing the Instrument of Appointment and Authorisation to enforce the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and updating the Register of Authorisations for publishing on Council’s website.

 The submission of the Council endorsed motions for consideration at the National General Assembly, to the Australian Local Government Association by 31 March 2025.

 Updating the Council meeting schedule and any other relevant Council meeting webpages published on Councils website to reflect the new Council meeting commencement time of 6.30 pm.

 Publish the updated Public Transparency Policy on Council’s website.

 Writing to Marilyn Kearney confirming her reappointment as an Independent Member to the Audit and Risk Committee.

 The amended CEO Employment and Remuneration Matters Policy will be updated on Council’s website.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Reports from Advisory Committees to Council - March 2025 | D25/104055 |  |
| **2** | Records of Meetings - March 2025 | D25/96753 |  |
| **3** | Responses to questions taken On Notice - March 2025 | D25/107566 |  |
| **4** | Proposed Australian National General Assembly Motions - 2025 | D25/108118 |  |
| **5** | Instrument of Appointment and Authorisation - Planning and Environment Act 1987 - March 2025 | D25/94932 |  |
| **6** | Public Transparency Policy 2025 | D25/95965 |  |
| **7** | Key Customer Service Measures Report - Quarter 2 2024-2025 | D25/100313 |  |
| **8** | CEO Employment and Remuneration Matters Policy | D25/114704 |  |
| **9** | CEO Employment and Remuneration Matters Advisory Committee Terms of Reference | D25/114220 |  |

7.18 Elevate Customer and Digital Transformation Program

**Director Business Transformation, Sue Vujcevic**

**Elevate Transformation Program**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes that Council’s current core business systems are reaching end of their useful lives and need to be modernised to improve customer experience and advance integration between systems and cyber security.

2. Notes the Business Case at Confidential Attachment 2 which outlines the proposal for the implementation of a new Enterprise Resource Planning system to replace the current core business systems supporting Council business operations.

3. Notes the Benefits Realisation Plan at Confidential Attachment 3 which provides outlines measurable benefits that are expected to be delivered by the implementation of a new Enterprise Resource Planning system.

4. Commits to future investment as detailed in the Confidential Attachment 1 for the procurement and implementation of an Enterprise Resource Planning system and refers the amounts to the 2025-26 budget process.

5. Endorses the indicative financial modelling to be undertaken for the upcoming Council 10-year Financial Plan which supports a funding strategy for the Elevate Program and:

a) Notes the 2025-26 budget already includes $2.3 million and;

b) Refers the remaining funding strategy of up to $31.3 million to the 2025-2029 budget process for consideration.

6. Commences the procurement tender process for the Enterprise Resource Planning system and

a) Notes that the contract award will be subject to a Council resolution;

b) Notes that the tender process may result in amendments to the forward financial projections outlined in Confidential Attachment 1.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

The current state of Council’s core business systems is such that taking no action is not an option.

Our core business systems are not fit for purpose as they are outdated, not keeping pace with technological advancements, and not meeting the expectations of the Merri-bek community, customers, and staff.

To address this issue, a comprehensive business case has been developed by an external third party based on their market scan and gap analysis for the Elevate Customer and Digital Transformation Program (the Program) to assist in identifying a holistic enterprise resourcing planning solution that is available for Council to implement. The Program aims to modernise and enhance our services, processes, and customer communication and experience through strategic digital initiatives. To ensure effective delivery, a strong governance framework has been established that is led by the Executive and includes the Digital Steering Committee, reporting to the Audit and Risk Committee, and Council on a regular basis on major aspects of the program i.e. progress milestones, financial and non-financial benefit realisation, and risk management.

The foundations of the Program are people and processes first, with technology as the enabler for improvement initiatives. There is no intention of impacting jobs at Merri-bek due to new technology. The Program aims to modernise and enhance our services, processes, and customer communication and experience through strategic digital initiatives.

The Program will have the opportunity to improve efficiency, transparency, and engagement across Council operations and enable us to serve our Merri-bek community better.

The Program will positively impact the following stakeholders:

 Customers of Council services

 Merri-bek community – everyone who lives, works, plays, studies, has a business in, travels through, or owns a property in Merri-bek

 Internal Council directorates – branches, units and staff.

The Program team engaged in workshops with business units across Council to understand the technical business requirements and services of each area. The workshops helped to align assumptions, identify clear benefits and determine how benefits will be measured. A benefits distribution matrix is below:

| **Key benefits and dis-benefits by stakeholder** | **Customers of Council** | **Merri-bek community** | **Internal Council - staff** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Key benefits** | | | |
| Improved customer experience | ü | ü | ü |
| Improved council reputation | ü | ü | ü |
| Improved organisational processes | ü | ü | ü |
| Improved employee experience and capability | ü | ü | ü |
| Reduced risk | ü | ü | ü |
| **Key disbenefits** | | | |
| Potential short-term disruption to Council staff processes during the implementation of any new technology as well as the training and education phase. |  |  | ü |

**Previous Council Decisions**

There have been no previous Council decisions relating to the Enterprise Resource Planning system investment.

## 1. Policy Context

An investment in a new Enterprise Resource Planning system would support the implementation of the Council Plan 2021-25 and subsequent Council Plans adopted by Council. It would support the strategies identified in the Council Plan 2021-25 in particular:

5.1 - Improve access to information (communications) about council services, activities and decisions through applying accessibility principles and community insights

5.4 - Create a customer experience where community members feel Council is helpful, engaged, accountable, respectful and timely.

This report supports Council’s continuing commitment to sustainable, equitable and transparent management of funds on behalf of ratepayers, key stakeholders and the broader community while focusing on the following risks:

**Financial Sustainability:** Ability to support ongoing delivery of services to existing and new customers could impact Council financial sustainability, further exacerbated due to vulnerability and cost implications of cyber-attacks.

**Customer Service:** Customer uncertainty when contacting and dealing with Council is a significant issue resulting in a breakdown of trust and poor customer experience.

**Empowered People:** Significant volume of manual administration work across Council impacts quality decision making and operations oversight, leading to increased risk of not meeting Council’s ongoing legislative obligations failures and potential for fraud.

The investment in a new Enterprise Resource Planning system delivers on the IT Strategy and Roadmap 2023-2026 (Confidential Attachment 4) and will assist Council in meeting its ongoing obligations under legislation including:

 *Copyright Act 1968* (Commonwealth)

 *Electronic Transactions (Victoria) Act 2000*

 *Freedom of Information Act 1982*

 *Health Services Act 1988*

 *Health Records Act 2001*

 *Independent Broad-Based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011*

 *Local Government Act 1989*

 *Local Government Act 2020*

 *Ombudsman Act 1973*

 *Planning and Environment Act 1987*

 *Privacy Act 1988* (Commonwealth)

 *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*

 *Protected Disclosure Act 2012*

 *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*

 *Public Records Act 1973*

 *Spam Act 2003* (Commonwealth)

 *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*

 *Victorian Protective Data Security Standards*

 *Whistleblowers Protection Act 2001*.

The Victorian Government Digital Strategy 2021-2026 (<https://www.vic.gov.au/a-future-ready-victoria/digital-strategy-2021-2026>) is the overarching strategy document for Victorian government agencies, including Councils.

The vision is defined as “Thriving Victoria. A digital Victoria. For you”.

 Making life and business easy for all

 Creating a connected, safe, inclusive Victoria

 Future-ready and centred on you.

The vision is supported by three key outcomes:

 Better, fairer, more accessible services - making services more personalised and consistent

 A digital ready public sector - improving operations, working collaboratively with partners and developing a workforce skilled for the future, now

 A thriving digital economy - attracting talent, upskilling our communities and businesses, creating jobs and bridging the digital divide.

The Victorian Government Digital Strategy 2021-2026 document defines the following eight guidelines that should underpin Council’s digital technology decision making process:

 **Digital By Default**

We will cultivate an expanding suite of intelligent, connected, customer-centric services supported by digital infrastructure, removing the need for manual processes regardless of the contact channel they are accessed from.

 **Strategic Investment Models**

The guideline for strategic investment defines a four-step approach to software selection:

o If we have it and it is fit for purpose, reuse it.

o If we do not have it, subscribe to it (Software-as-a-Service).

o If we cannot subscribe to it, buy it off the shelf.

o If all options are closed, only then consider building it.

 **Responsive Design**

Services will be designed to adjust to the user, the device being used and how they access our service.

 **Open Sharing and Open Data**

We will continue to share information and data to the maximum extent possible to promote transparency and deliver value to our community.

 **Cloud By Design**

We will design our services for the cloud and only invest in alternative infrastructure if cloud infrastructure is unsuitable.

 **Configuration over Customisation**

Look to adapt processes to align with software capability not the other way around.

 **Fostered Capability**

We will focus on fostering and cultivating human-centred capabilities such as curiosity and critical thinking to focus us on the desired user experience.

 **Technology and Data are Assets**

We will manage our technology, data and information as valuable assets that inform decision-making, enable evidence-led policymaking and service design.

## 2. Background

Council is dedicated to serving its customers and communities through the delivery of essential services and providing community infrastructure to support the wellbeing and prosperity of our community.

Council faces challenges due to the changing customer and community expectations, outdated and aging technology, cyber security threats, and the impact of rapidly evolving technological advancements.

The current core business systems, some of which are over 20 years old, are not meeting the expectations of the community, customers, and staff.

To remain modern, resilient, and efficient, Council must embrace change.

There are currently 120 applications supporting Council’s service delivery to the community. This is a complex arrangement that makes the IT support of these applications difficult, and it is a challenging process for staff to perform their service duties. This complexity can make change to customer services both expensive and slow. There is a risk that old technology does not have the native secure architecture that is built into modern technology systems, this makes older applications and data more vulnerable to today’s cyber threats.

There is an increasing expectation from the community that they should be able to conduct their business with Council in a way that is convenient to them; be it face to face, by telephone, or digitally.

Our current core business systems do not allow our customers to conduct all their business with Council at a time and on a device which suits them in the same way that they are able to interact with their other service providers.

Customers surveys indicate that communication from Council can be improved, and they cannot always communicate via their preferred channel.

The key issues identified:

 **Customer service limitations**

Current systems fail to provide a consistent, customer-centric experience, with significant gaps in workflow, communication management, and service delivery.

 **Cybersecurity and general security concerns**

Legacy on-premise systems lack modern security defences, exposing Council’s systems to vulnerabilities that could lead to data breaches, operational disruptions, and reputational damage.

 **End-of-life systems**

Many core business systems are reaching end-of-life, resulting in significant business, operational, and cybersecurity risks. Limited vendor support makes addressing functional issues or vulnerabilities increasingly difficult.

 **Disparate systems**

The use of multiple, disconnected systems for different business functions creates inconsistent customer service experiences, inefficiencies, and duplicated efforts.

 **Lack of integration**

Limited or non-existent integration between systems hampers Council’s ability to provide seamless, end-to-end service delivery, and accurate reporting.

 **Data management challenges**

The absence of a single source of truth for key data sets such as customer, property, and records compromises data integrity and makes effective data-driven decision-making difficult.

 **Operational inefficiencies**

Manual and outdated processes result in delays, increased costs, and a heavy administrative burden on staff, detracting from their ability to focus on higher-value tasks.

 **Inability to adapt**

The current systems struggle to integrate with emerging technologies, or support digitally enabled service channels. New legislation is difficult to integrate into the current systems.

 **Barrier to Scalability and Growth**

On-premise infrastructure demands high maintenance costs and inhibits scalability, limiting Council’s ability to respond to increasing demand or evolving service expectations.

 **Lack of business intelligence**

Existing systems do not support advanced business intelligence or analytics, preventing Council from leveraging data insights to support evidence-based decision making and operational efficiency.

These challenges underscore the urgent need for Council to transition to modern, integrated systems capable of addressing these deficiencies.

Such a transition will enhance operational efficiency, improve service delivery, strengthen cybersecurity, and enable Council to adapt to the changing needs of its community and stakeholders.

## 3. Issues

To address the issue of Council’s core business systems being not fit for purpose, a business case was prepared. Council received both internal staff feedback, that the system did not let them efficiently function, and external customer feedback on communication and service delivery issues that underpins this program.

The business case details the proposal to seek funding approval for the implementation of a new Enterprise Resource Planning system to replace the current core business systems supporting Council’s business operations. The project comprises three core components:

 **Enterprise Resource Planning system**

The new Enterprise Resource Planning system will replace all core business systems, except for the existing Geographic Information System (GIS) solution and the solution for corporate planning, reporting and governance. Integration with these remaining systems will be required.

 **Implementation partner**

The Council will partner with expertise that supplies, specialised resourcing to be contracted to support the implementation, including configuration, training, testing, data migration, solution architecture, change management, and integration development services.

 **Internal resourcing**

The Elevate Program which is solely focused on the management and delivery of the program and will be supported in the implementation of the Program by the secondment of specialist business users from business units.

It is recommended that Council should proceed with a market process (tender) for a suitable Enterprise Resource Planning system.

**The Problem**

As part of the development of the business case, an independent Market Scan and Gap Analysis was undertaken to assist in understanding the capabilities of the current systems to meet business requirements.

The Gap Analysis identified 78 gaps across 14 functional areas within the current core business systems. Nearly 95% of these gaps were assessed with an impact rating of extreme, severe or high, providing sufficient evidence of a need to address these functional deficiencies to support existing and future business functions.

Significant gaps were identified in key functional areas:

 **Asset management**

All gaps are rated as extreme, stemming from limited capabilities and insufficient integration with other council systems to enable end-to-end processes to best meet our community’s expectations.

 **Customer management**

Extreme gaps reflect the urgent need for an effective Customer Management System, with manual processes and duplication hindering efficient service delivery.

 **Human resource management**

High and extreme gaps are driven by fragmented systems with little to no integration, complicating workforce management.

 **Core IT systems capabilities**

Critical services deficiencies exist in end-to-end workflows, communication management, user interfaces and business intelligence, resulting from the reliance on disparate systems. This results in increased time and effort required to meet customer service needs.

These gaps highlight the pressing need for modern, integrated systems to address functional deficiencies and support efficient service delivery.

The risks associated with on-premise and end-of-life software core IT systems, such as security vulnerabilities, lack of scalability, and operational inefficiencies, are not likely to be effectively addressed with the current core business solutions.

The following issues with the current core business systems cannot be mitigated by upgrading the systems and moving them from on-premise to the cloud but can be resolved or mitigated by moving to a new Enterprise Resource Planning system delivered through a Software-as-a-Service model:

 **Current core IT systems risks**

The following solutions to deliver core business functions are deployed on premise and are reaching the end of their useful lives:

o Infor Pathway (customer management, property and rating, regulatory and compliance, and events and facilities)

o Microsoft Dynamics Navision (financial management, supply chain management)

o Micro Focus Content Manager (Records Management).

The business workflow, processes, and practice for the core business systems are generally from the time the systems were implemented and do not reflect current best practice. Any modifications to enhance service delivery or meet legislative requirements are done through add on processes, manual work arounds, additional product implementations, or expensive system customisations.

As the various current core IT systems are transitioning to end of life, software vendors will not undertake further development and will only provide limited maintenance and support.

This impacts vendors’ capabilities to react to new legislative requirements, functional and operational issues, security concerns such as cyber security, data management, data integrity, system integrations.

Eventually the vendor will advise a date after which they will no longer provide any support.

 **Current Core IT systems related business risks**

Data integrity and quality is inconsistent across systems for key information relating to customers, properties, records, and assets resulting from multiple points of entry. This reduces confidence in information and additional workload through data entry and additional reconciliation and checking must be undertaken.

This approach presents significant data management and integrity risks, where key data sources need to be updated and managed in different source systems where manual processes are used to maintain integrity.

Not having a single source creates significant service delivery challenges and resolving these core data management challenges at a system level is not possible where multiple ageing systems lack any capability to integrate and consolidate their various data sources.

The current core business systems have little capability to present information that is usable by a business intelligence platform to assist in aggregating, analysing, visualising and sharing data. This inhibits Council’s ability to deploy an intelligent business reporting and analysis capability to support data-driven decision making.

Deploying core business systems on-premise means that Council’s IT service delivery is focused on the deployment and management of hardware and infrastructure. Extensive resources in the IT team are currently focused on supporting and managing infrastructure, with limited resourcing available to support the effective use of the business systems.

 **Customer service delivery expectations**

Our customers and community have an expectation that the services they receive from Council will be efficient and accessible and that information about issues relating to them is both current and available at any time.

Our customers and community expect to be able to conduct their business with Council in a way that is convenient to them; be it face to face, by telephone, or digitally.

Our digital customer interfaces must enable our customers to conduct their business with Council at a time and on a device which suits them in the same way that they are able to interact with their other service providers.

Existing business systems lack the focus on the customer at the centre of the service delivery function. This is reinforced through current systems creating their own view of customer information and data, with little linkage back to a core customer record and single source of truth for customer information.

The current customer experience can vary significantly depending on the customer service channel that is used.

Customer service requests initiated in-person or by phone are managed in the customer management system, but correspondence related service is managed via the records management system. Web based customer enquiries are managed by the web site management software depending on the specific processes of the business, and the format that these requests are received in.

Current systems collect different, and sometimes only basic, information at the source of the customer service event. This can trigger manual process, additional information requests and overall inconsistent and inefficient approaches to service delivery.

This can result in a frustrating customer experience, as often repeated requests for information are needed.

 **Digital services capability**

Current systems do not provide a platform for the delivery of digitally enabled services moving forward.

Digitally enabled business systems are vital to ensure Council can benefit from digital and city services initiatives as they become available, affordable, and implementable.

 **Legislative obligations**

The current core IT systems are struggling to support Council’s legislative obligations particularly when there are legislative changes. Manual workarounds, manual data collection and inefficient processes proliferate throughout Council’s operations to ensure that legislative obligations are being met.

Ongoing product development from suppliers is often necessary to meet new and emerging compliance requirements. Older end-of-life core business systems are less likely to see enhancements and modifications to meet new requirements.

**Transformation benefits**

A fully implemented Enterprise Resource Planning system offers significant benefits – across five areas including:

 **Improve customer experience**

Our customers will experience a better integrated service delivery and communication, that reflects the effort the Council puts in.

 **Improve council reputation**

A digitally enabled council where residents can easily find answers and seamlessly access the services, they need 24/7.​

 **Improve organisational efficiency:**

We have brilliant people who want to serve our community but are let down by our digital systems. Minimising manual work and integrating systems will assist in achieving our service targets.​ Business processes will be based on industry-best practice, configured for Council’s local requirements.

 **Improve employee experience and capability:**

Maintaining a trackable and single source of truth, automating manual tasks will reduce complexity, increase communication capability and improve the customer and staff experience.​ Facilitating a transition away from periodic, static business reporting to more on-demand dashboards and analytical business information.

 **Reduce risk:**

We have no choice but to update our outdated legacy systems to protect our customer data, by hosting applications securely on the cloud. Major risks identified with the current core IT systems are effectively resolved or mitigated, with simplified but advanced workflow, ability to meet majority of current business requirements and single source of truth for customer data.

Whilst offering significant improvements to Council’s service delivery to our community, implementation of a new Enterprise Resource Planning system brings risks which need to be effectively managed to ensure as many of the benefits as possible are unlocked.

**Management of implementation risks**

Extensive industry engagement within the Local Government sector has taken place. This has included councils which have recently successfully deployed an Enterprise Resource Planning system, as well as councils whose deployments did not progress as anticipated so that Council can benefit from their lessons learnt.

This engagement, combined with existing internal and external experience has facilitated development of the risk mitigations for the implementation.

Effective Council resourcing of the project is vital including:

 Executive level involvement with Project Governance, including Project Sponsors and Digital Steering Committee resourcing.

 Change management program development, including resourcing both external and internal change management to facilitate change program implementation. This would include a change strategy and regular health checks, to verify the progress and staff engagement.

 Specialised external resourcing for implementation management, software configuration, data migration, training, and testing.

 Internal transformation team establishment, with project management, business analyst, change and communications, data migration, and related resourcing embedded in the business.

 Secondment of specialist business users from business units - full-time for the implementation of relevant functions - for all functions. This includes back-fill of these specialist business users to ensure they are released from business-as-usual activities within their business units.

Budgets have been planned to facilitate resourcing at these levels.

**Implementation principles**

To ensure that Council realises the full potential of a business transformation including the implementation of an Enterprise Resource Planning system to meet the needs of the community and provide the best value for money, it is proposed to adopt the following implementation principles:

 Governance – A program governance has been established, which includes a Digital Steering Committee, reporting to the Audit and Risk Committee and Council on a regular basis on major aspects of the program including progress milestones, financial and non-financial benefit realisation, and risk management.

 Communication – Transparent and regular communication updates will be provided to key stakeholders.

 Scope – Decisions on functional scope will limit customisation to maximise the Enterprise Resource Planning system’s existing features to minimise cost and maximise the customer experience. Not customising business applications will reduce the need for specialised support, make application upgrades easier, and facilitate Council being able to adopt industry best practice.

 Decision-making approach – The Enterprise Resource Planning system will be implemented in carefully planned phases, considering organisational readiness and the technology selected. Council will review the outcomes achieved in each phase through a quarterly report, based on deliverables as per agreed milestones.

 Financial control – Council will review the outputs of each phase before approval of release of funds for subsequent phases. This will ensure that focus on successful program implementation is not diluted over time. Decisions are made with consideration to financial sustainability and affordability and the whole of life cost analysis will be a deciding factor.

 Benefits realisation – A Benefits Realisation Plan (shown at confidential Attachment 3) has been developed to deliver the following benefits from the implementation of an Enterprise Resource Planning system:

o Improved the customer experience

o Improved Council reputation

o Improved organisational efficiency

o Improved employee experience and capability

o Reduced risks to be realised from the different phases of the IT solution implementation.

The achievement of these benefits will be closely monitored through Program Governance arrangements and reported to Council on a regular basis.

### Community impact

By leveraging technology, data and innovation, the Program seeks to improve efficiency, transparency, and engagement across Council operations to enable us to serve our Merri-bek community better and improve the customer experiences and service delivery.

Current systems fail to provide a consistent, customer-centric experience, with significant gaps in workflow, communication management, and service delivery.

Customer uncertainty when contacting and dealing with Council is a significant issue resulting in a breakdown of trust and poor customer experience.

By focusing on the customer, it is expected that the implementation of an Enterprise Resource Planning system will:

 Significantly improve the customer experience by allowing the community to easily find answers and seamlessly access the services they need at a time and on a device which suits them in the same way that they can interact with their other service providers.

 Provide a real-time holistic view of a customer to enable customer centric decisions and efficient resolution of customer requests while providing the capability to provide progress updates when required.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

The Program will address climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications in accordance with Council’s strategies and policies.

### Economic sustainability implications

Local businesses play an important role in our economy and our community.

The Program will assist in assist in supporting local business activities within the municipality.

### Legal and risk considerations

A decision from Council to proceed with this investment is required in March 2025 to enable this work to commence as per the identified state of our current IT core systems.

Deferral of the decision will delay the program resulting in increased costs due to inflation and would trigger the need for further investment in systems that are currently reaching the end of their useful life. That further investment would not provide the best value outcome for Council.

A strong governance structure including probity, legal and independent expert consultants will provide Council with the necessary oversight on this key program.

The implementation of an Enterprise Resource Planning system through a Software-as-a-Service model would:

 Reduce the significant volume of manual administration work across the Council

 Decrease the risk of failing to meet our legislative obligations and potential for fraud

 Eliminate vulnerabilities from having systems on premise that could lead to data breaches, operational disruptions, and reputational damage

 Facilitate Council meeting its obligations under the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)

 Improve data-driven decision making.

**Audit and Risk Committee recommendation**

The Audit and Risk Committee met on 4 March 2025 to consider the status of the Elevate Transformation Program, the Elevate Transformation Business Case, and the Benefits Realisation Plan and recommends that Council commence the tender stage. The Audit and Risk Committee are provided quarterly updates on the 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.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

No community consultation or engagement occurred for the context of this report.

Dependant on the outcome of this report there may be avenues for the community to be consulted during the final design of the community facing interface stage of the implementation process.

Input was sought and been received from branches and teams across Council to understand the gaps in our current core business systems and the potential benefits of the Program, so that Council can improve our service delivery to our customers and community.

**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. There are no individual rights or interests affected.

## 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 business case (**Confidential Attachment 2**) presents a 10-year cost estimate model which includes recommended, high and low potential solutions, which offer differing capabilities to meet business requirements. The levels of investment are consistent with other councils that are, or which have undertaken a program of this nature.

This report is seeking Council endorsement to commence the public tender required by the Elevate Program for the implementation of a new Enterprise Resource Planning system, to replace the current core business systems supporting Council business operations.

The budget estimates in the **Confidential Attachment 1** for the Elevate Transformation Program which include:

 Licensing and support for a period of 3 years.

 Estimates for implementation effort from internal and external resources to support the staged implementation the Enterprise Resource Planning system over 3 years after mobilisation.

 Costs are estimates for all components, based on feedback provided from potential third-party suppliers, as well as industry expertise and feedback from similar Local Government entities.

## 7. Implementation

Subject to Council’s decision, the next actions will be:

 Include the amounts for the procurement and implementation of an Enterprise Resource Planning system to the 2025-26 budget process for inclusion in the Proposed 4-year Budget 2025-2029 for consideration by Council at the 16 April 2025 Special Council Meeting.

 Commence the procurement process for the Enterprise Resource Planning system in March 2025 or as soon as practical.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Elevate Transformation Program - Enterprise  *Pursuant to section 3(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 2020 this attachment has been designated as confidential because it relates to Council business information, being information that would prejudice the Council's position in commercial negotiations if prematurely released.* | D25/112076 |  |
| **2** | Elevate Transformation Program - Business Case  *Pursuant to section 3(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 2020 this attachment has been designated as confidential because it relates to Council business information, being information that would prejudice the Council's position in commercial negotiations if prematurely released.* | D25/112077 |  |
| **3** | Benefit Realisation Plan  *Pursuant to section 3(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 2020 this attachment has been designated as confidential because it relates to Council business information, being information that would prejudice the Council's position in commercial negotiations if prematurely released.* | D25/112073 |  |
| **4** | IT Strategy and Roadmap 2023-26  *Pursuant to section 3(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 2020 this attachment has been designated as confidential because it relates to Council business information, being information that would prejudice the Council's position in commercial negotiations if prematurely released.* | D24/211398 |  |

7.19 Contract Variation: RFT-2022-287 Provision of an Integrated Parking Management Solution

**Director City Infrastructure, Anita Curnow**

**Transport**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Approves an increase in the maximum allowable spend for Contract RFT-2022-287 Provision of an integrated Parking Solution during the initial Contract Term and for up to two, 2-year extensions from $14,348,796 to $14,926,131 (excluding GST) to provide for the following additional services:

a) PayStay app transaction fees, transaction fees, merchant fees and processing fees on parking ticket machine purchases at a cost of up to $165,778 (excluding GST)

b) Replacement of damaged sensors at a cost of up to $80,000 (excluding GST)

c) Maintenance activities or external works that require the installation / reinstallation of parking sensors project (provisional sum up to $331,557 (excluding GST))

2. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to do all things necessary to finalise the contract variation and related documentation;

3. Refers to the third quarterly review of the 2024/25 Budget an adjustment to cover $20,000 for PayStay app fees, offset against parking ticket revenue, and $30,000 relating to repairs to damaged sensors, from the road and footpath maintenance budget.

4. Notes that the Provisional Sum, if used, would be entirely funded from the project, maintenance activity or third party accountable for delivering the project or activity involving parking sensor installation or reinstallation.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

Contract RFT-2022-287 Provision of an integrated parking management solution was approved by Council for award on 14 September 2022. In June 2024, a variation was approved to take up two options within the original contract offering - Licence Plate Recognition and Infringement Management as a Service.

Now, there are further items that require additional spending under Contract RFT-2022-287. They are as follows:

 Coverage of fees associated with payments at ticket machines using the PayStay app, consistent with the coverage of fees for credit and debit card payments and costs associated with cash handling.

 Funds this financial year and next to address a backlog of damaged sensors requiring repair, in excess of the business-as-usual maintenance of sensors and minor items already accounted for in the contract.

 A provisional sum that recognises that when sensors need to be procured as part of other projects (such as a resurfaced car park, utility works in the road reserve) the funds for the sensor works will come from the project source but the works need to be delivered under this contract and integrated into the ongoing operation of the solution.

The total cost to the contract if each of these items is fully expended would be, over the initial term that ends 31 December 2027 and the first two 2-year extensions ending 31 December 2031, an additional $577,335 (GST exclusive), with the total maximum authorised spend becoming $14,926,131 (GST exclusive).

The budget impacts of this Contract Variation will be addressed through budget adjustments, with PayStay app fees to come from parking revenue budget increase ongoing and damaged sensor repairs in 2024/25 and 2025/26 to come from road and footpath maintenance budgets. Provisional items, if needed, will be covered the relevant capital, operating or external party funding and not draw on the contract operating budget.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Contract Variation: RFT-2022-287 - Provision of an Integrated Parking Solution - Incorporation of Optional Items into Contract** – 12 June 2024

*That Council:*

*1. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to:*

*a) Vary Council’s formal Contract RFT-2022-287 Provision of an Integrated Parking Solution awarded to Orikan Group Pty Ltd and ACN 620 056 715 (Contractor) and effective as of 1 January 2023 to take up options for licence plate recognition technology and Infringement Management as a Service on the following terms and otherwise subject to and in accordance with paragraph 1(b) of this Resolution:*

*i. For the same maximum term as Contract RFT-2022-287, with the initial term expiring on 31 December 2027 and then five 2-year extension options.*

*ii. For licence plate recognition, at the rates outlined in Confidential Attachment 1.*

*iii. For Infringement Management as a Service, at the up front costs and rates per infringement and per year not higher than those outlined in Confidential Attachment 2.*

*b) Negotiate and finalise the terms of the Change Order for Contract RFT-2022-287 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 Change Order to the Contract and any required documentation for the Contract;*

*b) Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to exercise the first two options to extend the contract in accordance with the provisions within the Contract.*

*3. Authorises an increase in the total spend on Contract RFT-2022-287, after incorporation of these optional items to the end of the initial Contract Term (to 31 December 2027) and exercising of the first two 2-year extensions to the contract, to a total of 9 years from $4,493,750 (excluding GST) to $14,348,796 (excluding GST).*

*4. Notes that the additional costs relating to the proposed Change Order will be primarily funded by savings in the costs of collecting infringement revenue including a reduction in expenses relating to referrals to Fines Victoria, a reduction in lookup fees from the Vehicle Registration Enquiry (VRE) database, a reduction of bad debts and no net change in budget is required.*

**RFT-2022-287 - Provision of an Integrated Parking Management Solution** – 14 September 2022

*That Council authorises the Chief Executive Officer to:*

*1. Make a formal offer to DCA Cities Holdings Pty Ltd trading as DCA Cities ABN 77 620 056 715 to award Contract RFT-2022-287 for the Provision of an Integrated Parking Management Solution at a cost of $3,821,828 (excluding GST) over a five-year term.*

*2. Allocate contract expenses of up to $50,000 each year for annual operating costs (not indexed) and include an annual CPI uplift allowance to the base contract of 5 per cent, bringing the total expenditure approval for Contract RFT-2022-287 to $4,493,750 (excluding GST).*

*3. Negotiate and finalise the terms of the contract between Council and the contractor.*

*4. Do all things necessary to execute any required documentation for the contract.*

*5. Advise all tenderers of Council’s decision in relation to the contract.*

## 1. Policy Context

### Procurement Policy

## 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 must comply with its Procurement Policy before entering into a contract for the purchase of goods or services or the carrying out of works. This contract variation exceeds CEO delegation and requires Council approval.

## 2. Background

Contract RFT-2022-287 was signed on 14 July 2023, with a Commencement Date of 1 January 2023. There were some staffing shortages and legal complexities that required several months of negotiation within the bounds of Council’s resolution on 14 September 2022.

Council originally endorsed the award of Contract RFT-2022-287 to DCA Cities Holdings Pty Ltd trading as DCA Cities ABN 77 620 056 715, which was subsequently purchased by Orikan Group Pty Ltd and ACN 620 056 715, to whom the Contract has been novated.

A variation to Contract RFT-2022-287 was approved by Council in June 2024, relating to taking up two options that had been part of the original contract offering but not initially exercised. These options were Licence Plate Recognition and Infringement Management as a Service.

While the net cost to Council of these variations was negligible or nil due to offsets, the maximum approved spend of the contract with Orikan increased significantly as part of that variation from $4,493,750 (excluding GST) to $14,348,796 (excluding GST).

## 3. Issues

This report is to seek Council approval for further variations to Contract RFT-2022-287. There are three matters for which variations are sought.

### PayStay app transaction fees

One of the elements of the Orikan Contract is ticket parking machines for paid parking. These parking machines are all located in Brunswick, in seven off-street car parks and also on Barkly Street. While Contract RFT-2022-287 covered the delivery of the ticket machines, the payment arrangements (including coverage of transaction fees) for credit and debit card payment and costs associated with cash payment, it did not cover transaction fees associated with use of the PayStay app, which is used in Merri-bek for Residential Parking Permits. Council was keen to enable residents to use it for paid parking as well.

This matter was not identified when the contract was initially awarded, nor when the first variation to this Contract was approved by Council in June 2024.

A Contract variation is required to incorporate the various fees relating to the PayStay app. This is because parking fees are collected by Orikan on Council’s behalf and so the transaction costs levied are incorporated into that cost. If users paid the fees, it would not be necessary to increase the contract payments, however, Council already covers these transaction costs for payment done via debit or credit card, as this was included under the original contract. Covering these transaction costs reduces the impact of paid parking on users within the municipality.

### Cost to address backlog of repairs to damaged sensors

In addition, this report is to seek Council approval to vary Contract RFT-2022-287 to address a backlog of repair works needed to sensors. While a sum of $50,000 per annum has been included in the Contract for matters arising (such as unforeseen / unattributable damage to sensors), it has become evident that there is a backlog of such matters that now need to be addressed, valued at up to an additional $80,000.

Examples of damage is sensors that have been sealed over or bay labels that were removed during footpath reconstruction and that were not reinstalled. Council officers have engaged with these third parties, including the State Government, to discuss the damage and prevent this from happening in the future. Council officers recommend to repair the damaged sensors to extract the most value out of the contract and to efficiently enforce car parking.

A program of rectification works has been developed, requiring up to $30,000 (additional to the annual allowance) in 2024/25 and an additional up to $50,000 in 2025/26. Once this backlog has been addressed, additional issues that emerge will be able to be addressed with the $50,000 allowance.

### Provisional sum for project work involving sensors

Since the Orikan contract RFT-2022-287 commenced, there have been several occasions where projects needed to install or reinstall sensors. While the budget for these installations is available as part of these projects, they need to be procured under this contract and so they add to the total expenditure under the contract. It is proposed to add a provisional sum to the contract value to reflect this need.

This will support capital projects or maintenance projects where new sensors are required or the works affect existing sensors so that they need to be replaced.

Examples of the types of projects are:

 A car park is being resurfaced and sensors need to be replaced as part of the project scope

 Utility works are being performed in the road reserve, affecting existing sensors, and the utility company pays for the sensors to be reinstated

 New parking restrictions have been implemented relating to a development, including implementation of sensors, and a developer is responsible for funding the sensors

Even though sensor works are being undertaken by different parties in these examples, it is not possible for a separate provider to implement the sensors as they need to work within the Orikan system. Delivery of the sensors under the terms of the Contract and integrating them into the operation and maintenance regime of the Contract is required.

Based on instances that have arisen to date, a provisional sum of approximately $40,000 (excluding GST) per annum is envisaged. However, the timing of such works can be unpredictable, and so it is recommended that a total approved expenditure of an additional up to $144,818 be added for the initial term (to 31 December 2027) and a further up to $186,739 covering two 2-year extensions (the next 4 years). These figures incorporate CPI estimates.

### Contract price estimates

The table below summarises the changes to the total allowable spend under Contract RFT-2022-287 for the initial term (to end 2027) and two subsequent extension terms of 2 years each, including at the time of award, the June 2024 variation and proposed under this additional variation.

Note that all values are GST exclusive.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Initial Contract Period to 31 Dec 2027 | Extensions: 4 years (2x2-year extensions), 1 Jan 2028 to 31 Dec 2031 | Total to 31 December 2031 |
| **Original contract maximum spend** | **$ 4,493,750** | **$ 4,042,400** | **$ 8,460,304** |
| Previously approved variation (June 2024) | $ 2,375,233 | $ 3,437,413 | $ 5,812,646 |
| **Current approved contract maximum spend** | **$ 6,868,983** | **$ 7,479,758** | **$ 14,348,796** |
| PayStay costs | $ 72,409 | $ 93,369 | $ 165,778 |
| Sensor repair works | $ 80,000 | $ - | $ 80,000 |
| Provisional sum - project sensor works | $ 144,818 | $ 186,739 | $ 331,557 |
| **New maximum spend** | **$ 7,166,210** | **$ 7,759,866** | **$ 14,926,131** |

### Community impact

Users of the paid off-street car parks and on-street car parking on Barkly Street in Brunswick currently pay $3.30 per hour or $11.45 per day. It is proposed that if a user pays via the PayStay app, Council covers the transaction costs.

Council already covers these transaction costs for payment done via debit or credit card, as this was included under the original contract. Covering these transaction costs reduces the impact of paid parking on users within the municipality.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

Parking fees assist with managing demand for parking in high-demand areas and encourage use of active and public transport for access to these areas. This reduces transport emissions.

### Economic sustainability implications

Turnover of parking in areas of high demand also assist turnover of customers for businesses in the precinct.

Ensuring all sensors are working is important for the fair operation of parking restrictions.

### Legal and risk considerations

It is important contractually for this matter to be resolved as the contract has been operating without the transaction fees being clearly addressed. Executing the variation will therefore be important as a priority once a decision is made by Council to reduce legal risk.

Having parking sensors that are operating properly is critical if they are to be used as evidence in court proceedings. Infringements issued where the technology may be called into question cannot be pursued and are thrown out.

### 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

Community engagement has not been required to inform the preparation of this report.

**Affected persons rights and interests**

As Council will cover the PayStay fees it is deemed that no persons rights and interests are affected.

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.

### Communications

There is no communications required with users of paid parking within Merri-bek. Council covers the transaction costs of people paying via the ticket machines and PayStay app. There is therefore no difference for people in parking costs whether they pay cash, via card at a ticket machine or via the PayStay app.

## 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 items identified as requiring a variation in Table 1 have differing budget allocation requirements.

The additional **PayStay costs** of $20,000 per annum (indexed by CPI) will need to be offset by revenue from paid parking. A budget adjustment within 2024/25 will be referred to the third quarterly update and this change reflected in the forthcoming 2025/26 4-year Budget.

The **sensor repair works** relate primarily to civil works that have previously failed to reinstate or account for the parking sensors. As such, funding for this item of $80,000 will be drawn from the road and footpaths operating maintenance budget across 2024/25 and 2025/26.

The **provisional sum for additional sensors** will only be expended if required. The source of funding for these new installations of sensors will be project funding or recurrent capital funding, where sensor installation or sensor reinstallation are part of the scope. At times, the funding may be external such as a utility undertaking works in the road reserve affecting sensors, or a developer providing sensors as part of a planning permit condition. No additional budget is required to be earmarked for this provisional sum. The value of the provisional sum over the initial contract period is $120,000 based on 3 years remaining and expenditure of approx. $35,000 per annum to date on these types of works, and then 4 years of potential extensions.

These budget impacts are summarised below.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Item | Source of funding | Initial Contract Period to 31 Dec 2027 | Extensions: 4 years (2x2-year extensions), 1 Jan 2028 to 31 Dec 2031 |
| PayStay costs ($20,000 per annum indexed for inflation) | Budget adjustment, offset by parking fee revenue | $ 72,409 | $ 93,369 |
| Sensor repair works ($30,000 in 2024/25 and $50,000 in 2025/26) | One-off budget from road maintenance budget | $ 80,000 | $ - |
| Provisional sum - project sensor works ($40,000 per annum indexed for inflation) | Will vary, from project, maintenance or external sources where sensor works are required as part of scope of other works. | $ 144,818 | $ 186,739 |

## 7. Implementation

It is proposed that the Chief Executive Officer be authorised to do all things necessary to execute the variation and any other required documentation.

The budget adjustments will be made as part of the Third Quarter Budget Review to be presented to Council in April 2025 and for future years, as part of the annual Budget process as applicable.

## Attachment/s

There are no attachments for this report.

7.20 Contract Variation: RFQ 2022-326 Towing, Storage and Releasing of Abandoned / Unregistered Vehicles

**Director City Infrastructure, Anita Curnow**

**Amenity and Compliance**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Approves the adoption of a largely cost-neutral model under Contract RFQ-2022-326 – Towing, Storage and Releasing of Abandoned / Unregistered Vehicles.

2. Authorises an increase in the maximum allowable spend of Contract RFQ-2022-326 of $50,000 (GST exclusive) taking the total allowable spend over the life of the Contract to $770,000 (GST exclusive).

3. Notes that adopting the cost-neutral model makes redundant the resolution made at the 14 November 2018 meeting to allocate 50 per cent of the funds from the proceeds of the sale of abandoned vehicles to Council’s Social and Affordable Housing Reserve (Previously known as Affordable Housing Trust).

4. Approves the discontinuation of the resolution made at the 14 November 2018 meeting to allocate 50 per cent of the funds from the proceeds of the sale of abandoned vehicles to Council’s Social and Affordable Housing Reserve.

5. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to do all things necessary to execute a deed of variation and related documentation as per Council’s decision.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

Contract RFQ-2022-326 for the towing and storage of vehicles, redemption of reclaimed vehicles and auction of vehicles not reclaimed was awarded to Nationwide Towing & Transport. The 3-year contract commenced on 13 November 2022 with no extension options.

At the time of awarding Contract RFQ-2022-326 it was estimated that revenue generated from the reclaim or sale of impounded vehicles would exceed costs incurred and thereby provide a return to council of which 50 per cent would be allocated to the Social and Affordable Housing Reserve. This contract has not achieved this intended purpose due to cost and therefore an alternative cost-neutral model is being proposed.

The previously approved maximum allowable spend under Contract RFQ-2022-326 of $720,000 (GST exclusive) has now been fully expended. The cost-neutral model does not completely eliminate the need for payments under Contract RFQ-2022-326, due to special circumstances relating to some tow requests from Council. As such, it is estimated that an additional $50,000 (GST exclusive) spending allowable under the Contract is required to the Contract end date in November 2025.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Contract Variation: RFQ-2022-326 - Towing, storage and releasing of abandoned/ unregistered vehicles** – 14February 2024

*That Council:*

*1. Authorises the retrospective expenditure of $55,016.50 against contract RFQ-2022-326 - Towing, storage and releasing of abandoned/unregistered vehicles.*

*2. Authorises projected expenditure of $720,000 to the contract end date.*

**Kids Under Cover Donation Program** – 14 November 2018

*That* Council *:*

*1. Continues to support Kids Under Cover by promoting the Donate Your Car program.*

*2. Ceases providing financial support to Kids Under Cover and instead allocates 50% of the funds from the proceeds of the sale of abandoned vehicles by Council to the Moreland Affordable Housing Trust and 50% to support service improvements and new initiatives/projects.*

*3. Writes to Kids Under Cover advising of Council’s decision.*

## 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 comply with its Procurement Policy before entering into a contract for the purchase of goods or services or the carrying out of works. This contract variation exceeds CEO delegation and required Council approval.

## 2. Background

Council is responsible for dealing with abandoned and unregistered vehicles left on public roads, on council property or in public places. The authority to impound and dispose of unregistered or abandoned vehicles is in Schedule 11 of the *Local Government Act 1989*. Vehicles, including cars, motorbikes, trucks, trailers and caravans, that are deemed as unregistered or abandoned follow a statutory process and if not moved by the end of the statutory period, are towed to a secure site where they are either reclaimed by the owner or sold at auction if not claimed.

Council entered into contract RFQ-2022-326 for the towing and storage of vehicles, redemption of reclaimed vehicles and auction of vehicles not reclaimed with a three (3) year term. The contract, awarded to Nationwide Towing & Transport, is from 14 November 2022 until 13 November 2025. Expenditure is funded within annual budget allocations and expenses incurred under this contract relate to the towing, storage and auction fees of abandoned or unregistered vehicles.

The contractor provided a schedule of rates however expenditure is variable as it is dependent on the number of vehicles towed, the size of vehicles towed (additional fees are charged for heavy haulage) and whether the vehicle is reclaimed or sold at auction.

There has been a significant increase in the number of unregistered and/or abandoned vehicles left on public roads and in public spaces over the past four years, resulting in an increase in the number of vehicles impounded and contract expenditure exceeding initial projections.

In February 2024, in light of this variability, a Contract Variation was brought to Council seeking approval for a maximum of $720,000 (excluding GST) of expenditure under Contract RFQ-2022-326. This is actual expenditure and not net of revenue from vehicle sales.

It was intended that the provision of this service, administered through contract RFQ-2022-326, would generate adequate revenue to offset costs and beyond. However, this has not been realised due to the significant costs incurred to tow, store and dispose of them. In addition, there has been a significantly increased volume of vehicles being impounded. Further, 50 per cent of revenue is allocated to the Social and Affordable Housing Reserve (Previously known as Affordable Housing Trust).

## 3. Issues

Under the existing model and contract, Council officers investigate and inspect vehicles that have been reported to Council, or have been identified proactively by Officers on patrol, as being unregistered or abandoned. A statutory process is followed and if the vehicle is not moved by the end of the statutory period, are towed to a secure site where they are either reclaimed by the owner or sold at auction if not claimed.

Once towed, all associated reclaim or auction functions are undertaken by Nationwide, and they therefore take on all the risk. This service attracts administrative fees and based on the volume of vehicles impounded, it is significantly greater than anticipated at the time of releasing the RFQ. This is a niche market and there are very few contractors that provide these services.

At the time of releasing the RFQ, assumptions and estimates were based on historical data. Two plus years into the contract, Officers now have a better understanding of the volume of vehicles that result in impoundment and the greater than anticipated expenditure associated with this contract.

There are two key drivers behind the increase in the number of vehicles impounded. The first is an increase in the number of reports from members of the public to Council about vehicles considered to be unregistered or abandoned and the second is proactive action taken against motor vehicle businesses that store and repair vehicles on the roadway and in public places.

The significant cost to council and the little to no net return has resulted in a review of the current model and a proposal to consider an alternate, cost-neutral model.

Nationwide advises that the proposed cost-neutral model, which is in place in contracts with other Councils, typically sees approximately 90 per cent of fees that would normally be charged to councils abolished. Whilst Merri-bek currently incurs tow fees, storage fees and a number of administration fees, under this alternative model council would only incur costs in the below scenarios:

 Need for heavy haulage and special haulage (for towing trucks or vehicles down embankments, for example)

 Futile visits, cancellations, tows of stolen vehicles or vehicles subsequently requested by Council to be released

 After hours tows and night towing operations

All other current performance measures under the contract will remain in place should council resolve to adopt the alternate model.

Council resolved at the 14 November 2018 meeting to *allocate 50% of the funds from the proceeds of the sale of abandoned vehicles by Council to the Moreland Affordable Housing Trust and 50% to support service improvements and new initiatives/projects.*

At the time this resolution was made, the costs associated with administering vehicle towing were significantly less than the revenue from vehicle proceeds, facilitating allocation of 50 per cent of the revenue to the Social and Affordable Housing Reserve (Previously known as Affordable Housing Trust). Unfortunately, lack of competition and/or increasing costs for towing services results in high costs for providing the service relative to revenue from vehicle sales and this has ultimately affected the model because of the net cost of providing towing services.

In the 2022/23 financial year the net cost to council for this service was $99,993. In 2023/24 the net return was $26,922. The year to date figures for 2024/25 are indicative of another year where there will be a net cost to council.

Moving to the cost-neutral model is anomalous with making any allocation from this activity to the Social and Affordable Housing Reserve as Council will not receive this revenue. It is therefore appropriate that, in moving to a cost-neutral model, Council notes the redundancy of this prior resolution.

Further, the total spend under Contract RFQ-2022-326 to date is $716,203 (GST exclusive). Even proceeding on a cost-neutral basis, fees would still apply for the exceptional circumstances outlined above will still be a cost under the contract. It is estimated that this cost will be within an additional $50,000 (GST exclusive) over the $720,000 (GST exclusive) currently authorised, to the contact end date in November 2025.

### Community impact

The report responds to the increasing numbers of reports from the community of vehicles considered to be abandoned or being unregistered.

Council officers consider available information about each abandoned vehicle before making the decision to allocate it for towing, impoundment and potential sale. This includes the statutory requirements but also accounts for further factors. One of the factors considered is whether there is evidence that the vehicle is being slept in, in which case officers liaise with housing service providers to offer outreach services to the vehicle’s occupants.

### Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities no issues were identified.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

Community engagement is not required to support the recommendations made in this report.

**Affected persons rights and interests**

The change in payment model for Contract RFQ-2022-326 does not affect individual rights. All of the current statutory processes will remain and Council officers will continue to be the party identifying the vehicles to be towed.

## 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

Contract expenditure has been significantly higher than originally anticipated and revenue generated from the reclaim and sale of vehicles has not offset the increased costs, resulting in a significant disparity between costs and return. The table below provides the data.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Contract  RFQ-2022-326** | **2022/23** | **2023/24** | **2024/25 (to 25/2/2025)** | **Total to date** |
| Vehicle sales | (111,806) | (374,021) | (111,967) | (597,795) |
| Towing costs and fees | 211,800 | 347,099 | 157,304 | 716,203 |
| **Net cost / (return) to Council** | **99,993** | **(26,922)** | **45,337** | **118,408** |

Expenditure and revenue relating to this contract is currently reflected within the operational budget allocation for the Amenity and Compliance Branch. Should council adopt the Officer recommendation to move to the cost-neutral model, both the revenue and the expenditure budgets will be revised to account for the change. A significantly reduced ongoing expenditure budget will still be required to account for the charges detailed in the Issues section of this report. This is estimated to require up to $50,000 (GST exclusive) in the current contract to November 2025.

The basis of the model beyond the current contract period is unknown but unlikely to be significantly more favourable than the current state.

## 7. Implementation

Subject to Council’s decision, Council will enter into a Deed of Variation with Nationwide Towing & Transport for the provision of towing, storage, redemption and auction of vehicles for the remaining term of the contract.

Budgets will be adjusted as outlined in section 6.

A new procurement process will be undertaken in May 2025, six months before the expiry of the contract. Consideration will be given to most appropriate process, including utilisation of the Procurement Australia panel, shared procurement opportunities or going out to market with a tender.

## Attachment/s

There are no attachments for this report.

7.21 Contract Award: RFT-2025-11 Glass Recycling Processing and Mixed Recycling Processing

**Director City Infrastructure, Anita Curnow**

**City Services**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to:

a) Make a formal offer to The Trustee for Southern Paper Converts Trust trading as Visy Recycling ABN: 49 984 541 896 (Contractor) to award to the Contractor, Contract Number RFT-2025-11 for the Provision of Glass Recycling Processing and Mixed Recycling Processing (Contract) on the following terms and otherwise subject to and in accordance with paragraph 1(b) of this Resolution:

i. For a term of five (5) years commencing 1 July 2025 with three (3) times one (1) year extension option at the discretion of Council.

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.

b) Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to exercise the options to extend the Contract, in accordance with the provisions within the Contract.

3. Authorises expenditure of up to $17,500,000 (excluding GST) under this contract over the life of the contract including extensions.

REPORT

## Executive Summary

This report is for the award of Contract RFT-2025-11 Mixed Recycling Processing and Glass Recycling Processing to Visy Recycling for an initial period of five years with up to three (3) one (1) year extensions, with a maximum spend of $17,500,000 (excluding GST).

Council has participated in a collaborative procurement process with the nine inner Melbourne group of councils (M9) to leverage combined market power based on material volumes and to align requirements of services. Each council will enter their own separate contract with the selected service provider; however, all contracts have a common specifications and contract expiry date.

Council is currently in a contract with Visy (Contract RFT-2022-359). The primary term of the contract expires June 2025, however Council does have two extension periods remaining. The new contract will fully replace the existing agreement to enable Council the benefits of the M9 purchasing power. These benefits include:

 Savings for glass and co-mingled recycling processing services

 Improved opportunities to support community education related to reducing contamination and improving recycling opportunities

 Improved continuity and alignment with the M9 to support future strategic opportunities.

**Previous Council Decisions**

***Contract Award RFT-2022-359: Glass Collection And Mixed Recycling and Glass Processing Contracts*** *– 12 April 2023*

*That Council:*

*….*

*4. Awards Contract RFT-2022-359 Contract B Mixed Recycling Processing to:*

*a) The Trustee for Southern Paper Converts Trust trading as Visy Recycling ABN: 49 984 541 896*

*b) For the total contract value of $9,281,250.00 (including GST) for an initial contract term of two (2) years with the option for Council to extend the contract for a further three (3) by one (1) years.*

*5. Awards Contract RFT-2022-359 Contract C Glass Recycling Processing to:*

*a) The Trustee for Southern Paper Converts Trust trading as Visy Recycling ABN: 49 984 541 896*

*b) For the total contract value of $660,000.00 (including GST) for an initial contract term of two (2) years with the option for Council to extend the contract for a further three (3) by one (1) years.*

*6. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to do all things necessary to execute RFT-2022-359 Contract B Mixed Recycling Processing and Contract C Glass Recycling Processing, including finalising conditions of the contract.*

*7. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to exercise the options to extend contracts in accordance with the provisions within the Contract.*

*8. Advises all tenderers of Council's decision in relation to the Contract.*

*9.* *Publishes the Executive Summary and this resolution in the public minutes of this Council meeting, with the redaction of the authorised maximum value for the Chief Executive Officer’s negotiation on a variation to Contract 529T.*

## 1. Policy Context

### Procurement Policy

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 which allows for collaborative procurements with Federal, State or Local Government or an entity owned by the Federal, State or Local Government; and/or in reliance on contracts and arrangements established by another government entity, local authority or local government group purchasing scheme, Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) or National Procurement network members (e.g., Local Buy), Procurement Australia (PA).

This procurement was undertaken as a collaborative approach across the M9 councils. M9 is an alliance of the nine inner Melbourne councils that work cooperatively and collectively advocate for issues and projects of mutual interest. M9 includes the cities of Melbourne, Darebin, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Merri-bek, Moonee Valley, Port Phillip, Stonnington, and Yarra.

### Council Plan 2021-2025

Strategic Objective 1: To strive for maximum protection of people’s health, plants and animals through leading as urgent response to the climate emergency and a regeneration of our natural environment.

Strategy 1.1: Lead by example and partner with others to accelerate the shift to zero carbon emissions in energy, transport and waste in ways that are efficient, financially responsible, healthy and socially fair.

### State policy - Recycling Victoria: A New Economy 2020–2030

The State Government action plan on waste, Recycling Victoria – A New Economy 2020–2030:

Cut total waste generation by 15 per cent per capita by 2023.

Divert 80 per cent of waste from landfill by 2030, with an interim target of 72 per cent by 2025.

### Kerbside Waste Service and Charges Policy

The kerbside waste service and charges policy was approved by Council in December 2021. The policy has formed the basis for the implementation of the 4-stream waste service that commenced in July 2023 including the introduction of a separate glass recycling collection.

## 2. Background

Council’s current mixed-recycling and glass processing services are provided by Visy, under Contract RFT-2022-359, awarded in 2023. At that time Council officers were aware of the collaborative procurement being undertaken by the M9 Councils and so Contract RFT-2022-359 was structured with a shorter initial term of 2 years to maintain options to join the collaborative procurement outcome.

The M9 Councils have shared ambitions of reducing waste, increasing landfill diversion, and improving recycling are identified as important actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the demand for natural resources. This makes recycling processing services much more than simply processing co-mingled materials.

A collaborative procurement process was undertaken with the Melbourne nine (M9) councils to leverage market power based on material volumes and align requirements of the service. As outlined in **Confidential Attachment 1**, five Councils had contract expiry dates in 2024 when the Panel was first established. A further three Councils, Merri-bek included, have later contract expiry dates and can opt-in at later dates.

The M9 collaborative procurement process was designed to establish a panel of recycling processing providers. Each council will enter into their own separate contract with the selected service provider however all contracts will have a common expiry date.

The membership of the tender evaluation panel was as follows.

| **Title and/or company** | **Generalist or Nominated Speciality** | **Full / Advisory Member** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Strategic Advisor City of Melbourne | Tender Chair | Full |
| Manager Residential Waste and Recycling Services City of Melbourne | Technical | Full |
| Coordinator Waste Management & Recycling City of Moonee Valley | Technical | Full |
| Senior Waste Minimisation Advisor City of Yarra | Technical | Full |
| Senior Waste Contracts Officer City of Port Phillip | Technical | Full |
| Commercial Portfolio Manager – City Operations City of Melbourne | Procurement | Advisory |
| Manger Commercial Waste and Recycling Services City of Melbourne | Technical | Advisory |
| Contract Value Officer City of Melbourne | Technical | Advisory |

## 3. Issues

The tender resulted in a Panel of Suppliers being established, with 3 providers offering both co-mingled and glass recycling processing, as separable service offerings. The three providers are:

 Cleanaway

 Visy

 Australian Paper Recovery

The unit rates and other contract features tendered covered:

 Processing fees for different contamination levels

 Maximum contamination for load to be rejected

 Cost of rejected loads including transport & disposal

 Variability in fees for higher compaction rates (degree of compaction of incoming loads)

 Whether, and for what price, recycling material is accepted out of normal operating hours (e.g. on a Saturday)

 Allowance for community education support (regarding reducing contamination)

 Discount rate for higher volumes

### Panel Contract Offerings

The tendered rates of the three suppliers who form the panel for the M9 Recycling Processing Contract are outlined for both Co-Mingled Recycling and Glass Recycling in **Confidential Attachment 2**.

Considering the relatively high contamination rates that currently exist within Merri‑bek for Co-mingled Recycling (noting there is less contamination in Glass Recycling), the Visy Contract offering is the most cost effective. Visy has limited capacity for new Councils but is able to accept Merri-bek’s recycling given our recycling is already being accommodated at its facilities.

### Comparison to existing Contract RFT-2022-359

Officers assessed the Visy offering under M9 Contract RFT-2025-11 rates per tonne compared to the current Merri-bek City Council Contract RFT-2022-359 with Visy (**also shown in Confidential Attachment 2**) and the M9 contract rates are favourable as follows:

 For Co-mingled Recycling the rates are 3.8% less

 For Glass, the rates are 10.0% less

In addition, the M9 contract (Contract RFT-2025-11) includes annual in-kind community education support to the value of $20,000 for Merri-bek (see below).

### Environmental Sustainability

#### Markets and the Circular Economy

The service provider will be expected to demonstrate the current and future markets for the recovered commodities and provide a transparent material flow information and data for the material flowing to end markets. Council(s) reserve the right to audit the material flows to end markets.

#### Container Deposit Scheme

The introduction of the Container Deposit Scheme (CDS) in Victoria is expected to have an impact on the volumes within the kerbside recycling bins. The volume of diversion from the kerbside volumes to the CDS is unknown at this time. However, there are examples of diversion percentages in other States. The service provider is expected to provide their own assumptions when submitting a tender for the recycling processing services.

Given that there will be a financial value for the CDS material entering the Materials Recovery Facility (MRF), this Contract includes a 50:50 profit share arrangement for CDS materials that remain within the kerbside recycling bins in accordance with the Container Deposit Scheme Refund Sharing Protocol.

#### Monitoring and Reducing Contamination

The recommended Contractor, Visy, has an allowance of $20,000 worth of education annually to help to reduce the level of contamination in the recycling streams. This was a higher value-add than the other tenderers.

The level of contamination of recycling streams (known as Contamination Rate) is significant and so initiatives to monitor and address contamination levels are important to achieve both environmental and financial sustainability benefits.

Each Council will independently undertake kerbside bin audits of the Kerbside Recycling bins in line with the *Victorian Kerbside Auditing Guidelines*, 2021 to:

 Determine the composition of recycling material received at the MRF;

 Determine the contamination rate;

 Identify other research or insights requirements that Council may include from time to time; and as agreed by the service provider and approved by Council.

Kerbside bin audits will occur:

 Initially, prior to the Contract start date;

 At least every 12 months or on a frequency approved by Council, for the life of the contract and any extension periods;

 Before and after any changes to the Contract or Services proposed by the service provider or by Council;

 When an additional kerbside bin audit is warranted by Council for the purpose of verifying or recalculating the Contamination Rate.

### 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. Recommendation from Management

While not part of the Tender Evaluation Panel, Merri-bek officers have been actively participating in the M9 process and recommends that Merri-bek opts into the collaborative procurement, signing its own contract with Visy to commence from 1 July 2025 to begin accessing the benefits of this option and for continuity of the recycling streams essential services for the municipality.

## 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

#### Factors Affecting Spending Under this Contract

Council’s spend on recycling process will be affected by the following factors:

 Consumer Price Index (CPI) – Annual price adjustments shall be based on CPI for the duration of the contract.

 Increases in the state Waste Levy – If the Waste Levy increases, this will be added to the contract price at the levy percentage increase throughout the term of the contract. Even though clean recycling is not subject to the Waste Levy, it is applied to cover the costs of contamination to landfill.

 Changes in volumes of recycled material sent for processing – Even though the harm from recycling is less than landfill waste, it is even better to avoid using paper, plastics, glass and other recyclable products, in the ‘reduce – reuse – recycle’ hierarchy. If households dispose of less recyclable products, the volumes will trend downwards and costs could reduce. If the growth in households accessing the service and/or individual household production increases, the volumes could trend upwards.

As a result of these unknowns, financial modelling has been undertaken to estimate the maximum spend of $17,500,000 (excluding GST) under the contract, including the initial 5-year term and 3 available 1-year extensions.

#### Annual Cost of Recycling Processing

The proposed contract (on a theoretical straight line basis) represents spending of $2.1875 million per annum which provides a buffer for the unknown factors listed above. Considering the following:

 Council’s actual spend for co-mingled and glass recycling processing in 2023/24 was $1,474,288.00 ex GST based on 13,000 tonnes of material; and

 The current budget for 2024/25 is $1,647,069.00 ex GST,

it is considered that at least in the next 4 years, it is unlikely that the costs will exceed $2 million per annum. The estimates for the forthcoming budget year will always be made based on current trends and known factors.

#### Annual Waste Charge Process

The cost of waste services is covered by a Council’s Waste Service Charge. The waste charge is directly linked to the cost of providing the kerbside waste service, as is calculated on a cost-recovery basis and updated annually in the Budget process.

The budget estimates that will form part of the Waste Charge are calculated with near-term CPI, Waste Levy and volume trend information available.

Where actual spend for any given budget year varies from the budgeted amount, this is reflected by surplus going into or deficits coming from the Waste Reserve, for adjustment of the waste charge in future years.

## 7. Implementation and Timeline

It is proposed that the CEO be authorised to do all things necessary to execute Contract RFT-2025-11 and any other required documentation.

Contract RFT-2025-11, covering both co-mingled recycling and glass recycling will commence from 1 July 2025, upon the expiry of the initial contract term of Contract RFT-2022-359.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Confidential Attachment 1 - M9 Council Recycling Contracts  *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.* | D25/108067 |  |
| **2** | Confidential Attachment 2 - Contract Rates  *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.* | D25/108068 |  |

**8. Notices of Motion**

**8.1 Council retreats**

**Cr Sue Bolton**

## Motion

That Council uses its own council venues for Councillor workshops and not hold these workshops outside of Melbourne.

## 1. Background

Cr Bolton’s background:

For many years, the City of Merri-bek (and the City of Moreland), have held council retreats for all councillors and senior council staff to discuss the council budget and the council plan. Usually these retreats are outside Melbourne. Some other councils, such as City of Greater Geelong, hold all of these sessions in council buildings.

Given the cost-of-living crisis, it is important that the Merri-bek Council demonstrate that it is not wasting money on venues for council workshops and instead use its own venues.

## 2. Policy Context

Officer’s comments:

The annual strategic workshop for Councillors (working on the annual budget and Council Plan) is typically the only Councillor workshop held outside of Melbourne. This workshop occurs on a weekend. No decisions are made at the workshop, but important briefings and discussions take place about the forthcoming budget, capital works program and Council Plan. This helps prepare for later deliberation and decision at Council meetings.

## 3. Financial Implications

Officer’s comments:

A weekend workshop would require catering and the associated venue staffing costs whether held onsite or offsite. By having the annual retreat offsite at a corporate venue, this ensures sustained focus on key strategic issues and challenges for the Council’s work. Having the annual retreat offsite does mean accommodation costs are incurred, but this is offset by the benefits to strategic discussions and to future governance and decision-making.

## 4. Resources Implications

Officer’s comments:

If the annual budget and Council Plan workshop for Councillors was held at a Council venue rather than an external venue, then additional Council staff would be required to support the retreat, at weekend penalty rates. The choice between in house and external hosting enables flexibility and consideration of staff impact allocation, operational efficiency and workshop quality.

**8.2 Continuing high quality in-home support for older residents: advocacy to Federal Government**

**Cr Adam Pulford**

## Motion

That Council:

1. Notes the meaningful and important work of Council’s aged care workers supporting older residents in Merri-bek to live good lives and remain independent in their own homes.

2. Notes that while this work is predominantly funded by the Federal Government’s Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) block grants, Council does subsidise this work through our own budget.

3. Writes to the Federal Ministers and Assistant Ministers for Aged Care and Health advocating to make permanent the Commonwealth Home Support Program block grants that are currently scheduled to end mid-2027 to give certainty to the 30+ Councils in Victoria still delivering these services in-house, to older residents who currently access the program and to Council workers employed through the program.

4. Seeks to convene a meeting this year of Victorian Councils still delivering aged care services in-house supported by the CHSP block grants to coordinate collective advocacy to Federal Government and local Federal MPs in these Councils’ areas to make CHSP block funding permanent.

Invites the Australian Services Union to participate in the above meeting and advocacy efforts.

## 1. Background

## Cr Pulford’s background:

## For decades, Council has provided in-home aged care support services to older residents. These services include in-home personal care, domestic assistance, delivered meals, social support groups, home maintenance and on-demand community transport.

## Our services are delivered by our dedicated and skilled workers and are much-loved by older residents in our community. In some cases, our aged care workers have supported local older residents for decades, building deep trust and rapport with them. This is critically important as it is a big ask for people to let someone else into their own home to provide personal care, like assistance with showering. These services support older people to remain living independently in their own homes for longer.

## Council’s aged care services are funded in large part through the Federal Government’s Commonwealth Home Support Program, which is block grant funded, however Council does subsidise this work through its own budget (approximately a third of the total cost comes from Council’s own funding).

## CHSP funding is scheduled to end mid-2027. This looming deadline and funding uncertainty has seen more Victorian Councils withdraw from providing aged care services in-house. This motion seeks to continue Council’s long history of advocacy to the Federal Government to make CHSP block grants permanent and to strengthen our advocacy efforts by bringing together other affected Councils and the Australian Services Union, which has also consistently advocated for publicly delivered aged care services.

## Making CHSP block grants permanent would mean Merri-bek and other councils can continue to provide these important services to our older residents. This would also provide certainty to older residents accessing these services and Council aged care workers across the state.

## 2. Policy Context

Officer’s comments:

This Notice of Motion aligns with the Living and Ageing Well Framework which establishes principles and practices that inform relevant, timely and responsive action across all areas of Council to support older people in our municipality.

## 3. Financial Implications

Officer’s comments:

There are no financial implications.

## 4. Resources Implications

Officer’s comments:

Undertaking the necessary advocacy activities to address this Notice of Motion can occur within existing resources and officer time.

**8.3 Greening state-owned infrastructure**

**Cr Jay Iwasaki and Mayor Davidson**

## Motion

That Council writes to the Victorian Environment Minister, the Hon Steve Dimopoulos, inviting the State to partner with Merri-bek Council to exemplify the greening of state-owned infrastructure within the municipality, through initiatives such as:

 Replacing state-controlled impervious surfaces in Merri-bek with plants (e.g., trees for canopy, vines for walls) or porous surfaces to help reduce the urban heat island effect, enhance biodiversity, and improve residents’ well-being.

 Identifying key state infrastructure in Merri-bek where greening interventions can be implemented, including on vertical surfaces, and opportunities for encouraging private developments subject to state planning decisions to do the same.

 Collaborating with Merri-bek City Council in delivering urban greening initiatives, especially tree planting and landscaping, in rail corridors, arterial road corridors, state schools and on other state-owner land.

 Providing funding and resource support to Merri-bek for greening projects delivered on state land and assets to ensure their long-term maintenance.

## 1. Background

## Cr Iwasaki and Mayor Davidson's background:

## The urban heat island (UHI) effect significantly impacts cities like Merri-bek, where hard, impervious surfaces dominate state-managed roads and surrounding infrastructure.

## Research demonstrates that greening urban areas - such as through planting street trees, installing green roofs, and increasing vegetation cover - can mitigate the UHI effect, reduce extreme heat exposure, and enhance residents' physical and mental health (Santamouris 2015; Norton et al. 2015).

## Merri-bek is aiming to double tree canopy cover to 29 per cent by 2050 to mitigate the impacts of heatwaves (City of Merri-bek 2017). We’ve increased our tree planting budget in recent years and have been undertaking tree-planting in previously impervious areas through our “tree planting in tricky places” campaign. However, while small, impervious land in state controlled areas contribute to significant heat build-up due to asphalt surfaces and limited vegetation cover. By prioritising the greening of these areas, the Victorian Government can significantly contribute to community resilience, public health, and biodiversity enhancement while addressing climate adaptation goals.

## This Notice of Motion requests that Council formally advocates to the Victorian Government to take action on greening state roads, ensuring Merri-bek is cooler, greener, and healthier as heat waves increase in frequency.

## *References*

## City of Merri-bek (2017). Urban Forest Strategy 2017-2027. <https://www.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/globalassets/website-merri-bek/blocks/accordions/living-merri-bek/environment/urban-forest-strategy-2017.pdf>

## Norton, B.A., Coutts, A.M., Livesley, S.J., Harris, R.J., Hunter, A.M., & Williams, N.S.G. (2015). Planning for cooler cities: A framework to prioritise green infrastructure to mitigate high temperatures in urban landscapes. Landscape and Urban Planning, 134, 127-138. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2014.10.018>

## Santamouris, M. (2015). Regulating the damaged thermostat of cities—Status, impacts and mitigation challenges. Energy and Buildings, 91, 43-56. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enbuild.2015.01.027>

## 2. Policy Context

Officer’s comments:

The following Council endorsed strategies, and their associated action plans and position papers would support this topic of advocacy:

 Urban Heat Island Effect Action Plan, endorsed June 2016

 Urban Forest Strategy 2017- 2027

 Climate Risk Strategy, endorsed November 2022

 Open Space Strategy, endorsed April 2024

 Nature Plan, endorsed August 2020

 Integrated Water Management (IWM) Strategy 2040 - Towards a Water Sensitive City, endorsed 2020

 Reshaping Brunswick position paper, April 2023

 Upfield Corridor Urban Design Framework - Stage One, June 2024

 Cooling the Upfield Corridor Action Plan 2018 - 2029

 Merri-bek Local Planning Policy - Environmentally sustainable development Clause 15.01-2L-05

## 3. Financial Implications

Officer’s comments:

A letter can be developed and sent to the Minister within existing budgets.

## 4. Resources Implications

Officer’s comments:

A letter can be developed and sent to the Minister within existing resources.

**8.4 Free Third Spaces for Young People**

**Cr Ella Svensson**

## Motion

That Council:

1. Acknowledges the need for accessible and affordable recreational space for young people, particularly during the current cost of living crisis.

2. Acknowledges that recreational spaces like Don Bosco youth centre in Brunswick that provide young people with opportunities to access mentoring and other supports help young people to build strong relationships, supports mental health and can prevent isolation.

3. Notes the important and impactful work Council is doing to support young people in our community, including: Oxygen Youth Hub in Coburg, library programs, like take over nights at Glenroy and Brunswick Libraries, music and sports programs at Council facilities

4. Acknowledges that there may be gaps in geographical access or service availability for low cost meaningful activities for young people across the municipality.

5. Receives a report outlining how Council could create free third spaces for young people throughout the municipality. In considering how Council will create more free third spaces for young people, the report should:

a) Begin with a recommended pilot location, with a view to expansion to multiple sites across the municipality within easy access of all young residents. Consist of a variety of indoor and outdoor spaces, staffed by youth workers where appropriate.

b) Create different spaces to cater to the unique needs of different age groups including younger children (0-5), primary aged children, and teenagers. Include the opportunity for young people to use as a ‘hang out’ space, where young people will be able to attend during operating hours without always needing to book or attend a specific structured program.

c) Recommend a community engagement approach, including consultation with young people and families, to assist in the selection of locations and designs. Draw from and work with neighbouring Councils and local community groups with similar initiatives (e.g., Don Bosco Youth Centre).

d) Consider how these could be delivered in new developments through negotiation with planning officers through the planning application process Explore funding partnerships with state and federal governments to make these much needed spaces a reality.

e) Consider how existing non council services such as Don Bosco can be better supported by Council to continue and expand their work with young people.

## 1. Background

Cr Svensson’s background:

Third spaces for children and teenagers - public spaces outside of home and school - are essential in fostering healthy development. These spaces provide critical benefits for young people’s mental health and well-being, contribute to building stronger communities, help alleviate pressures from the cost of living, and reduce antisocial behaviour and crime.

As pressures on young people and families increase, including the cost of living crisis, free third spaces are more important than ever.

**Addressing cost of living**

The cost of living crisis makes the need for free third spaces even more pressing. Many families are struggling to make ends meet, which can limit young people’s access to extracurricular activities. Free third spaces remove this financial barrier, ensuring that all young people, regardless of background, have access to enriching environments. For families already under financial stress, these spaces provide a low-cost (or no-cost) alternative to expensive private programs, offering a fairer chance for all young people to explore their interests, develop new skills, and form lasting connections with others.

**Improving mental health and wellbeing**

With rising rates of mental ill-health and distress among young people (Li et al., 2021), having access to safe and supportive spaces is more crucial than ever. Adolescence is a critical stage in emotional development, and without adequate support, it can be a time of heightened vulnerability (Li et al., 2021). Third spaces offer young people the opportunity to connect with others and engage in activities that promote mental well-being, such as sports, creative arts, and unstructured social interaction (Blum et al., 2022). These activities provide a healthy outlet for emotional expression, helping young people manage stress, develop coping strategies, and build resilience (Blum et al., 2022; McPherson et al., 2014).

Furthermore, third spaces serve as refuges from the pressures of home and school life. For young people who may be facing difficult circumstances at home, community spaces offer a sense of stability and belonging (Littman, 2021). These environments provide a respite from the challenges they face in other parts of their lives, offering them a safe haven where they can find peace, engage in fulfilling activities, and connect with supportive peers and mentors (Littman, 2021).

**Promoting community connectedness and social cohesion**

In a time of growing social disconnection and increasing reliance upon online social connections (Li et al., 2022), third spaces provide a much-needed sense of belonging (Finlay, 2019). Third spaces create opportunities for young people to form friendships, learn new social skills, and interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds. By bringing together people from different walks of life, third spaces foster inclusivity and encourage understanding, helping to break down social barriers and prevent feelings of alienation (Littman, 2021).

When young people feel connected to their community, they are more likely to take an active role in its well-being. Third spaces offer not only recreational activities, but can also provide opportunities for young people to engage in community projects, volunteering, or leadership initiatives. This helps foster a sense of responsibility and encourages young people to become more engaged and invested in their surroundings (Blum et al., 2022).

A connected, supportive community can significantly enhance a young person’s sense of identity and purpose, benefiting both their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of the broader community.

**Improving community safety**

Providing third spaces can also help reduce antisocial behaviour and crime. When young people lack productive outlets or safe environments to connect with others, they may resort to negative behaviours as a way to cope with boredom, distress, or social isolation. By offering a supportive setting, third spaces help redirect energy into positive activities and foster a sense of responsibility and community engagement. Young people who have access to supportive public services are less likely to engage in antisocial behaviours and more likely to develop strong ties to their community (Blum et al., 2022; McPherson et al., 2014).

**Conclusion**

In summary, free third spaces are not merely places for children and teenagers to pass the time; they are vital to fostering positive mental health, supporting community cohesion, reducing financial barriers, and curbing antisocial behaviour. By investing in these spaces, we help build healthier, happier, and more connected young people, which in turn strengthens society as a whole.

*References*

Blum RW, Lai J, Martinez M, & Jessee C. (2022) Adolescent connectedness: cornerstone for health and wellbeing. BMJ. Oct 27;379:e069213. doi: 10.1136/bmj-2021-069213

Finlay, J., Esposito, M., Kim, M. H., Gomez-Lopez, I., & Clarke, P. (2019). Closure of ‘third places’? Exploring potential consequences for collective health and wellbeing. Health & Place, 60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2019.102225>

Li, S.H., Beames, J.R., Newby, J.M. et al. (2022) The impact of COVID-19 on the lives and mental health of Australian adolescents. Eur Child Adolesc Psychiatry 31, 1465–1477. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-021-01790-x>

Littman, D.M. (2021) Third places, social capital, and sense of community as mechanisms of adaptive responding for young people who experience social marginalization. The American Journal of Community Psychology. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12531>

McPherson, K.E., Kerr, S., McGee, E. et al. (2014) The association between social capital and mental health and behavioural problems in children and adolescents: an integrative systematic review. BMC Psychol 2, 7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/2050-7283-2-7>

## 2. Policy Context

Officer’s comments:

This Notice of Motion aligns with the vision of the Children, Young People and Families Plan 2021-2025 of ‘a community where children, young people and families are healthy, resilient, empowered, safe and belong’ and the following Council policies.

 Community Vision 2021-2031 (Theme 3: A Healthy and Caring Merri-bek, Theme 4: Spaces and Places in Merri-bek and Theme 5: An empowered and collaborative Merri-bek)

 Council Plan 2021-2025 (Major initiative and priority 21: Implement the Children, Young People and Families Plan)

It also aligns with Councils Child Safe Commitment and obligations in relation to the Child Safe Standards.

A process to determine how free third spaces for young people could be created throughout the municipality could be referred to the forthcoming Council Plan development process for consideration as an action.

## 3. Financial Implications

Officer’s comments:

The preparation of the report can be undertaken within existing operational budgets.

## 4. Resources Implications

Officer’s comments:

Undertaking the necessary research and consultation to address this Notice of Motion can occur within existing resources and officer time.

**8.5 Steps Towards a Merri-bek Pollinator Biodiversity Corridor**

**Cr Jay Iwasaki**

## Motion

That Council:

1. As the first step in establishing a Merri-bek Pollinator Corridor, organises a community forum and workshop to develop community participation for establishing a broader pollinator biodiversity corridor across Merri-bek. The forum should aim to connect local action groups and residents and link knowledge among participants. A council-supported workshop can also teach participants to build their own native bee hotels and/or establish an initial pilot site with information about native pollinators with localised habitat restoration (including “bee hotels”) in a visible location.

2. Provides support to the forum in the following ways (among others):

a) Supporting a suitably qualified ecologist to present

b) Identification and provision of a suitable venue

c) Promotion of the community forum and workshop through targeted and general communication

d) Provision of materials needed to construct artificial nesting habitat (bee hotels) for the workshop

e) Safety and insurance oversight of the community workshop

3. Notes that the information summarised from participants of this forum will help inform on the direction, scope, and scale of a wider pollinator biodiversity corridor in Merri‑bek.

## 1. Background

## Cr Iwasaki’s background:

### Pollinator corridors in the urban context

## Pollinators, such as bees, birds, butterflies, and other animals, are crucial to the health of ecosystems and agriculture. However, urbanisation has led to the fragmentation of habitats and a decline in pollinator populations, which poses significant threats to biodiversity and food security.

## Merri-bek City Council, like many urban councils in Australia, faces challenges in preserving and enhancing pollinator habitats within its jurisdiction (Iwasaki & Hogendoorn 2023). However, there is growing recognition of the importance of establishing pollinator corridors to connect fragmented green spaces, facilitating movement and gene flow for pollinator species.

## Existing programs in neighbouring councils, such as the Melbourne’s Woody Meadows project and the City of Yarra's ongoing biodiversity initiatives, have shown the positive impacts of creating urban green spaces tailored for pollinators (University of Melbourne, 2024).

## These projects align with broader regional and national goals for biodiversity conservation, including the Biodiversity 2037 plan, which sets out the framework for protecting and enhancing Victoria’s biodiversity.

### Opportunity for Merri-bek Pollinator Corridor

There is an opportunity for Merri-bek to build upon these initiatives, by first creating a connected space along the southern boundary of Merri-bek, with a focus on artificial bee habitat (Figure 1), native plantings, limited pesticide use, and community involvement. Such actions align with successful strategies employed in other urban areas. The project should additionally be informed by ongoing urban biodiversity initiatives, ongoing re-naturing efforts along both creeks, and include nature strips and private properties. Such actions align with successful strategies employed in other urban areas.

Lastly, incorporating education about native pollinators into community activities and collaborating with neighbouring councils and local citizen science groups will ensure a holistic approach to creating a resilient, biodiverse urban environment for people and pollinators in Merri-bek. This can draw from and work with neighbouring Councils’ initiatives and local citizen science groups (e.g., Melbourne Woody Meadows Project, The Melbourne Pollinator Corridor by the Heart Gardening Project, Adelaide’s ‘Bring the Pea Bee back to the Burbs’).

**Figure 1**. Native bee hotel along the River Torrens, City of Adelaide. Photo Tony Lewis.

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### Proposed approach

As a first step towards a Pollinator Biodiversity Corridor, it is proposed to hold a community forum and workshop. This would engage those in Merri-bek who are interested in learning more about pollinator corridors and paves the way for citizen scientists and community-led environment groups to play a role in helping to establish the Merri-bek Pollinator Corridor.

Within the context of Council’s nature planning, further activities could then be pursued such as documenting the strategic benefits and delivery cost for Council to develop stages of the Merri-bek Pollinator Corridor (Park Street corridor on Merri-bek’s southern boundary with Melbourne and Yarra, Moonee Ponds Creek and Merri/Edgars Creek). The project should additionally be informed by ongoing urban biodiversity initiatives and ongoing re-naturing efforts along both Moonee Ponds Creek and the Merri and Edgars Creek system.

A future Merri-bek Pollinator Corridor following previous examples would:

 Be composed of appropriate native plants for native pollinators, appropriate natural and artificial nesting habitat and may include translocations of rarer species of plants and animals when habitat is suitable.

 Incorporate pesticide free or pesticide limited use areas.

 Include alternative mowing trials in these areas.

 Incorporate widespread signage of native plants, habitats, and/or pollinators for education and publicity.

 Integrate into a broader Merri-bek Biodiversity corridor in the future with more extensive re-naturing.

 Outline the potential for additional corridors through areas with more limited green space

 Include community involvement such as pollinator/nature education in Merri-bek (e.g., schools, bushkinder, community events, local conferences).

 Include education and mitigation of the negative impacts of European honey bees on native wildlife.

 Encourage participation in utilising nature strips and volunteered private property to fill gaps in the corridor.

### References

## Iwasaki & Hogendoorn (2023). The conservation of urban flower visitors Down Under. Frontiers in Sustainable Cities. <https://doi.org/10.3389/frsc.2023.1103257> University of Melbourne (2024).

## Woody Meadows Project. <https://woodymeadow.unimelb.edu.au/> Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2017). Biodiversity 2037: Victoria’s Biodiversity Strategy. Victorian Government.

## See also: Iwasaki & Hogendoorn (2021). How protection of honey bees can help and hinder bee conservation. Current Opinion in Insect Science. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cois.2021.05.005> <https://www.greenadelaide.sa.gov.au/news/get-the-buzz-on-a-project-bringing-the-bees-back-to-the-foothills> <https://theheartgardeningproject.org.au/melbourne-pollinator-corridor>

## 2. Policy Context

Officer’s comments:

### Council Plan

This project supports the Council Plan Theme 1 “An environmentally proactive Merri‑bek’ by seeking to improve biodiversity outcomes for Merri-bek through the provision of infrastructure that will support pollinator species.

### Open Space Strategy Action Plan

The proposed forum will provide recommendations that will support the implementation of the following strategy actions:

 Action 3.2 b) Increasing the diversity and structural complexity of indigenous and native vegetation (including all open space, not only along creek corridors)

 Action 3.2c) Improve vegetation biodiversity value through new techniques (i.e. direct seeding) and better vegetation management programs (i.e. strategic mowing to reduce weed seed production and increasing pollinator plants)

**Nature Plan**

The proposed forum will provide recommendations that will support the delivery of the following plan actions:

 Action 1.6 - Increase habitat diversity through incorporation of enriched understorey planting (particularly flowering plants) rocks and logs in restoration programs and consider artificial habitat opportunities (e.g. nest boxes, bee hotels) where appropriate

 Action 1.15 - Trial a differential mowing program regime in parks across the municipality and monitor the effects on insect life and social/recreational values

 Action 3.4 - Create and deliver an annual program of nature-based activities to engage residents in learning about and valuing the natural environment.

**Urban Forest Strategy**

This strategy describes Merri-bek’s nominated priority habitat corridors, including east-west links such as Park Street linear reserve. The proposed forum will support the future development of these corridors.

## 3. Financial Implications

Officer’s comments:

Officers estimate that the proposed actions would cost up to $5,000. This includes promotional cost procuring an appropriately qualified ecologist to present as part of the forum, and materials to construct the bee hotels.

## 4. Resources Implications

Officer’s comments:

Procurement of the suitably qualified ecologist and organising and running of the community forum and workshop can be managed within existing staffing resources.

**8.6 Adequate notice of contract expiry for major Council services**

**Cr Sue Bolton**

## Motion

That Councillors receive notice via Councillor briefings about any proposals to extend contracts for waste collection, leisure centres and the wat djerring Animal Facility at least 12 months before the initial term of the contract expires.

## 1. Background

## Cr Bolton’s background:

## Sometimes Councillors only become aware that a contract for a major service such as waste collection or the animal shelter will expire, around four to six weeks prior to the contract expiry. Such short notice makes it difficult and even impossible for Councillors to canvass alternative proposals.

## Councillors need to be alerted well in advance when big and important Council services such as waste collection, management of the swimming pools and the contract with the City of Whittlesea for the wat djerring Animal Facility are going to expire. Councillors need to be given adequate time to consider alternative methods for service delivery.

## 2. Policy Context

The Procurement Policy is made under Section 108 of the[*Local Government Act 2020.*](https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/local-government-act-2020/003) The Act requires each council to:

 Prepare and adopt a procurement policy which specifies the principles, processes and procedures applying in respect of the purchase of goods and services and carrying out of works by the Council.

 Review its Procurement Policy at least once during each 4-year term of the Council.

The current Procurement Policy was revised and adopted on 13 March 2024. In accordance with the Act, the current Procurement Policy is due to be reviewed by June 2025.

## 3. Financial Implications

The motion can be delivered within existing budget and has no financial implications.

## 4. Resources Implications

The motion can be delivered with existing Council resources.

1. VAGO (2022) Appendix G–2 | Results of 2021–22 Audits: Local Government | Victorian Auditor-General´s Report [↑](#footnote-ref-1)