**Council MEETING AGENDA**

Wednesday 8 October 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 12 November 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 22 October 2025 commencing at 6.30 pm.

**WELCOME**

**1. APOLOGIES/LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Cr Svensson has sought a leave of absence for the period 20 October to 9 November 2025 (inclusive).

**2. DISCLOSURES OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

**3. MINUTE CONFIRMATION**

The minutes of the Council Meeting held on 10 September 2025 be confirmed.

**4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND OTHER MATTERS**

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**9. Notice of Rescission**

Nil

**10. Foreshadowed Items**

**11. URGENT BUSINESS**

**12. Confidential Business**

12.1 Central Coburg Program

*Pursuant to section 3(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 2020 this report 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.*

12.2 Contract Matters

*Pursuant to section 3(1)(g(i))(g(ii)), and of the Local Government Act 2020, this report has been designated as confidential because it relates to private commercial information, being information provided by a business, commercial or financial undertaking that relates to trade secrets, and private commercial information, being information provided by a business, commercial or financial undertaking that if released, would unreasonably expose the business, commercial or financial undertaking to disadvantage.*

12.3 Program Review

*Pursuant to section 3(1)(h) of the Local Government Act 2020 this report has been designated as confidential because it relates to confidential meeting information, being the records of meetings closed to the public under section 66(2)(a).*

12.4 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.*

**7. Council Reports**

**7.1 2024-25 Merri-bek City Council Annual Report**

**Director Community, Eamonn Fennessy**

**Customer, Communications and Engagement**

**Officer Recommendation**

That Council:

1. Formally receives the Merri-bek City Council Annual Report 2024-25, provided as Attachment 1.

2. Authorises the Director Community to make minor changes to the report if required.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

The Merri-bek City Council Annual Report 2024-25 contains Council’s audited Financial and Performance Statements and provides information on Council operations and services delivered to and for the community for the 2024-25 financial year.

The report, at Attachment 1, contains the key highlights and achievements of Council for the year.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Merri-bek City Council Annual Report 2023-24** – 9 October 2024

That Council:

*1. Receives the Merri-bek City Council Annual Report 2023–24.*

…

**1. Policy Context**

Sections 98, 99 and 100 of the Local Government Act 2020 and the Local Government (Planning and Reporting) Regulations 2020 provide the statutory framework for Council to prepare and consider its annual report for 2024-25.

**2. Background**

The Merri-bek City Council Annual Report 2024-25, at Attachment 1, contains the audited Performance and Financial Statements. Council’s Audit and Risk Committee recommended to Council that the Financial and Performance Statements be adopted in principle and subsequently at the Council meeting on 10 September 2025, approved in principle the Financial and Performance Statements.

The annual report meets the State Government’s performance reporting framework that became mandatory from 1 July 2014. All councils are required to report results as part of their annual reporting requirements. The framework was introduced to ensure all councils measure and report on their performance in a consistent way.

**3. Issues**

The intent of the annual report is to inform the Merri-bek community and stakeholders of Council’s performance in 2024-25 against the strategic indicators, major initiatives, and priorities outlined in the Council Plan 2021-2025 and any other key highlights or legislated requirements as prescribed.

**Community impact**

The annual report is a statutory obligation. It will be available on request from Merri-bek City Council offices, libraries and on our website.

**Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications**

No longer printing a long, professionally designed and printed version has environmental benefits.

**Economic sustainability implications**

There are no economic sustainability implications associated with this report.

**Legal and risk considerations**

There are no legal and risk considerations applicable.

**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**

The annual report will be published on Council’s website and printed copies will be available on request from Council offices and libraries.

**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 prepare and publish Merri-bek Council’s Annual Report 2024- 25 are included in the approved operating budget for 2024-25.

**7. Implementation**

The Annual Report will be published on Council’s website on or after 9 October 2025.

**Attachment/s**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Annual Report 2024-25 | D25/524927 |  |

7.2 Adoption of 10-year Financial Plan 2025-2035

**Director Business Transformation, Sue Vujcevic**

**Finance Management**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Adopts the proposed 10-year Financial Plan 2025-2035 (provided as Attachment 1) in accordance with the legislative requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020.*

2. Advises the submitter that Council has considered their submission relating to the Proposed 10-year financial plan 2025-2035 and that the submitter be advised of the outcome of the consideration as it relates to their specific submission through this council report, and they be thanked for their contributions

3. Authorises the Director Business Transformation to finalise the Merri-bek Council 10-year financial plan 2025-2035, including any amendments as a result of the adoption and or/minor administrative changes, including making the final documents available for public inspection.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

The *Local Government Act 2020* requires each Council to prepare a Financial Plan covering a minimum period of 10-years following each Council election. The 10-year Financial Plan 2025-2035 (the financial plan) was developed through deliberative engagement and covers the periods 2025-26 to 2034-35.

The purpose of this report is to seek Council adoption of the Financial Plan (Attachment 1).

The Financial Plan is one of a number of integrated documents that have been developed to provide a robust and transparent system of financial management aligned to the longer-term aspirations for Merri-bek and as expressed in the newly refreshed Community Vision and Council Plan.

The Financial Plan is an important document as it sets out broadly how Council can fund essential services and projects in coming years. The Financial Plan is a decision-making tool to identify Council’s current and projected financial capacity to meet Council’s future needs in providing services and facilities to the community based on the goals and aspirations of the Council Plan. The long-term outlook for Council displays prudent financial management.

The draft Financial Plan was presented to Council at its meeting on 13 August 2025 and subsequently went out for public exhibition for 28 days. Following this, one submission was received. The submission (included in the issues section of the report) references specific projects to be funded and/or retain funding annually. Officers are not recommending any changes to the financial plan as a result of the submission, the rationale for this being that the Financial Plan does not go into the level of detail of specific projects, like the submitter mentioned. This detail is included in the annual 4-year budget which goes out for public exhibition annually in April/May.

Since public exhibition of the draft plan, officers have updated the forecast actuals to reflect the actual 2024-25 numbers as endorsed by Council on 10 September 2025.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Draft Merri-bek City Council 10-year Financial Plan 2025-2035 -** 13 August 2025

*That Council:*

*1. Endorses the draft 10-year Financial Plan 2025-2035, at Attachment 1 to this report, for the purpose of community exhibition.*

*2. Invites feedback on the draft 10-year Financial Plan 2025-2035 for the public exhibition period, from 15 August 2025 until 12 September 2025.*

*3. Makes the draft 10-year Financial Plan 2025-2035 available on the Council website and hard copies available at the three civic centres and all libraries.*

**1. Policy Context**

In accordance with section 91 of the *Local Government Act 2020*, Council must:

a) Develop, adopt and keep in force a Financial Plan for at least the next 10 financial years in accordance with its deliberative engagement practices.

The Financial Plan must be prepared in accordance with Council’s deliberative engagement practices by 31 October in the year following a general election.

## 2. Background

The Financial Plan looks at the assumptions and budget parameters that have been applied to the 4-Year budget and extends these out into years 5 to 10 in order to give a long-term view of Council’s financial viability and outcomes.

Each year the 10-Year Financial Plan will be reviewed and updated to reflect the circumstances of Council at the time, and any proposed changes will be considered for adoption by Council as a part of the annual budget process.

Under the *Local Government Act 2020*, and in accordance with Council’s Community Engagement Policy, Council is required to prepare the Financial Plan in accordance with its deliberative engagement practices in future years.

The Financial Plan is included as **Attachment 1** to this report.

## 3. Issues

The preparation of a 10-year Financial Plan generates improved information to guide Council’s decisions about the need, timing and priority of proposed expenditure. Key financial indicators are also used to monitor Council’s long-term financial sustainability are in line with established benchmarks.

The Financial Plan seeks to ensure we have the financial capacity to continue to provide service levels which meet the needs of our community in a financially sustainable way by:

 Maintaining a modest operating surplus over the life of the Financial Plan whilst spending on renewal and upgrade of community assets.

 Striving to continually improve the way that we deliver our existing and future services and proactively seeking out savings without affecting service delivery levels to the community.

 Monitoring our asset condition data and prioritising the renewal of community infrastructure and facilities.

 Addressing the increasing costs, environmental impacts and potential service changes to council waste services. This includes the investigation of a transition to a four-bin service to reduce waste to landfill and improve the quality of recyclables.

 Monitoring and planning for the ongoing demand for new infrastructure driven by growth, changes in demographics, and increasing community expectations via the development of a comprehensive and evidence driven Asset Management Plan that is discussed and supported by the community.

 Saving for significant investment in placemaking projects (such as the Coburg library and piazza project). Placemaking projects capitalise on a community's assets, inspiration, and potential, with the intention of creating public spaces that promote people's health, happiness, and wellbeing'.

 Saving for the ‘Parks close to home’ strategies that will utilise a large proportion of the broader open space reserve funding to fill open space gaps across Merri-bek. Not only creating and improving access to open space in the area but ensuring new parks and locations are sought opportunistically each year.

 Saving for significant investment in aquatic projects including the Coburg Leisure Centres redevelopment. Upgrading and maintaining Aquatic and Leisure Facilities as outlined in the Moreland Aquatic and Leisure Strategy. Unlike general building infrastructure, Council’s six facilities aquatic infrastructure have a life cycle of approximately 50 years and significant ongoing investment is required. Investment in this strategy reinforces Council’s commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of residents by providing infrastructure and services that support good health outcomes;

 Maximise external contributions in relation to Development and Open Space Contributions Reserve.

 Ensuring that our debt and interest profile remains at a level that is low enough to guarantee our capacity to service and repay this debt into the future.

 Operating within the key financial indicators and benchmarks to ensure we maintain a sound financial position.

 Advocate strongly within the sector to secure funding where possible and strive to increase sustainable opportunities to diversify Council’s revenue base.

In summary, Merri-bek Council is committed to ensuring the responsible and the maximum allocation of funds to initiatives to progress the ongoing and future needs of the local community.

**Submissions received to the draft Financial Plan**

The draft Financial Plan was presented to Council at its meeting on 13 August 2025 and subsequently went out for public exhibition for 28 days. One submission was received as shown in the table below, with the accompanying officer response:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Submission received:** | **Officer response:** |
| Merri-bek City Council’s Financial Plan would include Exercise and gym equipment in local parks, Fawkner Festa, Fawkner Marketplace, 98.9 North West FM Hadfield studios and more for the allocated monies from $1,000 to $15,000 as well. | Proposing no change to the financial plan.  The Financial Plan is an important document as it sets out broadly how Council can fund essential services and projects in coming years. The Financial Plan is a decision-making tool to identify Council’s current and projected financial capacity to meet Council’s future needs in providing services and facilities to the community based on the goals and aspirations of the Council Plan.  The Financial Plan does not go into the level of detail of specific projects, like the submitter mentioned. This type of detail is usually considered in the annual 4-year budget, which goes out for public exhibition annually in April/May. |

Since public exhibition of the draft plan, officers have updated the forecast actuals to reflect the actual 2024-25 numbers as endorsed by Council on 10 September 2025.

### 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

Council launched its engagement program in November 2024 with consultation on the Budget 2025-2029 where over 40 ideas were submitted and over 1,000 people participated. Earlier this year deliberative engagement commenced to realise the Community’s vision for the future of Merri-bek.

Deliberative workshops were held over 3 days in February on the Community Vision and priorities for strategic plans. Over 60 residents, representative of the Merri-bek community, refreshed our Community Vision and provided an insight into what is important to the Merri-bek community.

Councillors also participated in three workshop sessions during January to May to formulate and consolidate Council Plan priorities to inform all other strategic documents. A review and analysis was also undertaken of all significant community engagement projects undertaken by Council in the last 4 years.

The draft Community Vision and draft Council Plan 2025-2029 was out for community consultation from 25 June 2025 to 22 July 2025 and were subsequently adopted by Council at its meeting on 10 September 2025.

The next stage of the engagement process, as endorsed by Council at its meeting on 13 August 2025, involved the draft Asset Management Plan and draft 10- Year Financial Plan going out on public exhibition from 15 August 2025 until 12 September 2025.

One submission was received which stated *Merri-bek City Council’s Financial Plan would include Exercise and gym equipment in local parks, Fawkner Festa, Fawkner Marketplace, 98.9 North West FM Hadfield studios and more for the allocated monies from $1,000 to $15,000 as well.* Officers do not recommend any changes to the financial plan as a result of submissions received.

## 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

Costs associated with finalising the Financial Plan are funded from existing operating budget allocations.

## 7. Implementation

Subject to Council’s decision, the Financial Plan will be published on Council’s website.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Proposed 10-year Financial Plan - 2025-26 to 2034-35 | D25/492047 |  |

**7.3 Adoption of 10-Year Asset Plan 2025-2035**

**Director City Infrastructure, Anita Curnow**

**Capital Works Planning and Delivery**

**Officer Recommendation**

That Council:

1. Adopts the Asset Plan 2025-2035 at Attachment 1to this report prepared in accordance with the requirements of Section 92 of the *Local Government Act 2020.*

2. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to arrange for edits to the document for presentation and clarity, without making any material change ahead of publishing the final Asset Plan on Council’s website.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

The *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) requires Council to develop, adopt and maintain a 10‑year Asset Plan for maintenance, acquisition, disposal and management of Council-managed assets. A review of the Asset Plan must be completed by 31 October in the year following a General Council election.

Council’s $1.9 billion portfolio of assets has been built up progressively over many decades. Assets such as roads and drainage provide the building blocks of our way of life, while others add to the quality of life by facilitating recreation, arts, culture, health and educational activities. Our assets are also integral to us achieving our zero carbon, water management and social inclusion goals, and support local business and economic development.

The Act requires the Asset Plan to be developed and reviewed through deliberative engagement process in accordance with Council’s engagement policy. The Asset Plan (Attachment 1) has been developed in line with Council’s deliberative engagement practices and have drawn from the engagement outputs from the deliberative panel formed as a part of the Council Plan and Community Vision review. Following a Council resolution in August 2025, the draft Asset Plan was published for public feedback through Conversations Merri-bek webpage.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Draft Asset Plan for Public Exhibition** – 13 August 2025

*That Council:*

*1. Endorses the draft Asset Plan 2025-2035, provided as Attachment 1 to this report, for the purpose of community exhibition.*

*2. Invites feedback on the draft Asset Plan 2025-2035 for the public exhibition period, from 15 August 2025 until 12 September 2025.*

*3. Makes the draft Asset Plan 2025-2035 available on the Council website and hard copies available at the three civic centres and all libraries.*

**1. Policy Context**

The draft Asset Plan is integrated with the broader Council planning framework that aligns closely with the Community Vision, Council Plan and the draft Long Term Financial Plan. These alignments ensure that the asset management decisions support our overall strategic objectives and are compliant with legislative requirements.

**2. Background**

Pursuant to Section 92 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act), Council must develop, adopt and keep in force an Asset Plan in accordance with Council’s deliberative engagement practices. The plan must encompass information on maintenance, renewal, expansion, acquisition, disposal and decommissioning of assets for which Council is responsible. Council must review the Asset Plance in accordance with its deliberative engagement practices and adopt the Asset Plan by 31 October in the year following a general election.

The Asset Plan (**Attachment 1**) covers Transport assets, Buildings, Stormwater and Open Space assets. Below is a snapshot of from the Asset Plan summarising the current state of Council’s infrastructure assets.

A chart of health check

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Our Assets | $ 913M  Road outline  Transport Infrastructure | $ 330M  Cloud With Lightning And Rain outline  Stormwater Drainage | $ 231M  Deciduous tree outline  Open Space | $ 470M  City outline  Buildings & Facilities |

**3. Issues**

**Community impact**

The Asset Plan is an overarching document that lays a strategic framework for how Council’s financial investment decisions are made to provide optimum levels of service to the community by the utilisation of Council’s physical assets.

**Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications**

The scope of capital projects included in the Asset Plan for each asset class will account for both emissions abatement and climate adaptation.

Emissions reduction is achieved by building projects incorporating costs for sustainable design to promote energy efficiency and use of green energy. Use of recycled materials in construction and minimising demolition also reduce the carbon footprint of our asset programs and create opportunities around the circular economy.

Climate risk considerations impact significantly on the design of assets. For example, rather than replace like-with-like, officers will review drainage capacity as drains are replaced to accommodate more severe storm events and reconsider selection of materials based on their performance at higher temperatures given the hotter summers we’re experiencing. These challenges are reflected in the forthcoming Climate Risk Strategy which will work together with the Asset Plan.

**Economic sustainability implications**

The Asset Plan is a key document that sets a strategic framework to enable investment decisions that reflect responsible financial stewardship of the $1.9 billion asset base. The life cycle model of asset from acquisition through to disposal/renewal and inclusion of maintenance costs is a representation of how sustainable our asset management practices are. The plan accounts for the financial sustainability indicators set by the State.

**Legal and risk considerations**

The Asset Plan is prepared in accordance with the requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020*. Whilst there are no significant risks associated in adopting the reviewed Asset Plan, there are reasonable risks if an Asset Plan is not reviewed, such as non-compliance with the requirements of the Act and lack of strategic framework guiding financial investment decisions for asset sustainability.

**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 adoption of the Asset Plan does not violate the Victorian Human Rights Charter.

For the Asset Plan as a whole, a Gender Impact Assessment is not deemed required. However, it is noted that for some asset categories, strategies guiding their prioritisation and scoping and individual category asset management plans will need to be developed with the insights gained through Gender Impact Assessments.

**4. Community consultation and engagement**

The Asset Plan has been developed in line with Council’s Deliberative Engagement practices and has drawn from the engagement outputs from the deliberative panel formed as a part of the Council Plan and Community Vision review.

The draft Asset Plan was published in Conversations Merri-bek webpage to obtain feedback from the community. Council did not receive any relevant feedback in relation to the Asset Plan through this process.

**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 development and adoption of the Asset Plan has not affected any persons’ rights and interests to the best knowledge of Council officers.

**Communications**

Assuming Council resolves to adopt the Asset Plan, it will be published on Council’s website for public access. In addition, physical copies of the Asset Plan can be made available on request at Council’s customer service centres. Officers will also use social media to inform the broader community of the adopted Asset 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 adoption and implementation of the Asset Plan has no direct financial and resource implications. The plan sets out the financial projection in capital and maintenance cost in each asset classes, which is in accordance with the draft Long Term Financial Plan.

The Asset Plan, once adopted, must be reviewed by 31 October in the year following a general election of the Council. The cost to achieve the 31 October 2029 milestone will be incurred in 2028/29 and therefore considered as the 2028/29 budget is prepared.

**7. Implementation**

The adopted Asset Plan will be published in Council’s website and physical copies will be made available at customer facing facilities of Council.

**Attachment/s**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Merri-bek Draft Asset Plan | D25/511705 |  |

7.4 Circular Economy Strategy and Climate Emergency Action Plan 2025 - 2030 - final for adoption

**Director Place and Environment, Pene Winslade**

**Sustainability and Climate**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Adopts the Circular Economy Strategy (Attachment 1).

2. Adopts the Climate Emergency Action Plan 2025 - 2030 (Attachment 2).

3. Notes the summary feedback from community and stakeholder engagement on the draft documents, including broad community feedback and targeted contributions from the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, members of Council’s Environmental Sustainability Advisory Committee, and sustainability-focused community groups and businesses.

4. Authorises the Director Place and Environment to make minor amendments to the Circular Economy Strategy and/or Climate Emergency Action Plan prior to publication, where such changes do not alter their intent or strategic direction.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

This report finalises three related actions in the Council Action Plan 2024-25 (being CAP #1 for the next Zero Carbon Merri-bek action plan, #199 development of Circular Economy Strategy and action plan, and #206 for the next Climate Risk action plan).

The report presents Council’s proposed *Circular Economy Strategy: Towards a zero waste Merri-bek* (Attachment 1) for adoption. The draft strategy provides direction for Council’s role in accelerating the transition towards a circular economy. It reflects the need to move beyond managing waste towards avoiding waste and pollution and regenerating nature.

The report also presents the proposed *Climate Emergency Action Plan 2025 – 2030: Towards a zero carbon, zero waste and climate resilient Merri-bek* (Attachment 2). This action plan brings together into one action plan all the implementation responses across the three strategies of the *Zero Carbon Merri-bek 2040 Framework*, *Circular Economy Strategy* and our *Climate Risk Strategy*.

Following endorsement at the 11 June Council Meeting, the draft documents were subject of public consultation between Monday 23 June and Sunday 20 July 2025.

Overall, community feedback reflected strong support for the strategic directions, goals and actions set out in the consultation drafts. Feedback during the consultation period has resulted in several refinements to the Climate Emergency Action Plan, including:

 A broadening of language and activities around climate and social justice to better reflect Council’s obligation to act in solidarity with First Nations, regional and global communities being hardest hit by climate impacts, and elevate their voices.

 A more ambitious goal for local energy storage by 2030, anticipating the positive impact of the federal government’s Cheaper Home Batteries Program.

 Adding an action to investigate the potential to establish or partner to establish a library of things, to foster equipment re-use in Merri-bek.

 Some restructuring of content, including introducing a graphic visualisation of the plan on a page, to help communicate the high-level scope to a broader audience.

**Previous Council decisions**

**Circular Economy Strategy and Climate Emergency Action Plan 2025 – 2030 – drafts for endorsement to consult** – 11 June 2025

*That Council:*

*1. Endorses the draft Circular Economy Strategy (Attachment 1) and the draft Climate Emergency Action Plan 2025 – 2030 (Attachment 2) for public exhibition and four weeks of community engagement commencing 23 June 2025.*

*2. Receives a further report at the September 2025 Council meeting presenting a final version of the Circular Economy Strategy and Climate Emergency Action Plan 2025 – 2030, incorporating community feedback, for adoption.*

*3. Acknowledges the valuable contribution that the Merri-bek community, external partners and stakeholders have made to community outcomes over the past five years of the Zero Carbon Merri-bek – Climate Emergency Action Plan 2020 – 2025 (Attachment 3), and the development of the draft strategy and action plan.*

## 1. Policy context

Council’s efforts to address the climate emergency are reflected in the new Council Plan 2026-2030 through:

 *Theme 1: Care for nature and climate resilience and associated strategic objective*

*To create a flourishing and climate resilient Merri-bek by improving wildlife and nature connectivity, greening and cooling for healthier streets and public realm, and engaging the community in meaningful climate action.*

In the outgoing Council Plan 2021 – 2025 this work was reflected through:

 ‘Theme 1: *An environmentally proactive Merri-bek*, and associated strategic objective:

*To strive for maximum protection of people’s health, plants, and animals through leading an urgent response to the climate emergency and a regeneration of our natural environment*

 *Theme 3: A healthy and caring Merri-bek,* and associated strategic objective*:*

*To support Moreland to become a more inclusive, connected, healthy, and caring community through providing equitable access to community facilities and services, facilitating local partnerships and programs, mitigating the effects of climate change, and supporting the community to adapt and build climate resilience.*

Development of the Circular Economy Strategy and new Climate Emergency Action Plan fulfils three actions outlined in the Council Action Plan 2024-25:

 CAP #1 – Finalise implementation of ZCM Climate Emergency Action Plan and develop new action plan to commence in 2025

 CAP #199 – Development of a Circular Economy Strategy: Towards a Zero Waste Merri-bek

 CAP #206 – Continue to implement the Climate Risk Foundational Action Plan and develop a new action plan to commence in 2025

The draft action plan aligns with and complements other Council strategies, plans and policies contributing to sustainability and climate action, including:

 Moving Around Merri-bek Strategy and Streets for People Plan

 Urban Forest Strategy

 Nature Plan

 Integrated Water Management Strategy

 Sustainable Buildings (Council) Policy

 Food Systems Strategy

 Procurement Policy.

Victorian legislation designates certain climate change accountabilities to all local governments. *The Local Government Act 2020* S. 9(2)(c) states ‘the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the municipal district, including mitigation and planning for climate change risks, is to be promoted’. Additionally, the *Victorian Climate Change Act 2017* explicitly states that climate change decisions should be based on the Act’s guiding principles including being evidence-based, integrated and equitable.

## 2. Background

The draft Climate Emergency Action Plan 2025 – 2030 integrates priority actions for 3 related strategies:

### 1. Zero Carbon Merri-bek 2040 Framework – our approach to reducing community and Council climate pollution (‘zero carbon’) through Energy Transition, Sustainable Transport, and Waste & Consumption.

### 2. Circular Economy Strategy – our evolved approach for tackling the unsustainable way we buy, use, and dispose of goods and materials (‘zero waste’) to mitigate climate and ecological damage.

### 3. Climate Risk Strategy – collaborating to identify and address Council and community climate risks, and increase our resilience against climate impacts, particularly heat and other weather extremes.

The draft Climate Emergency Action Plan supersedes, and expands on, Council’s first Climate Emergency Action Plan 2020 – 2025.

The draft Circular Economy Strategy supersedes Council’s expired Waste and Litter Strategy (2018).

### Strategic directions for action across 2025-2030

Implementation actions in in the action plan are structured around 5 strategic directions:

1. Socially just and climate resilient transition: no one left behind (NEW)

This new direction focuses on actions to ensure our diverse community is well informed about the changing local climate and the effective actions they can take. It aligns with the aspiration of Council’s newly adopted Council Plan 2025-29. It includes programs such as our solar thermal subsidy program which reaches out to at-risk residents to support them to stay healthy in the heat and manage their energy bills. Nature-based solutions include trialling approaches to increase shade trees and cooling on private land, with a potential focus on schools and retirement villages.

2. Energy transition: efficient and 100 per cent renewably powered energy

The dominant sources of direct greenhouse emissions in Merri-bek are electricity use (36 per cent) and fossil gas use (26 per cent). Residential energy use accounts for the majority. Grid electricity is forecast to be 65 per cent renewably powered by 2030, and 95 per cent renewable by 2035, so residential gas use will become the dominant source of energy-related emissions.

Priority actions are focused on enabling households to benefit from health and financial savings possible through transitioning to efficient and all-electric homes.

3. Sustainable transport: active or zero emissions transport

As emissions from electricity use decrease, transport emissions – from the combustion of diesel and petrol by cars, vans, and trucks – will account for a growing proportion of community (and Council) climate pollution. Actions under this strategic direction focus on creating a more pedestrian and bike-friendly city, with better public transport. This could enable many more local trips to be safer, healthier, cheaper and pollution-free. Council will also continue promoting the shift to zero emissions vehicles by fostering affordable access to public EV charging, powered by renewables.

4. Waste and consumption: circular economy with zero waste

This theme relates closely to Council’s Circular Economy Strategy, and reflects four of the five focus areas. The shift to a circular economy requires extensive cultural and economic change, which Councils can influence but not control. Advocacy for system change is a priority focus, calling on all governments to incentivise innovation and robustly regulate economy-wide elements of design, manufacturing, distribution and disposal that are causing social and environmental harm. Locally, engagement with community and businesses will encourage waste avoidance and circular economy participation, with potential cost-of-living and health co-benefits. We will continue to evolve our kerbside waste services to deliver the best possible waste and recycling outcomes and community value.

5. Council as role model: creating a zero carbon, circular and climate resilient city (NEW)

This new strategic direction is about Council walking the talk by holding ourselves accountable to embed responsive climate action and circularity principles across our own activities. These include high-impact functions of city planning, our building and infrastructure projects, our fleet, services, operations, and climate governance. Council will continue to green our supply chains, and deliver infrastructure climate-ready projects and services with a light ecological footprint. It also includes actions (focused on building and fleet electrification) required to achieve Council’s corporate 2030 emissions reduction goal.

### Action plan goals for 2030

In addition to the goals for reducing emissions from community and Council by 2030, the action plan proposes a series of goals across each strategic direction:

 A total of 14 Community 2030 goals, which we invite everyone (community and other levels of government) to adopt and help achieve.

 A total of 15 Council 2030 goals which Council should achieve, based on the proposed actions.

### Advocacy for climate and nature

We cannot achieve our goals and outcomes in isolation. Effective collaboration and mobilisation of civil society and businesses in campaigning for urgent and effective action by state and federal governments is critical. Some policy and regulatory progress has been made over the past five years, and so the action plan reflects an updated suite of priority ‘advocacy asks’ across each of the strategic directions.

## 3. Issues

### Key updates to the Action Plan based on community feedback

Careful consideration of consultation feedback from community and stakeholders has resulted in several refinements to the final draft Action Plan.

Notably:

 The introduction section and Action 1.1 have been updated to better reflect Council’s intention to act in solidarity with First Nations, regional and global communities being hardest hit by climate impacts, and to elevate their voices to inspire urgent climate action by others.

 Since the draft Action Plan was endorsed for consultation, Council has been advised that we were unsuccessful in securing grant funding through the Disaster Ready Fund (Round 3) to fully enact *Action 1.9 Explore and ‘Resilient Neighbourhood Hub’ model in an at-risk neighbourhood.* The action has been updated to reflect Council continuing to seek external grant funding and what can be progressed in the meantime.

 Raising the ambition of the goal for local energy storage by 2030, to effectively triple local storage (to 9.3MWh) rather than double it (to 6.2MWh) compared with the 2024 baseline (3.1MWh). This anticipates encouraging local households and businesses to take advantage of subsidies through the recently announced federal Cheaper Home Batteries Program.

 Addition of an activity under Action 4.2 to investigate potential for establishment of a library of things, to foster resource re-use in Merri-bek.

 Some restructuring of content, including visual plan on a page, to help communicate the high-level scope to a broader audience. The full vision has been moved to Appendix 1, with key advocacy asks becoming Appendix 2.

### Priority funding gaps – current actions/programs with lapsing funding

The action tables in the Action Plan 2025 – 2030 note actions that can be delivered within existing operating and capital budgets, and those that are subject to funding through annual budget processes or other sources (e.g. external grant funding).

Notably, two actions resourced and being implemented in 2025/26 do not have funding and will be evaluated and subject to annual budget processes to continue in 2026-27 or beyond:

*Action 1.5 – Undertake place-based community outreach and engagement to meet community interest and needs*.

Merri-bek has a culturally and linguistically diverse community and many people are not reached through our regular digital or printed communications. This action includes a pilot project being delivered in Fawkner by the Sustainable Communities Outreach Officer (focusing on energy, waste, transport (cycling), and heat health/climate resilience.

*Action 4*.2 – *Circular economy programs and support for community (education and behaviour change for waste avoidance)*

This action reflects a range of existing Council services and programs to support our community to reduce waste and participate in the circular economy. For example subsidies for reusable nappies and period products, Sustainability incursions in schools and early learning centres, home composting subsidies program and delivery of zero waste workshops and events for community. Current pilots run until June 2026.

### Economic sustainability implications

Merri-bek has a rapidly growing and diverse population experiencing housing and cost of living pressures. At the household level, more thoughtful consumer behaviours can offer ways to reduce household costs.

Our local economy provides employment, goods and services to the community. Merri-bek is experiencing a shift from its historical reliance on manufacturing to a focus on service-oriented sectors.

The circular economy presents many opportunities for local businesses to improve resource efficiency, lower costs, mitigate risks, and explore new revenue streams. Emerging business models can redefine product-consumer relationships and foster markets for services like sharing, leasing, repairing, reusing, remanufacturing, and resource recovery.

### Legal and risk considerations

Where legal or risk-related matters arise, delivery of actions will involve consultation with the relevant internal officers or specialists. This ensures that actions are developed and implemented with appropriate oversight and alignment with Council’s legal and risk frameworks. Examples of potential legal and risk issues include insurance coverage for new or non-standard infrastructure or assets (e.g. boom EV charging) or contractual risks in partnership or procurement arrangements.

Action delivery will also consider climate risks, including physical risks and transition risks, and continue to integrate these into Council's risk management framework, including the operational risk register.

### Human Rights consideration

A Gender and Equity Impact Assessment guided the development of the Circular Economy Strategy and Climate Emergency Action Plan. The following improvements on the plan and its delivery have been identified in the assessment and community consultation stages: consideration of co-design approaches with priority groups in designing and developing specific programs, addressing barriers to participation in programs including through outreach, and revising the strategy and action plan to capture community feedback, particularly from priority groups.

The development of the Strategy and Action Plan are consistent with the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006. The actions are not expected to interfere with or limit human rights. The Circular Economy Strategy and Climate Emergency Action Plan aim to have a broadly positive impact on human rights as defined in the Charter such as the ‘right to life’ (e.g. through advocating and acting to improve the thermal performance of homes and Council facilities), the ‘right to protection of families and children’ (e.g. through action and advocacy to minimise the extent of climate impacts on current and future generations) and ‘cultural rights’ (e.g. through engaging with Traditional Owners and other First Nations people on climate and care for country).

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

Following endorsement of draft documents at the 11 June 2025 Council Meeting, community consultation was undertaken on the draft Circular Economy Strategy and Climate Emergency Action Plan 2025-2030 from 23 June to 20 July 2025.

Community consultation was undertaken to receive feedback on:

 The vision, directions and objectives of the draft Circular Economy Strategy

 Support for the five strategic directions (including two new) in the draft Climate Emergency Action Plan

 Any high-priority gaps in programs/actions for the next 5 years

 The extent and ambition of the 2030 goals for community and Council.

A total of 127 people provided feedback on the action plan through:

 Conversations Merri-bek online surveys (61 participants)

 Community pop-ups x 4 (53 participants)

 A stakeholders and residents’ workshop (18 participants)

The face-to-face engagement activities were spread across Merri-bek. While demographic information was not collected at the face-to-face events, feedback was received from children, young people, members of culturally diverse groups and older residents.

Overall, there was positive feedback about the strategy and action plan, with many participants reflecting that they were on the right track. Some tweaks to the action plan were proposed to elevate some community expectations.

Key areas of feedback for the action plan included:

 Make clear that a “Just and equitable transition” is a principle applied across the whole plan (not only the “Socially just and climate resilient transition” strategic direction).

 That Council’s climate change mitigation and adaptation goals need to be ambitious or transformative enough and that we should act in solidarity with regional and global communities facing the worst impacts of climate change.

 Broad support for energy transition activities including Council’s low-income support programs and ensuring Council programs reach all types of households (e.g. rentals, low income, culturally diverse and apartments), not just homeowners in houses.

 Strong support for sustainable transport. This includes Council’s programs to create a safe, walking and cycling-friendly city through policies such as Moving Around Merri-bek and Streets for People, programs such as Ride and Stride, and advocacy to improve public transport.

 Interest in more zero waste community education opportunities, new re-use hubs that could enable borrowing, reuse, repair, and recycling for both residential and commercial items, and for a transfer station/recycling depot (this last item is a very costly option).

 Broad support for current goals and actions under Council as Role Model.

The detailed engagement outcome report will be published on the relevant project pages of the Conversations Merri-bek website.

### Communications

Following the adoption of the Circular Economy Strategy and Climate Emergency Action Plan, key messages and documents will be shared through Council channels including updates to relevant webpages (Conversations Merri-bek, MCC and Zero Carbon Merri-bek websites).

## 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

Implementation of the Climate Emergency Action Plan from 2025-26 to 2029-30 can largely occur within existing base, operating and capital funding. Some actions are investigations into opportunities that are not currently funded (refer Actions 1.5, 1.7, 1.8, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 4.2, 4.4, 5.6, 5.10). Pending the outcome of investigation work, funding would be considered through options including reprioritisation, grant funding, and / or budget bids.

## 7. Implementation

Following adoption of the Strategy and Action Plan:

 Conversation Merri-bek project pages will be updated, with notification to project followers.

 The endorsed documents will be uploaded to Council’s website and news items posted in relevant e-newsletter/channels.

 Actions will be loaded into Council’s corporate reporting system and delegated as appropriate, for progress tracking and periodic reporting.

 Refreshed governance structures will be confirmed and established to oversee implementation.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Circular Economy Strategy 2025 - FINAL DRAFT August 2025 | D25/441852 |  |
| **2** | Climate Emergency Action Plan 2025 - 2030 - FINAL DRAFT | D25/448565 |  |

7.5 Moving Around Merri-bek Action Plan: Draft for Consultation

**Director Place and Environment, Pene Winslade**

**City Design and Economy**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Adopts the draft Moving Around Merri-bek Action Plan 2025–2029 at Attachment 1 for community consultation, to be undertaken from Friday 24 October to Sunday 23 November 2025.

2. Notes that community engagement will include the publication of the draft Action Plan on Council’s Conversations Merri-bek website, as well as in-person engagement via pop-up sessions hosted across Merri-bek.

3. Receives a further report in early 2026 detailing the outcomes of consultation and seeking adoption of the final Moving Around Merri-bek Action Plan 2025-2029.

**REPORT**

**Executive summary**

This report seeks Council’s endorsement to release the draft Moving Around Merri-bek Action Plan 2025–2029 at Attachment 1 for public consultation.

The draft Action Plan sets out Council’s proposed transport delivery program over the next four years. It includes strategic actions grouped into three key categories - Infrastructure, Plans and Programs, and Policy and Advocacy. The actions within these categories are focused across priority areas of Streets for People, Access to Schools, Road Safety, and Transport Advocacy.

Community and stakeholder feedback on the draft plan will feed into a finalised plan for adoption. This approach ensures the Action Plan reflects community priorities, supports long-term strategic outcomes, and aligns with Council’s adopted Transport Strategy and the Council Plan 2025–2029.

There are no new budget impacts arising from this report. Costs associated with consultation are covered within existing operational budgets. Funding for the delivery of individual actions will be subject to future budget processes and external funding opportunities.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**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:*

*a) Attachment 1 on page 5 delete the following sentence “We will continue to make sure those who need to drive are able to reach their destinations” and replace it with “We will make sure that trips not suited to walking, riding or public transport can still be made.”*

*b) Attachment 1 on page 39, amend “It is a key local door to door transport service that support people who are unable to drive or use public transport.” To read “It is a key local door to door transport service that support people who are unable to travel to local destinations independently.”*

*c) Attachment 1 on page 40 truncate the sentence “We need to make sure our driving network is safe for all road users and ensure that those who need to use a car, for personal use or freight delivery, are able to.” So that it reads “We need to make sure our driving network is safe and accessible for all road users.”*

*d) Attachment 1 on page 42, delete the dot point “People who need to use their car are supported” and replace with “The transport needs of businesses for freight consignment and deliveries are met” and add a new point “The access needs of people who experience transport disadvantage are met.”*

*e) Attachment 1 on page 39, add to “Improve bus services in Fawkner” the extra words “and the Newlands area of Coburg North”*

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

*a) $50,000 for expert advice to prepare a business case for pedestrian operated signals;*

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

*…*

## 1. Policy Context

**Council Plan 2025-2029**

The Council Plan 2025–2029 sets out Council’s strategic direction for delivering on the Community Vision: “*Merri-bek leads, and leaves no one behind”*. Transport is addressed under the Beautiful and Liveable City theme, which aims to ensure streets and public spaces are safe, pleasant, and easy to use so everyone can enjoy and be proud of where they live.

Key actions that align with this report include:

 Keeping public places and streets well-maintained, safe, and inviting for community use.

 Fixing and improving streets and footpaths to make them more friendly for walking and riding.

 Encouraging walking, cycling, and scooting – especially for getting to school.

 Making it easier and safer to use public transport to move around.

The Moving Around Merri-bek Action Plan is a key mechanism to deliver on these outcomes and ensure that transport investments reflect the priorities of the Merri-bek community.

**Moving Around Merri-bek Transport Strategy**

Moving Around Merri-bek is Council’s long-term Transport Strategy, adopted in 2024. It sets the vision for a safe, accessible, sustainable, healthy, liveable, and inclusive transport system across the city.

The Strategy responds to local and global challenges including climate change, cost of living, public health, and population growth. It emphasises the need to shift away from car dependency and create a more balanced, people-focused transport system that works for everyone.

The Strategy introduces new tools and frameworks to guide Council’s work, including the Streets for People approach and the use of Movement and Place and Healthy Streets assessments to guide future investment.

The 2025–2029 Action Plan sits alongside the Strategy and outlines the specific infrastructure programs, projects, and advocacy efforts that Council will deliver to achieve its vision for transport.

**Moving Around Merri-bek Action Plan 2024-2025**

The Moving Around Merri-bek Action Plan 2024-2025 was the first implementation plan developed under Council’s refreshed Transport Strategy. It provided a 12-month roadmap for delivering early actions aligned to the Strategy’s six values: Safe, Accessible, Sustainable, Healthy, Liveable, and Inclusive.

The 2024–2025 Action Plan focused on foundational projects and initiatives, including:

 Embedding the Streets for People approach into transport project planning and delivery

 Progressing advocacy work on road safety issues and public transport improvements

 Strengthening walking and cycling infrastructure delivery

 Introducing Healthy Streets assessments to inform streetscape upgrades

 Supporting behaviour change through Ride & Stride, Biketober, and community education initiatives

The 2025-2029 Action Plan builds on this foundation, taking a more strategic and long-term approach.

**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.

**Community Engagement Policy (2020)**

The engagement approach follows Council’s Community Engagement Policy (2020).

## 2. Background

The Moving Around Merri-bek Transport Strategy was adopted by Council in March 2024. It sets a long-term vision for a safe, accessible, sustainable, healthy, liveable, and inclusive transport system across the municipality. It sets a framework for a series of multi-year Action Plans with specific transport programs, projects and advocacy efforts. The first of these was the 2024–2025 Action Plan, which focused on short-term foundational activities.

The draft 2025–2029 Action Plan is Council’s first full-term implementation plan under the Strategy. It takes a strategic and outcome-focused approach. It groups actions into three categories – Infrastructure, Plans and Programs, and Policy and Advocacy – and aligns them across four focus areas: Streets for People, Access to Schools, Road Safety, and Transport Advocacy.

This approach ensures Council’s work is clearly linked to desired outcomes for the community and can respond flexibly to emerging needs, funding opportunities, and cross-departmental collaboration.

This report seeks Council’s endorsement to undertake community consultation on the draft Action Plan before bringing a final version to Council for adoption in early 2026.

## 3. Issues

### Community impact

The draft Action Plan directly responds to the priorities raised by the community during consultation on the Transport Strategy and through ongoing engagement, including:

 Safer streets and crossings

 Improved access to schools

 Infrastructure to support walking, cycling, and public transport

 More equitable access to the transport system

By focusing on more strategic, holistic actions, the plan ensures Council’s work remains impactful, coordinated, and responsive to emerging needs.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

Transport accounts for a significant portion of carbon emissions in Merri-bek. The draft Action Plan includes actions that directly support the goals of Council’s Zero Carbon Merri-bek Framework, including mode shift to active transport, infrastructure that supports sustainable mobility, and advocacy for State and Federal Government policy reform that supports climate-aligned investment decisions.

### Economic sustainability implications

The Action Plan promotes more efficient, healthy, and accessible transport options that can reduce household transport costs and support local business access and vitality. Several actions support movement in activity centres and around employment hubs.

### Legal and risk considerations

There are no direct legal risks associated with endorsing the draft Action Plan for consultation. Any legal or regulatory requirements arising from specific projects will be addressed through project planning and implementation.

### 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 development and implementation of the Action Plan promotes equitable access to transport and inclusive use of public space and infrastructure, thereby supporting the rights to freedom of movement, equality, and participation in public life.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

Community consultation on the draft Action Plan is proposed to occur over a four-week period between October and November 2025.

Engagement will include:

 A dedicated page on Conversations Merri-bek with the draft Action Plan, explainer content, and a feedback survey

 Four in-person pop-up sessions at locations in Fawkner, Glenroy, Coburg and Brunswick.

 Targeted outreach to stakeholder groups, including Ride & Stride schools and other community organisations

 Promotion through Council’s communication channels including social media, newsletters, and civic signage

**Affected persons rights and interests**

The draft Action Plan may affect the interests of people who live, travel through, or operate a business in Merri-bek. The draft plan has been structured to ensure that affected groups are consulted in a transparent, inclusive, and accessible manner. The public consultation period provides the opportunity for all community members to have their say before a final version is presented to Council.

### Communications

A communications plan is in development to ensure wide reach and clarity of messaging. Key messages include:

 The Action Plan is Council’s roadmap for improving people’s ability to move around and experience life in Merri-bek.

 It responds to the priorities shared by the community in recent years.

 Council is seeking feedback to ensure the final plan reflects what matters most to the people of our community.

## 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 costs associated with community consultation, including event delivery and associated materials, are accounted for within the Transport Planning unit’s current operational budget.

Delivery of the finalised Action Plan will rely on funding through Council’s annual Capital Works Program and operational budgets, as well as external funding sources where available. No new funding is being sought through this report. Actions identified in the plan will be staged over the 2025–2029 period based on available resources and Council prioritisation.

## 7. Implementation

If the recommendation is adopted, Council Officers will:

 Launch the public consultation on Friday 24 October 2025

 Deliver the community engagement activities as outlined

 Analyse community feedback and incorporate changes where appropriate

 Present the revised final Action Plan for adoption in February 2026

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Moving Around Merri-bek Action Plan 2025-29 - Draft for engagement | D25/520658 |  |

7.6 568 Sydney Road Park Close to Home - Preliminary Community Engagement

**Director Place and Environment, Pene Winslade**

**City Design and Economy**

## Officer recommendation

That Council:

1. Endorses community engagement on options for the new park at 568 Sydney Road, Brunswick.

2. Receives a future report on the results of community engagement, with a recommended site extent and draft concept plan for the new park.

**REPORT**

**Executive summary**

The purpose of this report is to seek Council endorsement to commence preliminary community engagement on site options for the new Park Close to Home at 568 Sydney Road, Brunswick.

Council purchased the site at 568 Sydney Road in January 2025 to provide a new park in a high priority open space gap area. The new park will provide valuable green space for nearby residents, workers, and visitors, and a cool respite along the busy Sydney Road corridor. The site also supports an improved active transport link in the east-west Hope Street – Stewart Street route.

Council also owns the carpark immediately to the east of the site, fronting Staley Street. There may be the potential to incorporate some of the adjacent carpark site into the open space area. There may also the possibility of providing some traffic calming, street narrowing and/or closure on Staley Street to further extend the green space and address rat running.

Several site options have been prepared to seek preliminary community feedback on these options and what they would like to see in the new park. The options offer different levels of open space, car parking impacts, and potential configurations of Staley Street.

A two stage engagement process is proposed for the project, to allow the community to have meaningful input in shaping the new park. Subject to Council’s endorsement, the Phase 1 preliminary engagement will occur during October and November 2025. A further Council report in early 2026 will present the findings of the engagement and recommend a preferred site extent and concept plan for Phase 2 engagement.

The project is funded through the Open Space Reserve. The construction cost of the project will depend on the extent of the new park. An initial budget allocation has been set aside in the forward Capital Works Program, but additional funding may be referred to the capital works program if the preferred site option increases the park coverage.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Proposed Acquisition 568-574 Sydney Road, Brunswick** – 16 September 2024

*This was a confidential in camera item, where Council resolved to seek to purchase the site for a Park Close to Home.*

## 1. Policy Context

## Council Plan 2025-29

**Community Vision and Council Plan**

Merri-bek 2025-29 Community Vision

The long-term Community Vision is that *Merri-bek leads and leaves no one behind.*

Merri-bek 2025-29 Council Plan

Within the Council Plan there are several key strategies relevant to the project at 568 Sydney Road. These strategies include;

o Cool urban environments and beautify public spaces with nature, including seeking opportunities to reduce hard surfaces to increase permeability.

o Maintain our streets, laneways and public places so they are adaptive to community needs; places we are proud of and feel safe in.

o Improve parks and facilities to make them welcoming places to share and to enjoy activities.

o Make it easy and safe for people to move around Merri-bek, especially using public and active transport and zero emissions vehicles.

o Places for People plans that support development and greening of Merri-bek’s activity centres as vibrant attractive hubs.

## A Park Close to Home Framework

The framework adopted by Council on 6 December 2017, is a strategy to fill gaps in the open space network in Merri-bek. The strategy is intended to create and improve access to open space in the areas that need it most, by identifying gap areas in the community where residents are not within walking distance to their closest park. The development of land for a park at 568 Sydney Road, Brunswick will help to address one of the high priority gaps outlined in the framework.

A Park Close to Home delivers on the Merri-bek Open Space Strategy which seeks to provide quality open space within 500m of all residential properties, and 300m to all activity centre properties.

## 2. Background

In January 2025 Council purchased the site at 568 Sydney Road, Brunswick utilising the Open Space Reserve, to address a high priority open space gap area.

The new park will provide informal community use and passive recreation. It will provide a green respite on Sydney Road, support cooling through tree canopy and planting, and sustainable stormwater management.

The site also provides for a safe active transport link between Hope Street and Stewart Street, supporting a strategic east-west link between the Moonee Ponds and Merri Creeks which directly serves significant retail precincts, churches, open space, CERES and a school.

The site is currently vacant and environmental site investigations prior to acquisition found that the site is suitable for use as open space. An underground storage tank associated with the past use of the site as a dry cleaner has been removed.

## 3. Issues

### Site options

The site is 946m2 with one street frontage on Sydney Road. Council also owns the site immediately to the east, a 1,037m2 carpark with frontage to Staley Street. The carpark contains 36 carparks; half free (with a 2P limit) and half paid (unlimited time). It is not a separate rates carpark but is subject to the State Congestion Levy.

In considering ways to plan for the new Park Close to Home, there is the potential to incorporate some of the adjacent carpark site to increase the open space for community use, and maximise the environmental benefits of the new park.

There is also the possibility of providing some traffic calming, street narrowing and/or closure on Staley Street to further extend the green space and address traffic “rat running” on this street.

Preliminary community engagement is proposed to gather feedback from stakeholders on their views on three site options, and what they would like to see in the new park.

The options are summarised in the table below.

They vary in term of:

 size of open space

 whether and how much of the council carpark site could potentially be converted into open space (and number of carparks impacted),

 whether reconfigured and additional on-street parking could be accommodated in Staley Street

 whether and to what extent street closure at Staley Street is suitable.

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| **Option** | **Open Space area provided** | **Total reduction carparks in area** | **Staley Street** | **Comments** |
| Option A | 1,000m2 | Zero spaces are likely to be removed – however some reconfiguration of parking spaces may be required to enable a better path through the carpark area. | Park on new site, with all existing car parking retained. | Develop only the new site with some improvements to the existing Staley Street carpark to facilitate an improved walking and cycling link. |
| Option B | 1,600m2 | 9 spaces removed | Narrowed lanes and angled parking | Retain half of existing council carpark (18 spaces). Staley St is open. |
| Option C | 2,000m2 | 20 spaces removed | Closure of Staley St, narrowed lanes and angled parking | Retain half of existing council carpark (18 spaces). Staley St is closed. |

### Community impact

The project will have a highly positive impact on the surrounding residents, businesses and community, by providing a new park in an area lacking in existing open space. The park will allow for more frequent and convenient time for outdoor physical activity, social interaction, and connection to nature.

The different options have varying impacts on parking, cycling / pedestrian access, and traffic in the area, which will impact community stakeholders differently.

There are several Council off-street car parks in the vicinity of the site, some of which have no restrictions of paid parking components. As part of this project it is proposed to look at parking provision on and off-street in the area, to ensure parking demand is understood and appropriately managed.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

The project presents numerous opportunities to improve the environmental sustainability of the area through its design, which will include:

 Urban heat mitigation through planting and integrated stormwater management

 Increased biodiversity through increased and varied vegetation

 Increased tree canopy and shade

 Supporting active transport choices through the provision of safe walking and cycling links

### Economic sustainability implications

The project is expected to make the area more attractive to visit, and therefore to bring more economic activity to nearby businesses.

By providing an attractive, vibrant and welcoming space on Sydney Road, visitors and workers will have an additional place to meet, stop and rest, thereby increasing their dwell time in the activity centre.

The new park will also provide important green space for workers in the area, improving their wellbeing and satisfaction at work.

### Legal and risk considerations

If a road closure is recommended as a result of the community engagement, a further future statutory engagement and hearings process will be required to formalise this change.

### 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

A phased community engagement process is proposed for the project, to allow all stakeholders to have meaningful input in shaping the new park. The proposed phases are summarised in the table below.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Phase** | **Indicative timing** | **Purpose** | **Community opportunity** |
| **Preliminary**  Phase 1 | October – November 2025 | Present site options for community comment.  Gather ideas and input to shape Draft Concept Plan. | Provide feedback on site extent options.  Provide input to what they would like in the new park |
| **Draft Concept**  Phase 2 | February - March 2026 | Present the findings of Phase 1.  Gather feedback on Draft to help finalise Concept Plan. | Learn about how Phase 1 has shaped Draft.  Provide feedback on Draft. |

**Affected persons rights and interests**

The key stakeholders whose rights and interests may be affected and who will be contacted directly in advance of the broader community engagement include:

 Residents and property owners of Staley Street

 Saint Visilios Greek Orthodox Church

 Businesses on Sydney Road between Stewart and Blythe Street

 Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation

### Communications

A detailed communications plan has been prepared to best promote the engagement to the community, which will include:

 Direct approach and letter to nearby residents and businesses

 Letterbox drop to properties within 300m catchment

 Broad social media promotion

 Information on Conversations Merri-bek and Council website

 Signs on site and at nearby destinations

## 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 improvement of the site for use as open space will be funded through the Open Space Reserve.

Costs associated with the planning and design of the new park have been allocated in the current capital works budget, and indicative construction costs have been foreshadowed in the forward capital works budget.

The actual construction cost of the project will depend on the extents of the new park. If the scope increases, a budget allocation will be referred to the Capital Works Program and budget process for the 2026-27 financial year.

It is anticipated a concept design for the park will be finalised over the next twelve months, aiming for project delivery in calendar year 2027.

## 7. Implementation

Subject to Council’s endorsement, the Phase 1 Preliminary Engagement will occur during October and November 2025. A further Council report in early 2026 will present the findings of the engagement and recommend a preferred site extent.

## Attachment/s

There are no attachments for this report.

7.7 Living and Ageing Well Action Plan 2024-2025

**Director Community, Eamonn Fennessy**

**Aged and Community Support**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council notes the Living and Ageing Well Action Plan Report 2024-2025.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

Council’s Living and Ageing Well Framework establishes age-friendly principles and practices to support healthy ageing of residents in Merri-bek. It was endorsed by Council in 2019, in recognition of population ageing and the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2020 to 2030)[[1]](#footnote-1).

The Aged and Community Support Branch lead the implementation, with cross-Council and community collaboration being key to creating an age friendly city where residents thrive in older age.

The Framework is delivered through an Implementation Plan with yearly achievements and learnings reported yearly to Council. This report outlines key achievements and learnings from 1 July 2024 to 31 June 2025, with an allocated yearly budget of $50,000 for implementation of the Framework.

Council progressed actions under the Physical, Social and Municipal Environments of the Framework, and developed the next 4-year Implementation Plan (2025 to 2029). There was a focus on incorporating learnings from community engagement into the implementation plan. Council heard from the community about the impacts of rising cost of living on older communities, particularly those already experiencing financial and social vulnerability.

The Living and Ageing Well Framework plays a crucial role in guiding Council’s work, responding to Aged Care reforms, increasing vulnerabilities of older communities, and the growing ageing population.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Living and Ageing Well Year 4 Report and Evaluation -** 14 August 2024

*That Council notes the Living and Ageing Well Year 4 Report and Evaluation.*

## 1. Policy Context

**Council Plan 2021-2025**

Implementation of the Framework is a Council Action Plan item. Council Action Plan 2020/21 includes the deliverable of Improved Health and Wellbeing Outcomes for older people, through the implementation of the agreed Year One actions of the Framework at item 11.

**Council Plan 2025-2029**

The Framework also aligns with Council Plan Initiative and Priority 2.4: ’Support older adults by providing accessible spaces, programs and services that encourage independent living, promote health and activity and encourage connections across generations to enrich their lives and wellbeing’.

**Human Rights Policy 2016-2026**

Council’s Human Rights Policy acknowledges specific vulnerabilities associated with ageing as an emerging priority and identifies an age and life span approach towards human rights.

## 2. Background

The Living and Ageing Well in Merri-bek: An Age Friendly Framework (the Framework) has a community focus and is targeted at the emerging and existing cohort of older residents to support their wellbeing. It encourages active ageing by optimising opportunities for health, social connection and security.

The Framework has been structured based on the World Health Organisation’s Age Friendly Environments of Physical Environment, Social Environment and Municipal Services. The Framework was developed in consultation with older people and Council staff. It identifies actions which align with existing Council programs and services, as well as new, emerging areas. Across the last year, there has been a focus on creating opportunities for older people to increase social connection and well-being through key projects, and collating research to inform future planning for older people. Collaboration across Council and with community partners was key in achieving these outcomes.

Refer to:

 **Attachment 1** Infographic of 2024-2025 Living and Ageing Well actions

 **Attachment 2** Living and Ageing Well Framework, Evaluation and Action Summary

## 3. Issues

### Community impact

Living and Ageing Well progressed the objectives of the Living and Ageing Well Framework towards positive community impact.

1. Implementation Plan 2025- 2029

Based on evaluation findings presented at August 2024 meeting, Council officers developed a 4-year implementation plan. This is an internal plan with cross-Council actions, with a focus on increasing opportunities for social connection and increasing the visibility and voice of older people in the community.

2. Older Persons Reference Group

The Older Persons Reference Group was a highly regarded reference group of 10 residents meeting with Council officers. This group provided valuable lived experience knowledge and advice to Council on policy, programs and planning.  Their lived experience perspective helped to ensure that Council‘s planning and programs continue to meet the needs and aspirations of older people, and the community as we grow older. Feedback from this group has informed Council communication improvements, Open Space and Transport priorities, and exercise initiatives. The group facilitated promotion of Council information and services through members’ community networks.

3. Active Seniors Clubs

Council, in partnership with Active Merri-bek YMCA, provided outreach exercise classes at senior's clubs venues, promoting safe and engaging exercise. From 31st March to 30th June, there were 39 sessions held across 4 groups, with an estimated total attendance of 1,092 participants. This outreach allowed older people to participate in safe and engaging exercise, bringing opportunities for physical activity to them directly.

4. Social connection programs

Over 500 people enjoyed Seniors Festival events in 2024. Events included guided walks, workshops, engaging performances by older people from our multicultural community, and social events.

Council continued to deliver opportunities for learning and connection across generations, engaging over 335 participants. These intergenerational programs included an LGBTIQA+ event at libraries, individual social programs through the home support ‘Lively’ program, Early Years and School Holiday projects.

Council also continued to provide support for over 70 seniors clubs, and new and emerging groups, reaching over 1,200 people. This included network meetings for leaders of groups (in Italian and English) to deliver information and promote social connections.

5. Information and services

Council continued to deliver the Age Well Program, helping individuals, families and carers set goals and navigate available care, support and activity options that older people need to age well. This includes offering support in-person, over the phone and in the homes of community members, as well as community outreach through pop-up information sessions across the municipality. Where possible this program provided support in-language as required, delivering confidential advice based on individual needs at a time of much change during the Aged Care reforms.  This program supported 266 people over the past year.

Council continued to grow its Outdoor Help Garden Program, supporting 255 older residents to improve their outdoor spaces through garden maintenance projects. The program continues to thrive with a 109% increase over the past year.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

Council is aware of the vulnerabilities of older people to the impacts of climate change and their role in creating positive change. Council currently supports older people through initiatives such as the Solar Thermal Subsidy Program and will prioritise actions which address climate change, resilience and older people in the next Implementation Plan.

### Human Rights Consideration

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

The Framework holds the human rights of our citizens as a key principle in ensuring that all older people can participate in and benefit from health and wellbeing outcomes and is aligned with the Human Rights Policy. A Gender Impact and Equity Assessment was undertaken during finalisation of the new Implementation Plan.

Risk of social exclusion and discrimination of older people increases based on intersecting factors such as gender, cultural background and disability. Actions in the Implementation Plan prioritise those which work towards reducing age-based discrimination, and we will prioritise actions to address intersectionality.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

Actions delivered were developed in response to community engagement throughout the duration of the previous implementation plan, as well as the 2024 evaluation. Feedback is a regular practice through formal structures such as the reference group, and informally from community members through evaluation of events, client feedback from direct service delivery, and seniors clubs.

In 2024 Council heard from our Aged and Community Support clients through our Client Feedback Survey and engaged with older multicultural community members in-person with the Community Engagement Policy Amendment consultation.

## 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

Implementation of the Living and Ageing Well Framework is contained within existing operational budgets.

## 7. Implementation

Officers will provide a report of Year One actions of the Implementation Plan and Council Reports will be shared on the website following the Council Meeting.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Infographic of 2024-2025 Living and Ageing Well Actions | D25/478793 |  |
| **2** | Living and Ageing Well Framework, Evaluation and Action Summary 2025 | D25/478788 |  |

7.8 Free Third Spaces for Young People

**Director Community, Eamonn Fennessy**

**Early Years and Youth**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Increases the programming at the Fawkner Sports Hall for youth from one, to three afternoons per week on a pilot basis, initially for six months with a view to maintaining or increasing the frequency depending on utilisation.

2. Pilot a family engagement program including free access to Council spaces in various locations for three sessions per week, initially for six months, with a focus on play-based learning through a community development approach to foster community connection, increasing parenting skills and confidence.

3. Undertakes a feasibility study and provide a further report to Council by October 2026 regarding needs, opportunities, and resourcing requirements to create and where necessary staff additional free third spaces in priority locations in the longer term.

4. Refers the resourcing requirements of $319,445 for the points 1 - 3 to the 2026-2030 budget process for consideration.

5. Collaborates with the Fawkner’s Future group to identify a suitable space for young people, (noting the particular needs of young women) in Fawkner in the short term, while longer term options are identified and assessed.

6. Strengthens engagement with children (aged 8-12) to increase their voice in Council decision making and ensure community spaces meet their needs.

7. Incorporates and strengthens youth consultation into capital works and library redevelopment projects to ensure spaces are designed to meet young people's needs.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

This report provides an initial response to a March 2025 Council resolution to pilot new third space initiatives and assess long-term needs. 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 risk factors associated with 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. Access to welcoming and accessible spaces can provide a point of access to support and services for families, particularly those with young children.

The report highlights the growing demand for accessible, free or low-cost spaces, particularly for families with young children, and young people in Merri-bek. Existing facilities such as libraries and Maternal and Child Health Centres along with other Council owned facilities are identified as venues that could be further activated to meet community need.

The report also emphasises the role of third spaces in early intervention and mental health, especially for vulnerable groups. It notes that socially connected families experience better wellbeing outcomes, and that targeted outreach and culturally appropriate programming are essential to ensure equitable access. Indoor third spaces are identified as a priority, complementing the opportunities provided in outdoor spaces through the Merri-bek Open Space Strategy.

There are unmet needs for access to free and accessible third spaces and Council is uniquely positioned to respond by creatively expanding what is available for a range of age groups. Through relatively low cost investment Council can increase the utilisation of existing spaces in the short term, while identifying strategic opportunities to add additional third spaces to planned infrastructure developments, or modifications to existing facilities in the longer term, ensuing the availability of community spaces increases in line with population growth.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Free Third Spaces For Young People** - 12 March 2025

*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. Policy Context

This report aligns with the Children, Young People and Families Plan 2021-2025, which has the vision of a community where children, young people, and families are healthy, resilient, empowered, safe, and belong with specific outcome areas under Inclusive City and Community, and Health and Wellbeing aligned.

It is also in alignment with the following:

 Merri-bek Council Plan (2025 – 2029) theme Healthy and Inclusive Community:

2.2 Create supportive, accessible spaces and programs that promote youth wellbeing and social connection, empowering young people to thrive and feel connected to the community.

2.3 Offer a range of services for all ages and stages to support children and families, encourage participation in programs that strengthen community ties, and highlight the importance of early childhood education and health.

 Merri-bek Community Infrastructure Plan 2022-2032

 Merri-bek Open Space Strategy (2023)

 Victorian Child Safe Standards

 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12, Article 31)

 Victorian Child Friendly Cities and Communities Charter

## 2. Background

Council seeks to increase the number of third spaces in the municipality to support the well-being, mental health, community connection, and the positive development of children and young people. Third spaces for children and young people are safe, welcoming environments where they can freely interact, explore interests, build relationships, and engage in informal learning and development outside of structured home or school settings.

Third spaces in the community can take various forms and can be free community spaces or commercial venues and include both indoor and outdoor spaces, active and passive and supervised or unsupervised settings, they promote social connection and strengthen communities.

At the March 2025 meeting Council resolved to increase access to third spaces for young people through the introduction of a pilot program in at least one location and to identify options to create different spaces to cater to the unique needs of different age groups, including younger children (0-5), primary aged children, and teenagers.

This report provides details of how these short term options can be implemented, along with a plan to undertake a comprehensive assessment in the coming months of the need for and options to create additional third spaces in the longer term.

The Merri-bek Community Infrastructure Plan 2022–2032 identified a clear need for more youth spaces, particularly in Fawkner and Brunswick. The need for additional spaces to cater to the needs of families with younger children was also identified - safe, accessible venues for peer support groups and community activities.

While Merri-bek currently provides youth-specific and youth-accessible third spaces including the Oxygen Youth Space and the Glenroy Library Youth Lounge there are opportunities to expand the options available and to increase the activation of existing spaces. The rising cost of living is placing pressure on many families, and some children are currently missing out on opportunities for social and recreational programs due to financial hardship. Through the activation of existing third spaces in the short term and through the creation of additional third spaces in the longer-term Council can continue to provide free or low-cost activities for children and young people and provide opportunities for families to access support.

## 3. Issues

**The need for and benefits of third spaces**

There is a growing demand for free welcoming and accessible community spaces for different age groups, including parents. Council aims to enhance community infrastructure, ensuring that all residents, regardless of age or background, have access to safe, inclusive, and purpose-built and/or programmed spaces that meet their needs.  There is an opportunity to increase access to third spaces and programs for families with younger children (0-5 years) including informal use of spaces by families. For first time parents having access to a space following the conclusion of the scheduled first-time parent groups provided by the Maternal and Child Health Service would allow families to connect at the same time and day in a familiar environment and has the potential to extend the life and associated peer support these groups provide. Families could then transition into playgroups as established social networks, further strengthening community cohesion and well-being.

In addition to identifying the need for more youth spaces the Merri-bek Community Infrastructure Plan 2022–2032 identified the need for 364 new playgroup places by 2036, reflecting the growing demand for early years services due to anticipated population growth. Space to operate playgroups has been included in the design for the Brunswick Early Years Hub and will also be a feature of the planned Hadfield Early Years Centre, however other options are needed across the municipality.

There is a particular need for increased access to and the creation of additional spaces to meet the needs of young people in Fawkner. Young people in Fawkner have formed a group named “Fawkner’s Future” and have advocated to Council for the creation of a youth space to meet the needs of young people, noting that a lack of public transport in Fawkner creates a barrier for young people to access the Oxygen Youth Space in Coburg. Youth Services staff operate a supervised drop-in program once a week at the Fawkner Community Sports Hall attracting up to 20 - 30 young people at each session. The current uptake is predominantly young men. There are limited opportunities for young women in the area.

**Opportunity for increased activation of existing spaces**

Council investment in programs that support families, children, and young people can deliver long-term benefits to the community by improving access to services and offering responsive programs that enhance health, wellbeing, and developmental outcomes. Families, including first-time parents and fathers, need more opportunities to connect, share experiences, and access support. While the Maternal and Child Health Service provides valuable support, it has limitations in meeting both individual and community needs. By increasing access to free third spaces, Council can provide the community with activities such as drop-in opportunities for parents and caregivers to access peer support, culturally appropriate programs for diverse communities, and coordinated use of third spaces for both structured and unstructured family events.

Third spaces which have professional staffing or programming can provide a gateway to accessing services, early intervention and support for children at all ages and stages which reduces long-term costs in health, education and the need for intensive support, contributing to the building of resilience in individuals and stronger more cohesive communities.

There is an opportunity to provide additional programs and events for families with children in the early and middle years age groups that are innovative and responsive to community needs. Council libraries provide an ideal venue for such programs. Examples would include parenting information and support, extension of the first time parent group, support for families with twins and triplets and Dads Group activities.

Council has 15 Maternal and Child Health Centres across the municipality. A feature of these centres is the co-location with other services including schools, neighbourhood houses, early learning centres and at Balam Balam Place. Some centres are not utilised at capacity every day or at all on weekends, and there is scope to make them available, with appropriate resourcing, as free third spaces.

While there is a need to ensure access to outdoor spaces that promote play, connection, and wellbeing, outdoor third spaces are addressed through the Merri-bek Open Space Strategy (MOSS) which guides how Council creates and improves outdoor areas involved extensive consultation with children and young people. This Strategy has a number of actions that relate to children and young people and therefore it is proposed that the creation of additional free third indoor spaces is the main focus, as this is where the gaps and opportunities are greatest.

**The role of third spaces in prevention and early intervention**

There is increasing recognition of the importance of early intervention in mental health, particularly for infants, children, and young people. Free and accessible third spaces help build peer support networks and social capital early in family life. Parents who feel socially supported tend to experience less stress and better wellbeing, which positively affects family relationships and, in turn, benefits children’s mental health. Council can support this by providing safe, supervised spaces for children and youth to engage in programs, build relationships, and access services and referrals. Targeted outreach and engagement is essential to ensure equitable access to services and programs for vulnerable groups, including CALD families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and children with disabilities or experiencing disadvantage. Maximising the benefits that third spaces can provide will require some level of investment, not only in the spaces but also staffing to ensure children, families and young people are engaged through targeted outreach, coordination of programs and events and management of facilities.

There is an opportunity to pilot a play-based family engagement program utilising existing spaces as part of Councils Maternal and Child Health Service. The primary target group for the family engagement program would be those who have recently concluded the new parent group and families referred by MCH. The program would adopt a community development approach, engage families as participants and contributors, fostering community connection, building social capital and strengthen capacity, parenting skills and confidence. This program would play a role in ensuring that families receive timely and accurate information on a range of relevant services.

**External funding opportunities**

The Council resolution of 12th March 2025 includes reference to exploring opportunities to attract funding from state and federal governments and working with Councils planning Department to identify potential opportunities to have third spaces included in new developments. These possibilities will be further explored as part of the proposed audit and feasibility study to identify needs, opportunities, and resourcing requirements to create and staff free third spaces.

### Community impact

Increasing access to free third spaces and the creation of additional third spaces over time will deliver multiple positive impacts for children, young people and families. With appropriate programming, promotion and coordination these spaces can provide a safe welcoming space for connection, peer support and access to services and support when needed.

### Legal and risk considerations

There are no legal or risk issues arising from the recommendations 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, and the Plan has been implemented in accordance with the Charter, in particular the right to protection of families and children (section 17). The Plan also aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and in particular, the right to express views and the views of the child to be taken seriously (Article 12).

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

Insights gathered from the community and stakeholder engagement process that is currently occurring to inform the development of Council's next 4 year Children Young People and Families Strategy have informed the development of this report.

## 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

Implementing an increase in programming for young people at Fawkner from one afternoon per week to three over a six-month period requires increased staffing and some associated programming/equipment costs totalling approximately $135,000.

The timing of implementation of this option, if supported would be subject to consideration and funding being made available in the upcoming budget (2026-2030) process.

The costings are based on:

 Staffing: 2 x Band 4 staff at 0.6 FTE each: Total cost $121,000 per annum

 Program and equipment costs: $14,000 annually

**Total cost approximately $135,000 per annum (or fixed cost during trial phase).**

Implementing a family engagement program for young children and their families three days per week across the municipality would require increased staffing and associated program and equipment costs, totalling approximately $144,445 per annum. The timing of this option, if supported would be subject to consideration as part of upcoming budget (2026-2030) process.

The costings are based on:

 Staffing: 2 x Band 5 at 0.6 FTE each: $130,445

 Program and equipment costs: $14,000 annually

**Total cost approximately $144,445 per annum (or fixed cost during trial phase).**

To complete a detailed feasibility study will cost approximately **$40,000** and if supported, will be subject to consideration and funding being made available in the upcoming budget (2026-2030) process.

Undertaking the municipal wide audit of Council facilities that have the potential to meet the need for increased third spaces can be undertaken within existing resources.

## 7. Implementation

It is anticipated that increased programming for young people at Fawkner Sports Hall and family engagement program will occur from in second half of 2026, dependent on budget considerations.

Council officers can immediately commence working with the Fawkner’s Future group of young people to identify options for a suitable youth space in Fawkner.

Undertaking an audit of existing Council owned spaces and assessing their suitability to operate as free third spaces as discussed in this report will take a number of months and will form the basis of a further report to Council later in 2026.

## Attachment/s

There are no attachments for this report.

7.9 Road Safety Forum - post-event findings

**Director Place and Environment, Pene Winslade**

**City Design and Economy**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Thanks participants who attended the Road Safety Forum event held at the Coburg Civic Centre on 13 September 2025.

2. Acknowledges that feedback from the Road Safety Forum event outlined in this report will help to inform the proposed Road Safety Plan and Transport Advocacy Strategy scheduled to be developed in 2026.

3. Notes that themes shared in the Road Safety Forum event have been incorporated into the draft Moving Around Merri-bek Action plan which is presented to Council to endorse for public consultation at the October meeting.

**REPORT**

**Executive summary**

On 13 September 2025, Council hosted a Road Safety Forum at the Coburg Civic Centre to facilitate a community discussion about road safety issues within the municipality. Over 40 local residents, five Councillors, and two local MPs participated in discussions about road safety issues, proposed solutions, and prioritised recommended measures.

Road Safety is one of Council’s key values and objectives, detailed in the Moving Around Merri-bek Strategy (2024). Council is responsible for local roads and advocates for outcomes on State roads. A key objective of the September forum was to identify key problems, solutions and priorities that could help the community, council and its stakeholders to build on existing efforts to urgently address road safety in Merri-bek.

During the forum, seven key road safety issue themes were identified and discussed by community members. These themes were:

 Speeding

 School safety

 People’s behaviour on roads

 People riding

 People walking

 Busy arterial roads

 Public transport

A range of treatment options were proposed and prioritised. Three key treatment options that were raised consistently are:

 Lower speed limits

 Safe street design for everyone

 Enforcement of road rules

This feedback will be incorporated in the proposed Road Safety Plan and Transport Advocacy Strategy that Council will be preparing in 2026.

**Previous Council decisions**

**Notice of Motion - Community Safety Forum for Road Safety** *– 11 June 2025*

*That Council:*

*1. Requests Officers to host a community forum at Coburg Town Hall to discuss Road Safety matters in Merri-bek, including; Recent trends in road safety incidents throughout Merri-bek. Council efforts to address road safety, including current road safety projects and advocacy.*

*2. Requests Officers to invite relevant stakeholders such as community advocacy groups the Department of Transport and Planning, Victoria Police, the Transport Accident Commission and RACV to attend the forum.*

## 1. Policy context

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

The Moving Around Merri-bek Strategy was adopted in March 2024. The Strategy seeks to ensure all actions impacting Council’s transport network contribute to the values of Safe, Accessible, Sustainable, Healthy, Liveable, and Inclusive. The Community Road Safety Forum was aligned with the goals of Moving Around Merri-bek (2024) including:

 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.

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

### Council Plan 2025-2029

The Council Plan 2025–2029 sets out Council’s strategic direction for delivering on the Community Vision: “*Merri-bek leads, and leaves no one behind”*. Under the Beautiful and Liveable City theme, Council aspires to streets and public spaces are safe, pleasant, and easy to use so everyone can enjoy and be proud of where they live.

Key actions that align with this report include:

 Keeping public places and streets well-maintained, safe, and inviting for community use.

 Fixing and improving streets and footpaths to make them more friendly for walking and riding.

 Encouraging walking, cycling, and scooting – especially for getting to school.

 Making it easier and safer to use public transport to move around.

The Moving Around Merri-bek Action Plan frames how Council will deliver on these outcomes and ensure that transport investments reflect the priorities of the Merri-bek community.

## 2. Background

Many people across Merri-bek are actively advocating for better road safety for a wide variety of reasons. The community rightly expects a careful and thorough approach to tackling road safety issues. The urgency of these concerns has been heightened following four recent fatalities involving pedestrians and cyclists in the local area.

Road Safety is one of Council’s key values and objectives detailed in the Moving Around Merri-bek Strategy (2024). Since the adoption of this strategy council has advocated proactively to address road safety issues in Merri-bek and been successful in acquiring funding and delivering a range of road safety initiatives. Recent Council road safety programs and project initiatives include:

 Completing the municipal wide roll out of 40kph speed limits on local roads across Merri-bek.

 Endorsing the trial of a 30km/h speed limit on local streets in Coburg, Brunswick and Brunswick East. The trial is proposed for 12 months, during which community feedback will be collected, followed by a comprehensive assessment of its effectiveness.

 A variety of projects aimed at enhancing access for people walking and riding, including the delivery of $7.2 million in capital works this financial year

 Acquiring $2 million in funding through the Safe Local Roads and Streets Program for capital projects to address transport infrastructure gaps.

 A variety of infrastructure improvements to address pedestrian and bicycle safety.

Council officers have developed an in-depth understanding of community road safety priorities through ongoing resident enquiries, policy development, and regular community consultation processes. Key themes consistently emerging from community feedback include requests for reduced speed limits, enhanced active transport crossing facilities, implementation of traffic calming infrastructure, and broader improvements to street safety.

The Road Safety Forum was designed to build on feedback council has received in recent years and create an opportunity for Council officers, community members and elected officials to discuss the road safety issues that matter most. The specific aims of the Road Safety Forum were to:

 Respond to recent tragic road deaths in Merri-bek.

 Listen to our community and learn from them.

 Turn ideas shared into near-term actions.

 Explore other avenues of community advocacy for a safe Merri-bek.

The forum was attended by 43 community members, five Councillors (Mayor Helen Davidson and Councillors Liz Irvin, Ella Svensson, Nat Abboud and Sue Bolton) and a number of staff. State Members of Parliament Anthony Cianflone MP and Tim Reid MP also attended the forum.

The forum was facilitated by an independent consultant, Hafez Alavi, who facilitated discussion about the problem, solution and priorities.

A diagram of a solution

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

Figure 1: Road Safety Forum Activities

## 3. Issues

In this section of the report, detail is provided of the key issues, solutions and priorities developed by forum participants.

Key issues

A group of people standing in front of a wall with sticky notes

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

Figure 2: Photo of Road Safety Forum attendees sharing their key problems on sticky notes

Road safety issues were identified by participants and grouped into seven themes. A summary of the key points raised for each of the seven themes are summarised below.

**Speeding**

 Inconsistent speed limits

 Speed limits are too high

 Drivers do not comply to speed limits

 Lack of effective traffic calming

**School Safety**

 Lack of safe crossing near schools

 Unsafe driver behaviour

 Vehicle speeding issues

**People’s behaviour on roads**

 Distracted drivers (phone use)

 Rat running / hoon driving / road rage

 Drivers failing to follow road rules

 Conflicts between people riding and driving on the road

 Lack of compassion to other road users

**People riding**

 Fear of sharing road with vehicles

 Conflicts on shared paths

 Lack of separated bike paths and missing links

 Speed of ebikes and escooter

 Construction and car parking blocking bike lanes

**People walking**

 Construction blocking footpaths

 Not enough pedestrian crossings

 Fear of walking in the evening

 Conflict with turning vehicles at pedestrian crossings

 Too much road space allocated to vehicles

**Busy arterial roads**

 Inconsistent speed limits

 Not enough pedestrian crossings

 Speeding issues

 Safety for people riding

 Paths are too narrow

**Public transport**

 Upfield line is infrequent and unreliable

 Cost of public transport

 Lack of accessible tram stops on Sydney Road

 Safety getting on and off trams

 Lack of bus shelters

Key solutions

The forum also considered possible solutions to the key issues identified. The second workshop exercise asked the group to identify solutions for each theme, and a prioritisation process identified three top solutions for each theme.

A group of people sitting around a table

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

Figure 3: Discussion on suggested treatments to identified problems

The suggested outcomes are presented below.

**Speeding**

 Design for lower speed (14 votes)

 Consistent lower speed limits (one vote)

 Enforcement and lights (two votes)

**School safety**

 Special consideration for traffic around education centres (six votes)

 Enforcing rules (fines, cameras, shaming etc) (two votes)

 Slower speeds city wide (no votes)

**People’s behaviour on roads**

 Incentivise reduced car trips by encouraging local work opportunities, free and more frequent public transport and good design that leads to behaviour change (11 votes)

 More / easier reporting of near misses and minor crashes with the penalty of driver education (six votes)

 More / frequent education for all road users – Starting but not limited to the younger users (one vote)

**People riding**

 Community engagement through education for potential cyclists. Support group maps and input to identify problem routes (three votes)

 Road infrastructure for safe cycling (and other users). Protected, wide and connected cycle network with bike parking (one vote)

 Rules for toad use that reduce space for cars to allow more space for bike and pedestrian paths (multispeed) to include one-way streets for cars but bi-directional for bikes, roads for resident only vehicle access, 30km/h speed limits and enforce ebike rules (six votes)

**People walking**

 Timely enforcement for parking across footpaths – Request to set SLA or KPIs (nine votes)

 Street design and infrastructure – narrow footpaths and modal filters (six votes)

 Advocacy for pedestrian priority to include early start, signalised crossings and compliance cameras (13 votes)

**Busy arterial roads**

 Lower and consistent speed limits (six votes)

 Protected bike lanes (17 votes)

 Signalised pedestrian crossings (five votes)

**Public transport**

 Accessible tram stops in activity centres (nine votes)

 Better crossing points at tram and bus stops (no votes)

 Better parking management and enforcement plus more clearways (one vote)

Overall reflections and priorities

Many attendees observed that many of the suggested solutions addressed multiple road safety problems, demonstrating how interconnected thoughtful street design and management should be. Examples include:

 Lower speed limits

 Safe street design for everyone

 Enforcement of road rules

Council officers have documented the community key issues, solutions and priorities and will consider these as part of the development of the development of a Road Safety Plan and Transport Advocacy Strategy.

### 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

The community Road Safety Forum was held between 9:30am and12:30pm on 13 September 2025 at the Coburg Civic Centre. The event was advertised on the Council website, Conversations Merri-bek website, and Facebook and Instagram. It featured in the fortnightly My Merri-bek e-newsletter, and emails were sent to all individuals who had taken part in our Moving Around Merri-bek Transport Strategy and Streets for People Plan community engagements. In addition, key stakeholders such as local MPs, community advocacy groups, the Department of Transport and Planning, Victoria Police, and the Transport Accident Commission were all invited to attend the forum.

**Affected persons rights and interests**

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

## 5. Officer declaration of Conflict of Interest

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

## 6. Financial and resources implications

The funds required to facilitate the Road Safety Forum were absorbed in the Transport Planning operating budget and there is no forecast cost associated with this recommendation.

## 7. Implementation

The feedback gathered from the Road Safety Forum will be included as part of the formation of the following key pieces of work in 2026:

 Development of a Road Safety Plan

 Transport Advocacy Strategy

 Inform Broader Council work

Themes shared in the Road Safety Forum event have been incorporated into the draft Moving Around Merri-bek Action plan for public consultation

## Attachment/s

There are no attachments for this report.

7.10 Submission to Activity Centres Program, Phase 2 Engagement

**Director Place and Environment, Pene Winslade**

**City Design and Economy**

## Officer recommendation

1. That Council:

1. Endorses the draft Activity Centres Program – Phase 2 Merri-bek Submission Part A at Attachment 1 (Part A1: Position Paper) and Attachment 2 (Part A2: Technical Paper), as Council’s formal submission to the State Government in relation to publicly released material.

2. Authorises the Director Place and Environment to prepare Activity Centres Program – Phase 2 Submission Part B, in relation to any additional material supplied by the State Government to Council officers. This submission will align with Council’s adopted positions on building heights and core and catchment boundaries, incorporate community feedback from the Phase 1 engagement, and address key issues that arise in Council’s planning permit decisions, to advocate for the best outcomes for our community.

**REPORT**

**Executive summary**

This report is one of two reports tabled at the October Council meeting, relating to State government planning reforms. This report relates to strategic planning reforms to Activity Centres; the second report relates to a statutory planning reform that will apply to mid-rise developments of up to six storeys.

To meet the needs of Merri-bek’s growing population, additional housing will be required in well-serviced areas across the municipality. The State Government’s Activity Centres Program (Program) seeks to support this by facilitating housing growth in the Brunswick and Coburg Train and Tram Activity Centres (Activity Centres). As a key stakeholder, Council has an important advocacy role to ensure the Program delivers not only housing, but also affordable, sustainable, and well-planned outcomes for the Merri-bek community.

The Program involves two phases of community engagement. In June 2025, Council endorsed a Phase 1 submission following the first phase of engagement. It sets out Merri-bek’s strategic priorities to ensure housing growth is carefully planned and designed to deliver affordable, sustainable, and diverse high-quality housing, supported by essential infrastructure, transport, jobs and open space. These priorities remain relevant.

Phase 2 engagement is now underway. The State Government is seeking feedback on draft maps showing proposed building heights and activity centre boundaries across the approximately five-kilometre corridor from Brunswick to Coburg. These maps define the commercial “core” along Sydney Road and the surrounding residential “inner” and “outer” catchment areas. No other important supporting technical information or draft planning provisions have been released at the time of writing this report, although further technical information may be made available in the coming days. Community feedback is due by Sunday 19 October 2025, with Council feedback due by Friday 24 October 2025.

Once finalised, these maps will inform the preparation of Activity Centre Plan(s), the application of a Built Form Overlay (BFO) to the core, and the rezoning of surrounding residential land to the Housing Choice and Transport Zone (HCTZ), across the inner and outer catchments (HCTZ1 and HCTZ2, respectively). This stage of the Program is expected to conclude in early 2026, with a planning scheme amendment scheduled for approval by March/April 2026.

This Council report:

 Outlines feedback from Phase 1 community engagement.

 Summarises what is proposed in the publicly released Phase 2 engagement materials (Attachment 3).

 Recommends a Council advocacy position and submission on the Program and Phase 2 engagement materials (Attachments 1 and 2).

 Advocates for the public release of supporting technical information, and draft planning provisions, and recommends authorising officers to prepare a supplementary submission on any additional material provided to Council by the State Government.

This report seeks Council’s endorsement of the draft Part A submission and authorisation for the Director Place and Environment to prepare a supplementary Part B submission should further technical material is released.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Activity Centres Program Merri-Bek Cluster - Phase 1 Engagement** – 11 June 2025

*That Council:*

*1. Notes the State Government’s Activity Centres Program (Program), which includes the Brunswick and Coburg Station Activity Centres (collectively referred to as the Merri-bek Cluster), and the draft submission provided at Attachment 1.*

*2. Endorses the draft Activity Centres Program – Phase 1 Submission: Merri-bek Cluster, June 2025 at Attachment 1 as Council’s formal submission to the State Government for Phase 1 of the Program.*

3. *Receives a report on the draft Activity Centre Plan(s) and any associated planning controls to be released by the State Government during Phase 2 engagement, for the purpose of endorsing a formal Council submission.*

## 1. Policy Context

**Community Vision and Council Plan**

Merri-bek 2025-29 Community Vision

The long-term Community Vision is that *Merri-bek leads and leaves no one behind.*

The key priority areas for the Merri-bek Community Vision 2025-2035 are:

 We are a welcoming, safe and thriving community.

 We are sustainable and our environment is respected.

 Our community is engaged and informed.

 Our streets are full of life.

 One community, proudly diverse.

Merri-bek Council Plan 2025-29

The new *Merri-bek Council Plan 2025–2029* sets Council’s priorities for the next four years, guided by the Community Vision 2025–2035 and consistent with the *Local Government Act 2020*.

The Plan is structured around five themes:

 Care for nature and climate resilience.

 Healthy and inclusive communities.

 Beautiful and liveable city.

 Thriving economy and culture.

 Engaging and responsible council.

Under these themes, five strategic objectives will guide delivery: climate resilience, inclusive services, liveable places, a thriving economy and culture, and responsive, accountable governance.

**Planning Framework**

State Planning Strategies

*Plan for Victoria*

The Activity Centres Program is a priority action under *Plan for Victoria*, the State Government’s new long-term planning strategy released in February 2025. The Plan:

 Sets a housing target of 69,000 new dwellings for Merri-bek by 2051.

 Reinforces the longstanding 70/30 growth policy, aiming for 70% of new homes in established areas, such as Brunswick and Coburg, and 30% in growth areas.

 Builds on *Victoria’s Housing Statement: The Decade Ahead 2024–2034*, which prioritises affordable, well-located housing for all Victorians.

Merri-bek Planning Scheme

The Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) of the Merri-bek Planning Scheme includes the following key directions for Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres:

 53% of future growth is expected in the Brunswick–Brunswick East–Coburg corridor.

 With no greenfield land and limited brownfield opportunities, growth must be managed through urban densification near public transport, shops, and services.

 Brunswick and Coburg Major Activity Centres are prioritised for intensification, with Brunswick forecast to absorb the greatest share of new dwellings.

 Growth is managed in line with the 20-minute neighbourhood principle, enabling residents to access daily needs within a short walk, ride, or public transport trip. This supports:

o Sustainable and climate-resilient neighbourhoods.

o A healthy and active community.

o Stronger social connection.

o A thriving local economy.

The MPS aligns with the key objective of the Activity Centres Program which is to focus housing growth in well-serviced locations.

Current amendments to the Merri-bek Planning Scheme

Council currently has several important planning scheme amendments awaiting a decision from the Minister for Planning. These proposed amendments seek to introduce the following changes to the Merri-bek Planning Scheme:

 A strengthened Environmentally Sustainable Development policy to raise sustainability standards for new buildings and support a transition to net zero carbon development. Council resolved to seek authorisation for *Amendment C223mbek* in May 2022.

 The introduction of the Activity Centre Zone in the Brunswick Activity Centre to guide land use, encourage business investment and job creation, and support the ongoing vibrancy of the area. Council resolved to seek authorisation for *Amendment C230mbek* in May 2024.

 A new 15-year Development Contributions Plan to help fund essential infrastructure. Council resolved to seek authorisation for *Amendment C236mbek* in May 2025.

 New flood controls for properties at risk of flooding from local stormwater drains. Council adopted *Amendment C196mbek* in August 2025.

Council officers continue to advocate for a timely decision by the Minister for Planning to enable these amendments to proceed and be implemented into the Merri-bek Planning Scheme.

In addition, Council is progressing an increased public open space contribution rate to ensure new open space is provided in response to growing demand. *Amendment C235mbek* is currently on public exhibition, with submissions due by 13 October 2025.

Related strategic studies:

Council is also progressing several strategic planning projects relevant to the Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres, including:

 Brunswick built form review: In May 2023, Council resolved to undertake a comprehensive built form review of the Brunswick Activity Centre. This review is well advanced but is currently on hold to avoid duplication with the State Government’s Activity Centres Program and to minimise potential community confusion.

 Brunswick and Coburg heritage reviews: In 2023, Council resolved to undertake heritage reviews of both the Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres. This work is expected to be finalised by late-2025.

## 2. Background

**State Government Activity Centres Program**

The State Government’s Activity Centres Program (Program) aims to deliver over 300,000 new homes by 2051 across 60 designated centres in Melbourne. The Program focuses on increasing housing in well-serviced locations with strong access to public transport, jobs, and services.

Each activity centre in the Program consists of two key components:

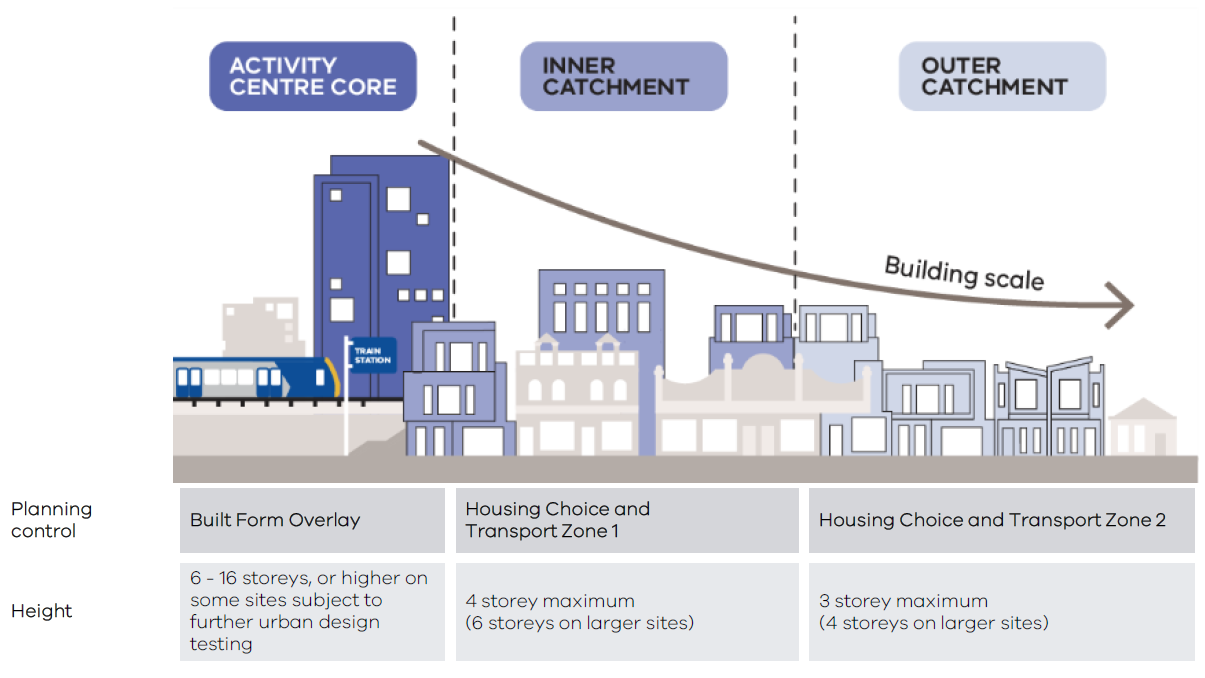
 **Commercial core**: the central activity area, including commercial centres, generally intended for larger apartment buildings.

 **Residential inner and outer catchment**: the surrounding residential areas, generally intended for townhouses and smaller apartment buildings.

To support implementation, two new planning tools have been introduced into the Victoria Planning Provisions (refer to **Image 1**):

 **Built Form Overlay (BFO):** applies to the core. It establishes preferred building heights and design requirements based on State Government typologies set out in [*City of Centres*](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwifrLnomuSPAxVGs1YBHck7MI4QFnoECCAQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.planning.vic.gov.au%2F__data%2Fassets%2Fpdf_file%2F0024%2F738015%2FCity-of-Centres-Development-of-Typology-based-Built-Form-Controls.pdf&usg=AOvVaw1jWFA45YdJcZy9cm3tUcAL&opi=89978449) and introduces a streamlined process to accelerate housing delivery. The BFO applies in addition to the underlying zone.

 **Housing Choice and Transport Zone (HCTZ):** applies to residential land in the catchment, replacing existing residential zones. Building heights range from 3–6 storeys.



*Image 1. Height transitions in scale from mid-rise in the core to the lower-rise outer catchment.*

*Source: Department of Transport and Planning.*

Infrastructure Contribution Plans for the Activity Centres

A subsequent stage of the Program proposes introducing standardised Infrastructure Contribution Plans to help fund essential local and state infrastructure such as community facilities, schools, and cycling links as Activity Centres grow. Since November 2024, an industry working group has been testing models to better align infrastructure provision with housing growth.

Piloting of the simplified contributions system for new development in Activity Centres and their catchments is scheduled to begin in January 2027. However, the timeframe for implementing Infrastructure Contribution Plans in the Brunswick and Coburg Train and Tram Activity Centres remains uncertain. As of preparing this report, the working group has not released its findings or recommendations, and no implementation timeline has been confirmed.

**Brunswick and Coburg Train and Tram Activity Centres**

On 27 February 2025, the Premier announced the expansion of the Activity Centres Program to 60 centres, including Brunswick and Coburg Train and Tram Activity Centres (Activity Centres).

Covering the five-kilometre Sydney Road commercial core, the Activity Centres are anchored by Brunswick and Coburg stations and currently span six train stations (to be consolidated to five by 2030). They also encompass key open spaces and the Coburg Civic Centre and are supported by tram route 19 and an integrated transport network. The catchment extends east and west into surrounding fine-grain residential areas.

Existing planning framework

The Activity Centres are covered by a mix of zones and height controls that guide how the areas can develop.

*Brunswick and Coburg Train and Tram Activity Centres*

 **Commercial core**

o Brunswick: Sydney Road is primarily Commercial 1 Zone (C1Z), supporting retail and offices with housing above. Adjoining land includes Residential Growth Zone (RGZ), Mixed Use Zone (MUZ), Industrial Zone (IN1Z and IN3Z), Public Park and Recreation Zone (PPRZ) and Public Use Zone (PUZ). A Design and Development Overlay (2016) allows 5–6 storeys along Sydney Road and 7–8 storeys between Sydney Road and the rail line (Victoria Street–Brunswick Road).

o Coburg: Sydney Road is primarily Activity Centre Zone (ACZ), with adjoining MUZ, PPRZ and PUZ. The ACZ (2015) allows 6–12 storeys in the commercial core.

 **Residential catchment**

o Brunswick: Surrounding areas are mostly Neighbourhood Residential Zone (NRZ), limited to two storeys.

o Coburg: Surrounding areas are a mix of General Residential Zone (GRZ) and NRZ, permitting two and three storeys.

**Phase 1 community engagement**

Phase 1 ran from 6 May to 15 June 2025, seeking high-level feedback with limited information available.

Council adopted and lodged its Phase 1 submission in June 2025. This submission was supportive of the State Government’s objective to focus housing growth in well-serviced areas such as the Merri-bek Cluster. However, this growth must be balanced with the delivery of affordable, sustainable, and diverse high-quality housing, supported by essential infrastructure, services, transport, jobs, and open space. These priorities remain relevant.

Feedback from Council and the community in the Phase 1 engagement

The [Engage Victoria Activity Centres Program – Phase 2 website](https://engage.vic.gov.au/project/activity-centres-program/page/merri-bek) includes Phase 1 Consultation Summary Report and Statements of Advice from Community Reference Groups. In summary, the community identified the following top five matters to consider with increased density:

1. Protecting parks and open space.

2. Walking and bike riding connections.

3. Building considerations, such as overshadowing, wind protections and sun access.

4. Increased tree planting.

5. Public transport infrastructure.

A summary of community feedback from the Consultation Summary Report and Statements of Advice from Community Reference Groups is at **Attachment 5**. Council has not received a specific response to the matters raised in its Phase 1 submission.

The feedback demonstrates that the Brunswick and Coburg communities understand the need for, and broadly support, housing growth. However, the community also expects growth to deliver high-quality, sustainable, diverse, and affordable housing, protect and enhance the public realm and open spaces, and be accompanied by investment in infrastructure, particularly public and active transport and parks. The feedback from the Merri-bek community closely aligns with the matters raised in Council’s Phase 1 submission.

**Phase 2 community engagement**

Public engagement commenced on Wednesday 10 September 2025 and will close for the community on 19 October 2025, with Council submissions due by 24 October 2025.

Phase 2 public engagement material

In this phase, the State Government has released only a limited set of maps for consultation, showing:

1. The existing conditions of the area, including places identified by the community as important, capturing feedback from the Phase 1 engagement.

2. Proposed building heights and the boundaries of the activity centre core and surrounding residential catchment.

These maps are provided at **Attachment 3**. The State Government is primarily seeking feedback from the community and councils on proposed building heights and activity centre boundaries. Once finalised, the maps will inform new planning provisions in the Merri-bek Planning Scheme, replacing Council’s existing controls.

No additional supporting information has been made available to the public at this stage.

What is proposed as part of Phase 2 community engagement?

Refer to **Attachment 3**.

*Proposed building heights and boundary of the ‘core’*

For each activity centre, a draft map shows proposed building heights within the core. Heights of 8, 12 and 16 storeys are identified. Some sites are marked as ‘Strategic sites’ with no height specified. The proposed core boundaries broadly follow Sydney Road and the Upfield line, encompassing key commercial and mixed-use areas.

*Proposed building heights and boundary of the ‘catchment’*

In the surrounding residential catchment, the State Government proposes building heights of up to six storeys on larger inner-catchment sites (lots over 1,000m² with a 20-metre frontage), reducing to four storeys elsewhere. In the outer catchment, heights would be limited to four storeys on larger sites and three storeys on smaller lots. The draft maps show catchment boundaries extending east and west of Sydney Road, covering established residential areas beyond the commercial core.

## 3. Issues

As a key stakeholder, Merri-bek City Council plays an important role in bringing local knowledge and community perspectives to the State Government’s Program, advocating for integrated, place-based outcomes that reflect strategic priorities and community aspirations.

Merri-bek’s population has grown significantly, from 167,870 in 2015 to 191,747 in 2025, and is projected to increase by around 40,000 people (21%) by 2040. To accommodate this growth, Council supports housing development in well serviced areas like Brunswick and Coburg. However, this growth must be carefully planned, transparent, and supported by evidence, infrastructure, and jobs.

**Recommended Council advocacy position**

Council officers propose the following Phase 2 advocacy position, which is structured around four key pillars:

**1. Supporting growth through better infrastructure and services.**

**2. A fair and transparent process for our community.**

**3. Ensuring economic success and job growth**

**4. Getting heights and boundaries right.**

These pillars underpin the officers’ response to the Phase 2 consultation material and submission**.**

**Recommended Council Phase 2 submission**

The draft Phase 2 Part A submission comprises:

 **Part A1:** a high-level position paper with the four advocacy pillarsand summary response to the Program and Phase 2 engagement material **(Attachment 1)**.

 **Part A2:** a detailed technical submission, drawing on local knowledge, typologies, and preferred future character **(Attachment 2)**.

If endorsed by Council, this submission will be shared with both the State Government and the Merri-bek community. The content is outlined below.

**Recommended Activity Centre heights and boundaries**

Refer to **Attachments 1, 2 and 4.**

In this phase of community engagement, the State Government is primarily seeking community and council feedback on building heights and activity centre boundaries. No other important supporting technical information or draft planning provisions have been publicly released at the time of writing this report.

Officers recognise these as the State Government’s key issues. Despite the limited information released, officers sought to respond constructively by applying local knowledge, drawing on the typologies in the *City of Centres* document, and considering preferred future character to take a balanced approach.

Proposed building heights and boundaries of the ‘core’

*Building heights*

Council officers generally support the overall level of growth but recommend moderation in some areas. Certain residential pockets in the proposed core are better suited to catchment-scale typologies with lower heights; if retained in the core, they should match outer catchment controls. Officers also propose moderated heights elsewhere to reflect realistic development potential when urban design principles are applied. To balance these changes, the draft submission identifies alternative sites with greater capacity for taller buildings.

For ‘strategic sites’ where the State Government has not nominated heights, the draft Part A submission provides recommended height limits to ensure clarity and certainty for Council and the community.

Officers have undertaken a capacity assessment of the Activity Centres core, comparing existing heights, the State Government’s Phase 2 proposal, and Council’s preferred heights. The results show that Council’s option delivers only a 5% reduction in overall capacity compared with the Department of Transport and Planning’s (DTP) proposal, while achieving a more balanced distribution of growth between Coburg (45%) and Brunswick (55%), compared with DTP’s 39% and 61%. It is considered that the Core, together with the catchment areas, will comfortably meet Merri-bek’s 2051 Housing Target of 69,000 dwellings.

*Boundaries*

The proposed core boundaries broadly align with Council’s previous work for the Sydney Road corridor in Brunswick and Coburg, with variations highlighted in the draft Part A submission. Additional strategic sites have been identified for inclusion, while other areas, such as land adjoining Brunswick parklands and the heritage-listed Hoffman Brickworks, are recommended for exclusion due to existing approvals, physical separation, or heritage significance.

Proposed building heights and boundaries of the ‘catchment’

*Building heights*

No changes are proposed to building heights in the catchment, as these are already set in the Housing Choice and Transport Zone (HCTZ) and are not open for consultation.

*Boundaries*

Council officers generally support the extent of the catchment but recommend that areas within Heritage Overlay precincts and where there is a high fragmentation / small lots or frontage, be included in the outer catchment, consistent with the Activity Centres Program Pilot.

Summary

To the greatest extent possible, the draft Part A submission has sought to accept the State Government’s proposed heights and boundaries, while seeking to collaborate on the detailed planning scheme requirements to ensure new development delivers high quality outcomes for the Merri-bek community.

**Recommended approach to unreleased technical material and draft planning Provisions**

As noted above, the State Government has only publicly released existing conditions maps and building height/boundary maps. This makes it difficult for officers to understand the reasoning behind the proposals or provide meaningful comment, as achievable building heights depend on other factors such as setbacks, overshadowing, and design requirements that have not been made available.

In its Phase 1 submission, Council emphasised the need for all technical information and draft planning provisions to be released to ensure transparency and context. This is critical to help the community understand the strategic justification for State Government decision-making. Council also called for meaningful engagement, including adequate time for review, further consultation opportunities, and a clear demonstration of how community and Council feedback is considered.

The draft Phase 2 Part A submission (**Attachments 1** and **2**) continues to advocate for these principles, strongly urging the State Government to release all technical information and draft planning provisions for community consultation. The missing information is discussed below.

Supporting strategic justification and evidence-based decision-making

Council officers understand that DTP has prepared further technical material to inform planning controls and Activity Centre Plans. This includes a Vision, typologies, a draft Movement and Place Framework, Public Realm Plan, Transport Plan, Urban Design Background Report, and Activity Centre Plan(s). These documents are understood to address matters such as setbacks, deep soil, active frontages and transport, and decision guidelines, but have not been publicly released.

Draft Built Form Overlay (BFO) schedules

The State Government has also not released the draft BFO schedule(s) or associated approaches to overlays and local policy. In addition to building heights, the BFO may include requirements for building typology and future character, overshadowing of open space and pedestrian streets, landscaped setbacks, active frontages, pedestrian connections, weather protection, vehicle access, waste and loading areas, and signage. These detailed schedules would specify metrics and their application.

As they are not available, neither officers nor the community can provide meaningful feedback at this stage.

Foundation plans

In the early stages of the Program, DTP prepared ‘foundation plans’ identifying contextual and valued attributes of each centre, along with place-specific opportunities and constraints. Officers provided feedback on these internally, but the plans have not been publicly released. Instead, only a simplified ‘existing conditions’ map has been issued for Phase 2 engagement. As a result, Council officers are concerned that places not explicitly identified by the community may be undervalued in drafting the BFO schedules.

Housing capacity targets

The State Government has not released housing capacity targets for the Activity Centres as part of Phase 2. Without this information, it is unclear how many dwellings are expected in the core and catchment areas or whether the proposed planning framework can realistically deliver them.

Council has consistently called for the release of Housing Capacity Assessment Platform (HCAP) modelling to test the achievability of proposed heights and catchments. Until this information is provided, Council and the community cannot give fully informed feedback.

Next steps - Part B Submission

This report also seeks authorisation for the Director of Place and Environment to prepare a supplementary Part B submission on the unreleased material, once supplied by DTP, to ensure alignment with Council’s adopted positions on building heights, boundaries, and other key planning issues.

**Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications**

Council has declared a climate emergency and urges the State Government to progress Amendment C223mbek to the Merri-bek Planning Scheme, which seeks to strengthen sustainability requirements for new development and raise the standard of environmentally sustainable design (ESD) across the municipality.

The new *Ministerial Direction 22 – Climate Change Consideration* (MD22), gazetted on 11 September 2025, outlines what planning authorities must consider meeting their legal duty under the Planning and Environment Act to address climate change when preparing or amending planning schemes. The Program is a large precinct-scale transformational program that will have considerable implications for areas of Merri-bek already experiencing climate impacts exacerbated by urban renewal and consolidation.

The submission at **Attachment 2** requests that a Climate Change Assessment be prepared in line with MD22 and supporting guidelines to identify local built form standards and supporting policy for the BFO to help mitigate climate impacts.

### Economic sustainability implications

Council’s Phase 1 submission to the Program outlined Merri-bek’s efforts to ensure that the Program supports job growth.

### 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 were found to be in line with these requirements. This report seeks endorsement of a submission to the State Government that has regard to existing Merri-bek policy and adopted strategies.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

The State Government is undertaking community consultation for its Activity Centres Program.

For the Merri-bek Cluster, the first phase of community consultation was undertaken in May/June 2025. Led by the State Government, this early-stage engagement aimed to inform the community and gather feedback on where additional housing could be located. Information was made available on the State Government’s online engagement platform, and several drop-in sessions and online Q&A events were held.

The second phase of community consultation is occurring in September/October 2025. During this second phase, the State Government has shared its draft maps for the Merri-bek Cluster which include key components of the state government’s draft plans for these Activity Centres. Activities being undertaken by the State Government include community drop-in sessions, walk-by activations, online Q&A session and an online survey.

The draft Part A submission at **Attachments 1** and **2**, advocates for the release of all technical information to our community to support transparency, context, and informed participation, and further engagement on the draft Activity Centre Plans and Built Form Overlay schedules.

**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 rights and interests affected by the recommendations of this report.

### Communications

The State Government is leading communication with the community about this State Government led program. Information about this state-led consultation has been included on Council’s website, encouraging Merri-bek residents and businesses to participate.

## 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 submissions will be met within existing budgets. There are no financial implications to action this resolution.

## 7. Implementation

**Phase 2 Part A submission** - Once endorsed by Council, the Phase 2 Part A submission at **Attachments 1 and 2** will be submitted to the Victorian Government by the Director Place and Environment on Council’s behalf. This submission focuses on building heights and centre boundaries and publicly released information.

**Phase 2 Part B submission** - Once further technical information is received, the Director Place and Environment will prepare a supplementary submission in relation to draft Activity Centre Plans and draft Built Form Overlay (BFO) Schedules. This submission will be aligned with Council’s adopted position on building heights and core and catchment boundaries, community feedback from the Phase 1 engagement for this Program and key issues that arise in Council’s planning permit decisions, advocating for the best outcomes for our community. This submission will focus on matters other than building heights and boundaries and be based on material which has not yet been publicly released.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Activity Centres Program Phase 2 Merri-bek Submission Part A1: Position Paper | D25/492538 |  |
| **2** | Activity Centres Program Phase 2 Merri-bek Submission Part A2: Technical Paper | D25/467811 |  |
| **3** | Activity Centres Program Phase 2 Department of Transport and Planning Engagement Maps | D25/476944 |  |
| **4** | Activity Centres Program Phase 2 Engagement Council Position Maps | D25/490021 |  |
| **5** | Activity Centres Program Merri-bek Cluster Phase 1 community feedback summary | D25/488616 |  |

7.11 Submission - state government residential mid-rise code reform

**Director Place and Environment, Pene Winslade**

**City Development**

## Officer recommendation

That Council:

1. Endorses Council’s submission to the Department of Transport and Planning on the technical aspects of the draft standards for mid-rise residential developments (up to 6 storeys), at Attachment 1 of this report, which includes recommendations that:

a) Third party review rights to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal must remain as part of Clause 57 of the Planning Scheme.

b) Development at this scale should deliver best practice Environmentally Sustainable Design.

c) Operational provisions must be amended to enable Council to consider environmental risks such as flooding and potentially contaminated land.

d) It is essential that design quality is supported.

e) The canopy tree requirement must be adjusted to ensure development at this scale is within a landscaped setting, which contributes to greener, cooler, and healthier neighbourhoods.

f) The concept of relying on setbacks, to minimise both overlooking and overshadowing, be revisited as this may increase the impacts on neighbours, when compared to the current metrics in Clause 55 of the *Planning and Environment Act*.

g) The Department of Transport and Planning should undertake wider consultation with the community on such significant changes to planning controls.

**REPORT**

**Executive summary**

This report is one of two reports tabled at the October Council meeting, relating to State Government planning reforms. This report relates to statutory planning reforms to planning controls for mid-rise developments. The other report relates to Activity Centre planning reforms which will introduce new zones with three to six storey height limits in Brunswick and Coburg Activity Centres.

The Victorian State Government is currently consulting on new draft planning controls for mid-rise residential developments (up to six storeys). The mid-rise residential standards are part of the ongoing planning reforms which seek to boost housing supply. The draft mid-rise residential standards proposed by the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP), set out new planning requirements for residential apartment buildings between four and six storeys, aiming to streamline approvals and clarify residential amenity, design, and development expectations for Councils, the development industry and local communities, on residentially zoned land. In Merri-bek it is expected that apartments up to six storeys will be allowed near activity centres, in land currently within the Residential Growth Zone, Mixed Use Zone or in the proposed new Housing Choice and Transport Zone.

The Victorian State Government is currently undertaking targeted consultation with developers, planning consultants, building designers, industry peak bodies and Councils on the Mid-rise Code. This includes the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), Planning Institute of Australia (PIA), the Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment (CASBE) and others. DTP is encouraging submissions on the proposed design standards via an online survey. It is expected that the new mid-rise residential standards will be implemented in Victorian Planning Schemes by December 2025.

Some of the key features of the new draft standard for mid-rise residential development are:

 No third-party right of review to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) will apply for objectors if all “deemed to comply” standards are met. Objectors can therefore only seek a review before VCAT, if a standard is not met.

 They limit what can be considered in the planning assessment. This means broader issues including flooding or potentially contaminated land will no longer be considered.

Whilst Merri-bek supports increasing the supply of well-designed new housing, there are some concerns with the draft standards for mid-rise residential developments. These concerns broadly relate to:

 The lessening of the community’s ability to participate in the planning process, through limiting the ability of an objector to seek a review at the VCAT.

 The lack of broader consultation on these changes with community, particularly in a setting where new standards allow for greater impacts on residential amenity (e.g. shadowing) through allowing developments up to six storeys in residential areas.

 Removing the need to assess mid-rise apartment buildings against Council’s policy which seeks to deliver best practice Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD)

**Previous Council decisions**

There are no previous Council decisions relating specifically to the State Government’s draft mid-rise residential standards.

## 1. Policy context

Merri-bek Council Plan 2025–2029

The Merri-bek Council Plan 2025-2029 includes the following initiatives and priorities:

 Promote genuinely affordable social, quality, and sustainable housing by encouraging well-designed, sustainable developments. (2.14)

 Facilitate high-quality built form outcomes and design innovation through

 built form policy and controls, planning decision-making, advocacy on state planning reform, and input to State planning decisions. (3.8)

 Ensure the Merri-bek Planning Scheme provides an effective framework of local policies and controls that guide the type and location of housing growth – to manage land use change, support economic and sustainability objectives, and protect natural and cultural resources. (3.9)

**Planning Framework**

Merri-bek Planning Scheme

The Merri-bek Planning Scheme includes the following policies:

 Ensure site design, building frontages, design articulation and internal layout achieve a good interface with and surveillance of the public realm, including maximising opportunities for active frontages. (Clause 15.01-1L)

 Encourage good-quality contemporary architecture. (Clause 15.01-2L)

 To achieve best practice in environmentally sustainable development from the design stage through to construction and operation. (Clause 15.01-2L-05)

The Council Plan and the Merri-bek Planning Scheme have a consistent ambition for the delivery of high-quality housing.

## 2. Background

The draft mid-rise residential standards propose new planning requirements for residential buildings between four and six storeys, aiming to streamline approvals and clarify amenity, design, and development expectations for Councils, industry and communities.

The standards are intended to apply to residential buildings of four to six storeys. Other Planning Scheme clauses will continue to apply to other zones. Clause 58 (Better Apartment Design Standards) continues to apply in other zones, such as commercial or certain activity centre contexts; Clause 55 (Two or More Dwellings on a Lot) remains applicable to two and three storey developments in residential zones.

The proposed new mid-rise standards cover key areas of building design and residential amenity. The draft standards are set around the following themes:

 Urban context which includes standards related to front, side and rear setbacks, walls on boundaries, site coverage, tree canopy, access, and front fences.

 Liveability which includes standards related to dwelling diversity, building entry and circulation, private and communal open space, room sizes/dimensions, daylight and ventilation, storage, and accessibility features.

 External amenity which includes standards related to building separation within a site, light courts, overshadowing and overlooking.

 Sustainability which includes standards related to energy efficiency targets, permeability and stormwater management and waste/recycling.

The draft mid-rise residential code offers different options for some of the proposed planning rules. For example, there is a choice about street setbacks of whether to have a sheer six storey wall, a four-storey wall with the upper floors set back, or to match the setback of existing buildings nearby. Other parts of the code have mirrored standards for townhouses from Clause 55, or apartment buildings from Clause 58.

Four to six storey mid-rise apartment buildings must continue to meet the height controls within the existing residential zones. In Merri-bek this would mean that mid-rise apartments would be possible in the Mixed Use Zone (MUZ), Residential Growth Zone (RGZ), or the proposed new Housing Choice and Transport Zone (HCTZ), which are mostly adjacent to activity centres.

The State Government has recently been undertaking consultation on Activity Centres planning reforms, to introduce new planning controls in and around the Upfield Corridor in Brunswick and Coburg (referred to as the Merri-bek Cluster). It is expected that the ‘catchment’ areas around these Activity Centre will be included with the new Housing Choice and Transport Zone, which provides for the following building heights:

 Inner catchment: buildings up to six storeys on lots over 1,000m² with a 20-metre frontage and up to four storeys elsewhere.

 Outer catchment: buildings up to four storeys on lots larger than 1,000m² with a 20m frontage and up to three storeys elsewhere.

The draft mid-rise residential standards are intended to guide the more intense housing outcomes within the catchment areas around Activity Centres.

## 3. Issues

### The State Government is seeking feedback on the draft standards for mid-rise residential developments. The supplied materials are technical in nature and propose some different options for some of the standards. This report provides high-level feedback on some of the identified key concerns, with Attachment 1 providing analysis on the more technical aspects of the draft standards for mid-rise residential developments.

### Community impact

### A longstanding and celebrated attribute of the planning system in Victoria has been the community’s right to seek a review before VCAT of a planning proposal that impacts them. The draft standards for mid-rise residential developments, are proposing to reduce VCAT review rights when developments meet certain standards. At the same time, the planning controls that provide protections to existing residents are being weakened. For example, the current rule about building shadowing at the equinox would change to a simpler rule requiring buildings to be set back 4.5 metres from the south boundary. The reason given is that this setback balances existing resident comfort and development feasibility, while leaving space for trees and landscaping. However, it is not yet clear if this change will protect residents as well as the current rules do under Clause 55.

### As the wider community has not been consulted, this part of the reform raises concerns about worsening living conditions for residents and loss of VCAT review rights. It is important that the that VCAT review rights are not removed and the current amenity protections for residential zoned land are not reduced without a comprehensive consultation and thorough planning process which enable the views of the community to be heard and considered, prior to any decisions being made.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

### The draft standards for mid-rise residential developments as currently drafted will result in planning applications that meet deem to comply standards no longer being considered against the various other planning policies in Victorian Planning Schemes. This means Council has no opportunity to apply planning policy, including Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) objectives which set objectives for best-practice ESD.

### This shift is concerning for apartment buildings of four to six storeys. These buildings typically have greater environmental impacts and more opportunities for energy and water savings, so they should be setting higher, rather than lower ESD standards. Reducing ESD requirements reduces the sustainability, affordability, and resilience of new homes, undermining longstanding Merri-bek City Council and planning industry efforts to lift standards for healthier, more environmentally responsible development. It is considered that bare minimum ESD requirements are counterproductive, especially as Victoria seeks to build more apartments in a warming climate were energy and comfort performance matters most.

### Environmental risk

### The draft standards for mid-rise residential developments are designed to operate as a standalone, complete provision in Victorian Planning Schemes. This proposed operation prevents Council from considering environmental risks that may not be addressed by zoning or overlay controls. For example, if a site is zoned residential but has a past use like a petrol station, a permit could be granted without any assessment of potential land contamination or the need for remediation. This means vital planning permit conditions to protect future residents could not be legally imposed. Similarly, hazards like localised flooding may be ignored if not picked up by an overlay. The deemed to comply standards strip away the precaution needed for safeguarding community health and environmental quality.

### Design quality

### Introducing requirements for design quality for mid-rise residential developments, is consistent with Council’s ambition for the delivery of high-quality housing, as detailed in both the Council Plan and the Merri-bek Planning Scheme. It is considered that design quality is a fundamental ingredient in creating homes and neighbourhoods that people genuinely want to live in, helping to ensure new developments have lasting value and leave a legacy we can be proud of.

### It is positive that Victoria’s mid-rise building standards include a specific design quality requirement, but more work and detail is needed. Good design goes beyond selecting durable external materials and is something that must be considered holistically, from layout and amenity to details like orientation and landscaping. Design quality is not easily measured or reduced to a checklist, so it is essential for the draft standards to clearly explain what constitutes good design, and how these elements will be assessed fairly and objectively. More detail is needed before Councils, the community, or industry can fully understand or comment on how a design quality provision will support better outcomes in practice.

**Urban forest**

### The draft standards for mid-rise residential developments, propose ten per cent site area tree canopy cover for sites under 1,000 square metres and 20 per cent for larger sites, with minimum tree sizes and specific deep soil requirements. The intention of this standard is to have apartment buildings within landscape settings which is a positive aspiration given that urban apartment living should contribute to greener, cooler, and healthier neighbourhoods.

### However, it is unclear how these standards will interact with requirements such as Clause 52.37 (Canopy Trees) and Clause 12.06-1S (Sustainable Environment) in the Planning Scheme, which set additional or sometimes stricter expectations for tree planting, biodiversity and urban greening. Without clearer guidance, the standards risk unintended weakening of tree outcomes. Further work is needed to ensure the achievement of enhanced canopy cover is central to achieving liveability, sustainability, and resilience goals, with enforceable tree targets to address these challenges.

### 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 has regard to existing Merri-bek policy and adopted strategies and the importance of public participation in the planning process.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

There is currently targeted consultation with developers, the planning and design industry, peak bodies and Councils. This includes the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and the Council Alliance for a Sustainable Built Environment (CASBE). Feedback from this process will shape the final form of the mid-rise residential standards and inform the Department of Transport and Planning’s advice to the Victorian Government, who will make the final decision.

Council’s submission includes that the Department of Transport and Planning should undertake wider consultation with the community.

The Public Transparency Principles outlined in Section 58 of the *Local Government Act 2020*, include several principles including not releasing information if it would be contrary to the public interest. **Attachment 2** is the draft mid-rise standards, which are confidential as it details more permissive planning controls, which may lead to land speculation.

## 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 submissions will be met within existing budgets. There are no financial implications to action this resolution.

## 7. Implementation

Once endorsed by Council, the submission will be lodged with the Department of Transport and Planning by the Urban Planning Unit, via an online portal.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Submission Mid-Rise Standard | D25/513630 |  |
| **2** | Mid-Rise Standards Overview and Consultation Draft, August 2025  *Pursuant to section 3(1)(c) of the Local Government Act 2020 this attachment has been designated as confidential because it relates to land use planning information, being information that if prematurely released is likely to encourage speculation in land values.* | D25/529998 |  |

7.12 Connolly Avenue safety improvements

**Director Place and Environment, Pene Winslade**

**City Design and Economy**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes the findings of the community engagement and thanks the community for their participation.

2. Endorses the updated concept plan and notes the implementation plan for those works.

3. Refers the proposed design and project to be considered in the budget process for delivery in the 2026-27 financial year.

4. Notes the advocacy that has been undertaken on a signalised pedestrian crossing on Elizabeth Street.

**REPORT**

**Executive summary**

Connolly Avenue is a residential local street in Coburg North, bordered by Goff Street, Elizabeth Street, Murray Road and the Merri Creek. The area includes Newlands Senior Citizens Centre and the Barry Beckett Children's Centre. Numerous road safety concerns have been raised over the years relating to pedestrian safety at the intersection with Murray Road, vehicle speeds travelling through the neighbourhood, and the volume of traffic using the neighbourhood as a rat run.

As part of the area wide 40km/h roll out on all local streets in Merri-bek, the speed limit was reduced from 50km/h to 40km/h in early 2024. Traffic counts were undertaken 12 months after the speed limit was reduced, and it was found that speeds on Connolly Avenue were still well above the new posted speed limit, often 10km/h above.

In February 2025, Council resolved to receive a report detailing potential solutions to these road safety concerns that have been discussed with the community. Officers investigated the issues and developed a draft concept plan with proposed treatments. The draft concept plan was exhibited for community engagement between 25 August 2025 and 14 September 2025, and 85 people provided input on the plans.

Following consultation, the concept plans were updated to include more speed humps and some other minor changes. The updated concept plan includes:

 Two raised crossings

 Six speed humps

 Three new kerb ramps

 Kerb buildouts

 Signage and line marking improvements

 Advocacy for a new signalised pedestrian crossing

Some of the proposed works, including three speed humps on Connolly Street (west) between Meadow Street and Murray Road, and signage and line marking improvements to the Goff Street and Connolly Avenue intersection, can be delivered in the current financial year with existing allocated budgets.

The remaining recommended treatments proposed for future financial years will need to be considered as part of the Capital Works Program from 2026/27 or subject to external funding.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Improve Safety At Both Intersections Of Connolly Avenue And Murray Road, North Coburg** – 12 February 2025

*That Council:*

*1. Receives a report by October 2025 presenting potential solutions including traffic calming measures that could be implemented to resolve the dangerous conditions that exist at both intersections of Connolly Avenue and Murray Road in North Coburg, having discussed the solutions with local stakeholders and residents and providing an indication of costs that could be referred to future budget processes.*

*2. Investigates the delivery of immediate solutions, to help make the area safer, sooner.*

*3. Advocates to the state for the delivery of the proposed pedestrian crossing at Elizabeth and Goff Street.*

## 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. Investigating safety improvements to the Connolly Avenue neighbourhood 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.

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

### Council Plan 2025-2029

The Council Plan 2025–2029 sets out Council’s strategic direction for delivering on the Community Vision: “*Merri-bek leads, and leaves no one behind”*. Transport is addressed under the Beautiful and Liveable City theme, which aims to ensure streets and public spaces are safe, pleasant, and easy to use so everyone can enjoy and be proud of where they live.

Key actions that align with this report include:

 Keeping public places and streets well-maintained, safe, and inviting for community use.

 Fixing and improving streets and footpaths to make them more friendly for walking and riding.

 Encouraging walking, cycling, and scooting – especially for getting to school.

 Making it easier and safer to use public transport to move around.

The Moving Around Merri-bek Action Plan is a key mechanism to deliver on these outcomes and ensure that transport investments reflect the priorities of the Merri-bek community.

## 2. Background

Connolly Avenue in Coburg is in a residential area that forms part of the Newlands Estate housing development. The project area investigated is bordered by Elizabeth Street, Murray Road, the Merri Creek, and Goff Street (See Figure 1). In recent years, road safety concerns have been raised periodically with Council, predominantly centred around the intersections with Murray Road, the area being used as a rat-run, and the speed of vehicles using local streets.



Figure 1. Project area map.

In 2024 the speed limit of all streets within the Connolly Avenue neighbourhood was reduced to 40km/h as part of Council’s *Safer Speeds on Local Roads rollout.* Traffic surveys were undertaken 12 months after the new speed zones were installed, and it was found that the speeds remained significantly higher than the posted speed limits.

The eastern intersection of Connolly Avenue and Murray Road, which is adjacent to the Newlands Senior Citizens Centre and the Barry Beckett Children's Centre, is very wide. This intersection design does not adequately slow vehicles when turning from Murray Road into the Connolly Avenue neighbourhood and is also difficult for people walking to cross because of its excessive width. These issues are exacerbated by the fact that older and younger people use this area.

Following the Council resolution in February 2025 to investigate solutions to these road safety concerns, officers developed draft concept plans with proposed improvements to address these issues. The draft concept plan included treatments that Council can deliver in the short and medium term, as well as other longer-term solutions that would be reliant on external funding or delivery. The treatments identified for Council to deliver between 2025 and 2027 are:

 Narrowing the Connolly Avenue (east) and Murray Road intersection, and installing a raised threshold.

 Installing speed humps on Connolly Avenue (west) between Meadow Street and Murray Road.

 A new kerb ramp from Connolly Avenue to the Merri Creek Trail.

 New ‘give way’ signage and line marking at Goff Street and Connolly Avenue intersection.

The treatments identified that require external funding or external delivery are:

 A raised threshold on Connolly Ave (west) and Murray Road intersection.

 A raised pedestrian operated signal over Elizabeth Street between Goff Street and Raymond Street.

The draft concept plan was exhibited for community feedback between 25 August 2025 and 14 September 2025.

## 3. Issues

### Community engagement results

There were 85 survey responses, and a submission from local community advocacy group Safer Walking and Riding for Murray Road. Respondents were asked how supportive of the proposed treatments they were overall, and then they were asked whether they had any feedback on the proposal.

Figure 2 below shows the level of support for the project amongst respondents, with 94 per cent stating that they were ‘very supportive’ or ‘supportive’. Of the three respondents who were either unsupportive or very unsupportive, all said they wanted to see more done to improve safety in the area than what was proposed.

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Figure 2. Level of support for draft concept plan amongst respondents

The qualitative feedback was analysed and categorised thematically. The most common themes in the responses were:

 Request for more speed humps (mentioned by 24 per cent of respondents)

 Requests for safety improvements to Murray Road (22 per cent)

 Requests to address Murray Road / Outlook Rd / Connolly Avenue intersection (11 per cent)

 Requests for road narrowing and chicanes (11 per cent)

 Requests for road closures and restrictions on through movement of vehicles (6 per cent)

 General support for the project (11 per cent

Other suggestions and feedback raised included parking controls, new pedestrian crossings, faster implementation, temporary and interim treatments, safety improvements to Elizabeth Street; and further speed reductions. Only one participant explicitly opposed the kerb build outs proposed for the Connolly Avenue (east) and Murray Road intersection.

### Updated Concept Plan

Following consultation, officers reviewed the draft concept plans to ensure they are aligned with community expectations and have made some updates. The updated concept plan can be found in Attachment 1, and is summarised below and in Figure 3:

 Narrowing the Connolly Avenue (east) and Murray Road intersection, and installing a raised threshold

 Installing speed humps on Connolly Avenue (west) between Meadow Street and Murray Road

 A new kerb ramp from Connolly Avenue to the Merri Creek Trail

 New ‘give way’ signage and line marking at Goff Street and Connolly Avenue intersection, and realigning the kerb ramps to align with the pedestrian desire line along Connolly Avenue

 Installing a speed hump on Meadow Street between Grey Street and Rasmussen Court

 Installing speed humps on Connolly Avenue (west) between Meadow Street and Goff Street, with one on the approach to the new shared path kerb ramp

 A raised threshold on Connolly Ave (west) and Murray Road intersection, to be delivered if external funding is secured

 A raised pedestrian operated signal over Elizabeth Street between Goff Street and Raymond Street, that Council is to advocate to the state government for Department of Transport & Planning (DTP) to deliver

A map of a city

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Figure 3. Updated concept plan

The changes to the concept plan following consultation are:

 Three additional speed humps, one on Meadow Street and two further south on Connolly Avenue (west)

 Realigning the kerb ramps at Goff Street and Connolly Avenue intersection so that they follow the pedestrian desire line

Officers also investigated more significant changes to the neighbourhood to stop the rat running through the area. This included a traffic filter on Goff Street to completely restrict vehicular through traffic, and an ‘exit-only’ treatment at the intersection of Meadow Street and Connolly Avenue.

This is considered a relatively cost-effective solution, that would nearly entirely limit the rat running in the area, without significantly impacting any resident’s access. This type of treatment would require a much lengthier community engagement process, a hearing of submissions, and a trial, which would take multiple years to deliver. This would require greater resourcing costs, but may be considered in future projects.

At this time, officers are confident that the treatments identified in the updated concept plan will have a positive impact on traffic volumes and speed in the neighbourhood.

### Advocacy

The primary advocacy item recommended in the updated concept plan is a raised, signalised crossing over Elizabeth Street, between Goff Street and Raymond Street. This treatment was well supported by participants of the community engagement.

Elizabeth Street is managed by the Department of Transport and Planning, and the delivery of the project would need to be led entirely by DTP. Officers have worked with officers at Darebin City Council to identify a preferred location and type of crossing, and Darebin has previously developed a concept design. Advocacy has been ongoing, and the item forms part of Council’s advocacy priorities for the 2026 state election. Officers are again writing to Ministers and DTP to request delivery.

Officers will seek external funding to assist with the delivery of improvements in the updated concept plan. The proposed raised threshold at Connolly Avenue (west) and Murray Road presents a good opportunity for external funding through a road safety grant.

A number of participants also raised concerns and suggestions for safety and accessibility improvements to Murray Road, which is outside of the scope of this project. This feedback included requests for speed limit reductions on Murray Road, a reduction of the number of travel lanes in both directions, and safer crossing points. Improving safety on Murray Road as part of Council’s road safety advocacy is an advocacy priority for Council for the 2026 state election, and this advocacy will include safer speeds and safer road design to complement safer speed.

Some participants raised concerns related to the Outlook Road and Murray Road intersection, opposite Connolly Avenue, requesting signalisation of the intersection. Again, this was considered beyond the scope of the current project and could be explored through future advocacy to the state government. Any proposed treatment at this intersection should consider potential impacts of inducing additional traffic demand to the local road network.

### Community impact

The recommendations of this report are intended to contribute towards improving safety and liveability of the streets within the Connolly Avenue neighbourhood, and to mitigate the negative impacts of through traffic. Before any changes are made to the street, all impacted residents and businesses will be notified of the proposed changes and have an opportunity to have any concerns heard.

### 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 Council’s Transport Strategy, “Moving Around Merri-bek”. Council aims to reduce transport emissions by providing infrastructure that enables people to use zero emission transport modes such as walking and cycling.

By improving the safety of the Connolly Avenue neighbourhood, it is expected that it will provide opportunities for more people to choose low and zero emission transport modes for their local trips and support community efforts to reduce their transport emissions.

### 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 assessment has found that the recommendation will not have any adverse impacts any persons human rights. It is anticipated that through the delivery of these improvements to the Connolly Avenue neighbourhood, the right to freedom of movement (section 12) is expected to be improved for people, particularly those walking in the area.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement*.*

**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. Primarily, this project impacts the residents within the project area. Additionally, consideration needed to be given to the rights of older people and younger people, given the proximity of the Barry Beckett Children’s Centre and the Newlands Senior Citizens Centre.

All residents and owners within the project area were sent letters providing details of the project and inviting feedback. Officers reached out directly to Barry Beckett Children’s Centre to invite them to participate in the consultation and to share the information with the families and community connected to the centre.

### Community engagement

Community engagement on the draft concept plans for safety improvements to Connolly Avenue was undertaken from 25 August 2025 until 14 September 2025. Information about the project and the concept plans was exhibiting on the Conversations Merri-bek website, and was also mailed to all residents and property owners in this project area. During that time, 85 of surveys were completed, including online surveys and hard copies.

On Saturday 6 September, officers ran an in-person session at the Newlands Senior Citizens Centre where people could come and ask questions about the project and provide feedback on the proposal. Approximately 27 people attended, including families with young children, older residents, and people caring for older people.

### Communications

All residents and property owners in the project area were sent letters containing information about the project, the draft concept plans, and details on how to provide feedback on the project. 3208 emails were sent to people who have registered for updates for transport projects on Conversations Merri-bek inviting them to participate in the consultation. An active community advocacy group, Safer Walking and Riding for Murray Road, were also directly notified of the consultation and invited to submit feedback.

## 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

Whilst some elements of the updated concept plan can be delivered with the existing Council budget, the officer recommendation will have financial implications for future financial years.

For the current financial year (2025/26), the design of treatments identified within the updated concept plan will be done using the existing council budget. The proposed speed humps on Connolly Avenue (west) between Meadow Street and Murray Road have been budgeted for through the 40km/h roll out program and are ready to be delivered. Similarly, new give way line marking, signs, and pram ramps at Goff Street and Connolly Avenue can be installed with exiting budget this financial year.

The remaining works identified in the updated concept plan, which have not been included in Capital Works Program forecasts, are estimated to total $250,000. This includes a raised threshold with kerb build outs, three additional speed humps, and a new pram ramp for the shard path. As such, it is recommended that these treatments are assessed and considered along with all other projects within the Capital Works Program for 2026-27 financial year unless external grant funding can be acquired before that time.

## 7. Implementation

Subject to a Council decision, works can commence on designing and delivering different elements of the proposal immediately. Officers will monitor the works installed in 25/26 financial year the following financial year to evaluate impact on traffic speed and volume.

The implementation plan for this project would be as follows:

**2025-26 financial year:**

1. Notify participants of the community engagement of the Council decision and thank them for their feedback.

2. Install three speed humps on Connolly Ave (west) between Meadow Street and Murray Road.

3. Design a new raised threshold with kerb build outs at Murray Road and Connolly Avenue (east).

4. Design and install new give way line marking, signs, and kerb ramps at Goff Street and Connolly Avenue intersection.

5. Design a raised threshold at Murray Road and Connolly Avenue (west).

**2026-27 financial year, subject to consideration in the 2026/26 budget process:**

6. Install two speed humps on Connolly Avenue (West) between Meadow Street and Goff Street.

7. Install one speed hump on Meadow Street between Connolly Avenue west and Connolly Avenue east.

8. Install new kerb ramp up to the Merri Creek Trail approximately 40m west of Goff Street.

9. Install raised threshold and kerb build outs at Connolly Avenue (east) and Murray Road.

10. Apply for external funding to support delivery if opportunities arise.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Connolly Avenue safety improvements - updated concept map - September 2025 | D25/479404 |  |

7.13 Advisory Committees - Appointment of Members

**Director Business Transformation, Sue Vujcevic**

**Governance and Strategy**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Appoints the community members listed in confidential attachment 1 to this report titled Advisory Committees and Reference Groups.

2. Notes the appointments to the Advisory Committees and Reference Groups will sunset on 30 June following the next General Election.

3. Endorses postponing the appointment of the vacant positions on the First Peoples Advisory Committee and Disability Reference Group to the November Council meeting.

4. Notes that all applicants will be contacted to thank them for their application and receive notification of the outcome of their application and the final Terms of Reference made available via the Merri-bek City Council website.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

At its meeting on 13 August 2025, Council endorsed the establishment of the following Advisory Committees and Reference Groups to support the delivery of its strategic directions and objectives:

a) Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience Advisory Committee

b) Health, Wellbeing and Social Inclusion Advisory Committee; supported by the following Reference Groups:

i) Gender Equality Reference Group

ii) LGBTIQA+ Reference Group (established as part of the LGBTIQA+ Action Plan)

iii) Disability Reference Group

iv) Older Persons Reference Group

c) Liveability Advisory Committee; supported by a Strategic Transport Reference Group

d) Merri-bek Arts Advisory Committee

e) First Peoples Advisory Committee.

The Community Engagement Policy was adopted by Council on the 9 December 2020, superseding Council’s Community Engagement and Public Participation Policy 2018. It supports Council’s integrated strategic planning and reporting framework required under the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) and meets Council’s legislative requirements for community engagement which is a key focus for local government.

Council’s Advisory Committees and Reference Groups are an important network of stakeholders who are regularly engaged to provide detailed feedback on Council’s operations and decisions that may affect specific communities. Council’s Advisory Committees and Reference Groups play a key role in providing early advice to Council about significant strategies and policies that impact the community.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Council Advisory Committee Review –** 13 August 2025

*That Council:*

*1. Endorses the proposal to establish the following Advisory Committees and reference groups to support the delivery of its strategic directions and objectives, together with relevant Terms of References as provided in Attachment 1:*

*a) Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience Advisory Committee.*

*b) Health, Wellbeing and Social Inclusion Advisory Committee; supported by the following Reference Groups:*

*i) Gender Equality Reference Group*

*ii) LGBTIQA+ Reference Group (established as part of the LGBTIQA+ Action Plan)*

*iii) Disability Reference Group*

*iv) Older Persons Reference Group.*

*c) Liveability Advisory Committee; supported by a Strategic Transport Reference Group.*

*d) Merri-bek Arts Advisory Committee*

*e) First Peoples Advisory Committee.*

*2. Initiates a public engagement process to invite applications for membership for the newly established Council Advisory Committees.*

*3. Receives a report at its October 2025 Council meeting detailing the outcomes of the application process and appoint members and Councillors accordingly.*

**Councillor Appointments to Portfolios, Internal Committees, Advisory Committees and other External Bodies** **–** 17 November 2021

*That Council:*

*…*

*3. Appoints Councillors to internal, advisory, network and external committees for the 2021/2022 Mayoral year as follows:*

*…*

*b) Advisory Committees*

*Sustainable Transport Advisory Committee: Cr Conlan*

*Environmental Sustainability Advisory Committee: Cr Panopoulos*

*Human Rights and Inclusion Advisory Committee: Cr Bolton and Cr Panopoulos*

*Moreland Arts Advisory Committee: Cr Riley*

*…*

**Review of Council’s Advisory Committees –** 11 August 2021

*That Council:*

*1. Note the findings of a recent review undertaken of Council’s Advisory Committees.*

*2. Endorse the proposal to establish the following Advisory Committees by November 2021:*

*a) Sustainable Transport Advisory Committee*

*b) Environmental Sustainability Advisory Committee*

*c) Human Rights and Inclusion Advisory Committee*

*d) Moreland Arts Advisory Committee*

*3. Endorse the proposal for Council officers to review Reference Groups and Working Groups with a view to refreshing or establishing these by December 2021.*

*4. Endorse that Council officers implement process improvements to enable better quality coordination of Advisory Committees.*

## 1. Policy Context

The review of Advisory Committees and Reference Groups and subsequent establishment of them at the 13 August 2025 Council meeting, enhances Council’s commitment to integrated strategic planning and community engagement, as required under the Act.

The establishment of five Advisory Committees, each aligned to a Strategic Direction within the Council Plan 2025–2029, seeks to ensure community input and advice sought, is aligned with Council’s key priorities, directions and increases Council’s strategic oversight.

In accordance with Merri-bek City Council’s Community Engagement Policy and Governance Rules, Advisory Committees and Reference Groups are established by Council to provide early input on related policy, strategy or major operational proposals.

Consistent with Council’s Community Engagement Policy, Advisory Committees and Reference Groups are an important network of stakeholders to regularly engage to obtain detailed feedback on the ways our operations and decisions may affect specific communities.

Council’s Governance Rules provide the ethical framework for the operation of Council and apply to every meeting of Council, including Advisory Committees established through Council. As such, each Advisory Committee is established in accordance with a framework and terms of reference.

Subject to the *Local Government Act 2020*, the Council may appoint any number or combination of its members and officers to be on an Advisory Committee to consider and make a recommendation to the Council upon any matter, but no recommendation of any Advisory Committee shall have any force or effect until approved by the Council.

Advisory Committees are guided by the community’s aspirations captured in the Community Vision 2025-2035. They also provide relevant input to support Council deliver its 4-year Council Plan 2025-2029 and key policies.

## 2. Background

At the Council Meeting on 13 August 2025, Council endorsed the establishment of the following Advisory Committees and Reference Groups, and approved the commencement of a public engagement process to invite applications for membership:

1. Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience Advisory Committee

2. Health, Wellbeing and Social Inclusion Advisory Committee; supported by the following Reference Groups:

a) Gender Equality Reference Group

b) LGBTIQA+ Reference Group (established as part of the LGBTIQA+ Action Plan)

c) Disability Reference Group

d) Older Persons Reference Group

3. Liveability Advisory Committee; supported by a Strategic Transport Reference Group

4. Merri-bek Arts Advisory Committee

5. First Peoples Advisory Committee.

At that meeting, Council also resolved that a report would be presented at the 8 October 2025 Council Meeting, outlining the outcomes of the application process and recommending the appointment of community members (and Councillors) to the newly established Advisory Committees and Reference Groups. Councillor appointments to these groups will be established at the upcoming 19th November Council meeting.

## 3. Issues

### Application and selection process

An extensive and inclusive call for applications was carried out over 4 weeks, from Friday, 15 August 2025 to Friday, 12 September 2025.

The opportunity was featured on the Conversations Merri-bek platform via the dedicated page: [Advisory Committee and Reference Group Expressions of Interest | Conversations Merri-bek](https://conversations.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/advisory-committee-and-reference-group-eoi)

The campaign received a total of 215 applications. Overall, the campaign attracted a strong level of diversity across applicants, contributing to broad representation for the advisory groups.

The recruitment campaign was successful for recommending members for 8 of the 10 groups. However, six positions remain vacant on the First Peoples Advisory Committee, and two positions are yet to be filled on the Disability Reference Group.

To allow additional time for further engagement and to encourage additional submissions, the Convenors of the First Peoples Advisory Committee and the Disability Reference Group have requested that the appointment of the further six community members to the First Peoples Advisory Committee and the two remaining positions on the Disability Reference Group be deferred to the November Council meeting.

The following shortlisting and selection process was followed by Council officers:

1. Officers assessed whether the applications received reflect the diversity of the Merri-bek community and its priority groups. A quantitative analysis was conducted to determine whether each group received too many, too few, or an appropriate number of applications.

2. For groups with a high volume of applications, candidates were assessed against the selection criteria, scored out of three, and shortlisted accordingly. In addition to this quantitative scoring, convenors completed a qualitative assessment to evaluate the suitability of applicants based on experience, alignment with group objectives, and potential contribution. Where appropriate, applicants who were not recommended to be selected for their nominated group were considered for other groups they had indicated a willingness to join. Convenors met to discuss and identify candidates who may be suitable for reassignment to these groups.

3. For groups with fewer applications, these were also rated against the selection criteria, ranked and shortlisted. Overflow from other groups were considered to ensure appropriate numbers and representation. Convenors met to discuss and identify candidates suitable for reassignment to these groups.

As a result, a broad range of community members have been recommended to be selected to each Advisory Committee or Reference Group with recommended applicants listed in Confidential **Attachment 1**. These members bring a wide range of perspectives and lived experiences that will enrich Council’s engagement and decision-making processes.

**Advisory Committees and Reference Group Term**

The appointments to Advisory Committees and Reference Groups will conclude on 30 June following the next general election.

**Councillor Appointments to the Advisory Committees and Reference Groups**

Each year, Council appoints Councillors to Portfolios, Internal Committees, Advisory Committees, Reference Groups, and other External Bodies.

### Appointments to Portfolios, Internal Committees, Advisory Committees, Reference Groups, and other External Bodies for the 2025/26 Mayoral Year will occur at the Council Meeting (Mayoral Election) to be held Wednesday, 19 November 2025.

### Community impact

The establishment of the Advisory Committees and Reference Groups will enable a focused contribution from the various Committees and improved engagement between council and the community. The overarching result expected will be improved community engagement and Council decision making, resulting in positive outcomes for the Merri-bek community.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

### The Advisory Committees and Reference Groups, particularly the Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience Advisory Committee, are guided by the community’s aspirations captured in the Community Vision and provide relevant input to support Council to deliver its 4-year Council Plan including priorities for addressing the climate emergency and environmental sustainability.

### Economic sustainability implications

The Advisory Committees and Reference Groups will be able to contribute and provide relevant input to support Council to deliver its 4-year Council Plan including priorities for addressing economic sustainability.

### Legal and risk considerations

The Advisory Committee and Reference Groups Appointment of Members is in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2020* and Council’s Community Engagement Policy.

### Human Rights Consideration

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

Advisory Committees and Reference Groups, the community and those affected by decisions and actions will continue to have the opportunity to contribute to decision making.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

The community were engaged through an Expression of Interest featured on Conversation Merri-bek website.

To broaden reach and accessibility:

 The webpage was shared via email with 290 members of the broader community program network and 1,000 individuals who had previously expressed interest in joining the deliberative panel earlier in the year.

 The campaign was promoted on Facebook and in Merri-bek News.

 Paper copies of the application form were made available at customer service centres and libraries, with translations provided upon request.

 Drop-in sessions were hosted to support older community members in completing their applications.

 Posters were displayed in key community locations to raise awareness.

**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. In this regard, persons within the Merri-bek community have had an opportunity to apply to become a member of an Advisory Committee or Reference Group.

### Communications

All applicants will be thanked for their application and notified of the outcome of their application following Council’s decision. The adopted Terms of Reference for Advisory Committees and Reference Groups will be made available via the Merri-bek City Council 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 Resource Implications

The appointment of various members to the Advisory Committees and Reference Groups have no financial or resources implications as they are contained within the existing budget allocations.

Furthermore, First Peoples Advisory Committee members will be paid $100 per meeting to recognise the multiple responsibilities First Nations people have to their cultural obligations both through their work roles and wider community responsibilities. It also acknowledges and values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members’ cultural knowledge, advice and guidance.

The Community Co-Chair will receive a higher sitting fee to reflect the increased responsibilities and standing of this role.

## 7. Implementation

Pending Council endorsement of community members to the Advisory Committees and Reference Groups, all applicants will be thanked and notified of the outcome of their application.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Confidential - Advisory Committees and Reference Groups  *Pursuant to section 3(1)(f) of the Local Government Act 2020 this attachment 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.* | D25/525444 |  |

7.14 Road Management Plan

**Director City Infrastructure, Anita Curnow**

**Capital Works Planning and Delivery**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Adopts the amended Road Management Plan at Attachment 1 to this report prepared in accordance with the requirements of Division 5 of the *Road Management Act 2004.*

2. Publishes a notice of the adoption of the Road Management Plan in the *Victoria Government Gazette* and a local daily newspaper as required by Section 55 of the *Road Management Act 2004* stating:

a) The Road Management Plan has been adopted on 8 October 2025; and

b) That a copy of the Road Management Plan may be inspected or obtained from Council’s website or customer service centers.

3. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to arrange for edits to the document for presentation and clarity, without making any material change ahead of publishing the final Road Management Plan.

**REPORT**

## Executive Summary

The *Road Management Act 2004* (the Act) requires each municipal Council to review its Road Management Plan by 31 October in the year following general election of Council.

Council’s Road Management Plan was reviewed after internal and external consultation pursuant to Section 54(5) of the Act and Section 8(3) of the *Road Management (General) Regulations 2016* (the Regulation).

In accordance with the Regulation, a summary report of the findings as well as the proposed amendments to the Road Management Plan was presented at the August 2025 Council meeting to seek endorsement for broader public consultation.

Public notice was published in *Victoria* *Government Gazette*, *The Age* newspaper and feedback was also sought through Conversations Merri-bek webpage in accordance with Section 10 of the Regulation.

Some 33 submissions were received through Conversations Merri-bek webpage, which closed on 18 September 2025, and it is therefore, proposed to adopt the revised Road Management Plan (**Attachment 1**) based on the outcome of the review process.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Road Management Plan Review and Proposed Amendment** – 13 August 2025

*That Council:*

*1. Endorses the proposed amendments to the Road Management Plan as outlined in Attachment 1, in accordance with Section 41 of the Road Management Act 2004.*

*2. Publishes a notice of the proposed amendments to the Road Management Plan in the Victoria Government Gazette and a local newspaper in accordance with the provisions of the Road Management (General) Regulations 2016 stating:*

*a) The purpose and general purport of the proposed amendments to the Road Management Plan.*

*b) What road infrastructure or road related infrastructure or classes of roads or pathways will be affected by the proposed amendments.*

*c) Where the written report can be obtained or inspected that summaries the proposed amendment.*

*d) That any person can make a submission in respect of the proposed amendments within 28 days of the public notice being published.*

e) *Those submissions can be made through Conversations Merri-bek webpage or in hard copy.*

## 1. Policy Context

Where a Council has adopted a Road Management Plan, the *Road Management (General) Regulations 2016* require a review of the plan within the period referred to in section 90(3) of the *Local Government Act 2020*. As such, a review of the current Plan is required by 31 October 2025.

The Road Management Plan defines a minimum level of service for Council’s maintenance of the local road and pathway network.

The Municipal Association of *Victoria* (MAV) circulated a template identifying benchmark intervention standards and response times. This serves as a general guide to all councils.

## 2. Background

The purpose of the Road Management Plan is to demonstrate that Council, as the road authority, is responsibly managing all the road and pathways assets under its control. The plan must specify the standards and inspection regimes required to manage civil liability, which are reasonable and achievable.

In consideration of Section 9(1) of the Regulations, Council undertook a review of the Road Management Plan to:

Ensure that the standards in relation to, and the priorities to be given to, the inspection, maintenance and repair of roads and classes of road to which the plan applies are appropriate.

The internal review was undertaken by Council officers who are responsible for development and delivery of the Road Management Plan in consultation with other stakeholders who have responsibility in the areas of accessibility, ageing well and other transport functions. In reviewing the Road Management Plan, the following were considered:

 Current activities and performance in relation to meeting the requirements of the Road Management Plan

 Management systems, operational objectives and maintenance standards

 Benchmarking of intervention standards across similar metro Councils and recommendations from Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV)

 Feedback from user groups

In accordance with the Regulation, a report summarising the findings and describing proposed amendments was presented to the 13 August 2025 Council meeting. Council resolved to support the review of the Road Management Plan and publish a notice in *Victoria* *Government Gazette*, local newspaper and feedback was sought through Council’s conversations Merri-bek webpage.

The plan has been finalised after considering the feedback received during the consultation period.

## 3. Issues

In accordance with Section 10 of the Regulation, Council gave notice in the *Victoria* *Government Gazette* and in *The Age* newspaper as well as Council’s conversations Merri-bek webpage. The notice stated:

 The purpose and general purport of the review of the Road Management Plan

 The road and pathways infrastructure or classes of roads and pathways affected by the proposed amendments

 That a written report summarising the findings and conclusions of the review and proposed amendments could be inspected at Council office and through Council’s website.

 That any person could make submission in respect of the proposed amendment in writing or through Conversations Merri-bek webpage during the submission period (28 days).

### Community impact

There were 33 submissions received during the submission period, which closed 18 September 2025. Questions were tailored in Conversations Merri-bek page to seek feedback on a proposed amendment.

The table below shows the survey feedback.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Road Management Plan feature** | **Yes (%)** | **No (%)** | **Unsure (%)** | **Did Not Respond (%)** |
| Support for more frequent scheduled inspections including night inspection | 88 | 6 | 6 | – |
| Support for earlier intervention of potholes, depressions and deformations | 97 | 0 | 3 | – |
| Support for quicker response times | 82 | 9 | 6 | 3 |
| Support for new maintenance items identified | 85 | 6 | 9 | – |
| Support for inclusion of new intervention for footpath trip hazard (25mm–30mm) | 64 | 21 | 15 | – |
| Support for proposed lowering of service levels | 30 | 33 | 36 | – |

There was majority support for all proposed amendments with improved service levels. Support was more divided on the small number of items with a reduction of service levels. A further analysis of the verbatim comments on the reason for not supporting are summarised below:

 Lack of clarity on the definition of some defect types (unevenness vs trip hazard)

 General disagreement on lowering of any services

 Disagreement on removal of level 2 inspection for bridges from Road Management Plan (covered through asset inspection for valuation purposes).

In addition, the verbatim comments highlighted some confusion about the proposed new footpath trip hazard intervention. Response times for this item are proposed at 6 months, whereas in the current plan there is no requirement for any rectification of defects in the 25mm to 30mm range. Therefore, this is an improvement rather than a reduction in service levels, but it has been interpreted that way by some. This may also explain the lower level of support (64%) for this item compared to other improvements proposed in the Road Management Plan.

After consideration of these comments, no further amendments to the Road Management Plan are proposed. The items with lower service levels are not considered to carry significant risk and the resource reduction associated with them will partly offset the increased resources needed to achieve the well-supported improvements in intervention levels.

On social media, there were 130 comments from the public and have shared a wide range of feedback and suggestions, including:

 Road Conditions

 Congestion and Safety

 Specific Streets Mentioned

The summary of the feedback from the community from the “Conversations Merri-bek” page.

**Summary Table of Community Feedback on Road Management Plan Amendments**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Topic** | **Community Sentiment** | **Common Themes** |
| **More frequent & night inspections** | Mostly supportive | Improves visibility of hazards; better assessment during low traffic; peak-time inspections suggested |
| **Earlier intervention for potholes & deformations** | Strongly supportive | Prevents escalation; reduces accidents; aligns with community expectations |
| **Quicker response times** | Strongly supportive | Current delays seen as unacceptable; safety risks highlighted; calls for immediate action |
| **New items added to response regime** | Mixed support | Some see value; others question prioritization over community programs |
| **Trip hazards (25mm–30mm)** | Supportive but cautious | Many feel even small hazards are dangerous; concern for elderly, disabled, and pram users |
| **Lowering of service levels** | Mostly opposed | Seen as unjustified; ratepayer frustration; calls for transparency and accountability |
| **General feedback** | Rich and varied | Requests for better bike paths, clearer reporting mechanisms, improved footpath accessibility, and more community engagement |

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

Council assets including roads and pathways are subject to the impacts of climate change. Extended periods of extreme heat, more frequent and severe rain events and unpredictable dry and wet periods can impact functionality of these assets. The increased scheduled proactive inspection enables significant changes to the performance of the road and pathways and allows for early intervention.

One of the notable amendments is the introduction of overhanging vegetation clearance on trafficable portion of road and pathways. The intervention level for the overhanging vegetation clearance is set to make sure that mature trees are protected whilst ensuring safe passage of road and pathway users.

### Legal and risk considerations

The Road Management Plan sets the standards for inspection, defect identification and response times based on Council’s resources and considers standards that are reasonable in order to minimise public risk as well as Council’s legal exposure.

### 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 more specifically the right to freedom of movement. Having considered the scope for the amendments proposed to the Road Management Plan, the rights for freedom of movement is not considered to be negatively impacted.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

Prior to seeking community feedback, extensive internal and external consultation of the Road Management Plan was undertaken. The proposed amendment was presented at the 13 August Council meeting to seek feedback from broader community and all feedback received during the consultation process has been considered in finalising the amended Road Management Plan.

### Communications

Subject to Council resolving to adopt the amended Road Management Plan, officers will publish the amended Road Management Plan in Council’s website and publish the notification of adoption through *Victoria* *Government Gazette*, local newspaper, Council’s social media platforms.

## 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

A key part of the consideration of changes to the inspection regime, intervention levels, response times and the addition and removal of items into the Road Management Plan has been Council’s ability to meet these requirements within existing budgets. In some cases where better levels of service are identified (for example missing pit lids), our regime is already at the levels we are now proposing, so it made sense to align the Road Management Plan with our current risk-based practice.

Council has dedicated three staff to the road inspection function, this was set at two for most of the period of the current Road Management Plan and so the more frequent inspections can be addressed without a further increase in resources. The inspection regime will focus on a wider range of items during inspections, covering those ‘new’ items identified.

The introduction of night time inspections will require internal allocation within the relevant budgets, as a focused activity usually conducted over winter months.

The proposed Road Management Plan amendments are expected to be within existing budget and resource allocations. Opportunities for improving efficiency in the inspections and response regime will continue to be identified and harnessed.

## 7. Implementation

Subject to Council adoption of the amended Road Management Plan, the Plan will be published in Council’s website and notice of adoption will be given via *Victoria* *Government Gazette*, local newspaper and Council’s social media platform.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Road Management Plan 2025 – Draft | D25/511349 |  |

7.15 Financial Management Report for the period ended 31 August 2025

**Director Business Transformation, Sue Vujcevic**

**Finance and Procurement**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council notes the Financial Management Report for the period ending 31 August 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 August 2025.

The 31 August 2025 Income Statement shows that Council has recorded a surplus of $174.4 million, $0.4 million lower than the year-to-date budget of $174.8 million, as a result of lower overall revenue. This difference is 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. The accounting surplus includes items such as non-cash contributions, capital grants and is used to fund items such as loan repayments, the rates funded capital works program and transfers (savings) via reserves.

Council has spent $4.5 million on capital expenditure, which is tracking above the year-to-date (YTD) budget of $3.4 million, with $89.4 million budget remaining.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**2024-25 Financial Statements and Performance Statements** – 10 September 2025

*That Council, in accordance with the recommendations of the Audit and Risk Committee, and having considered Council’s Financial and Performance Statements for 2024-25 Statements at Attachments 1 and 2 to this report:*

*1. Approves ‘in principle’ the Financial and Performance Statements 2024-25.*

*2. Authorises the Mayor, Cr Helen Davidson, Deputy Mayor, Cr Helen Politis, and the Chief Executive Officer, Cathy Henderson, to certify the Financial and Performance Statements for 2024-25 in their final form.*

*3. Carries forward the $473,339 of tied operating funding that were not spent as of 30 June 2025.*

*4. Carries forward the $32,410,329 of capital project funds into the 2025/26 Capital Works Program.*

*5. Authorises the Principal Accounting Officer to implement any minor administrative changes to the Financial and Performance Statements for 2024-25 if recommended by the Auditor-General upon final review, for approval by the Chief Executive Officer.*

## 1. Policy Context

The 2025-2029 Budget was adopted by Council on 23 June 2025. The Budget sets out the resources required to deliver the Council Plan, Services and Capital Works Program for the 2025/26 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 August 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 2025-26.

## 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 August 2025 with a surplus operating result of $174.4 million which is $0.4 million (0%) less than the year to date (YTD) forecast of $174.8 million.

It is important to note that the $174.4 million operating surplus does not convert to immediately available cash to Council. The accounting surplus includes items such as non-cash contributions, capital grants and is used to fund items such as loan repayments, the rates funded capital works program and transfers (savings) via reserves.

As described above, significant amounts of surplus are restricted by legislation or 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 2026. A timing variance is a current difference between actual result and forecast which is expected to be resolved before the end of the financial year. A permanent variance is a current difference between actual result and forecast which will continue to the end of the financial year.

The main items contributing to the overall variance are:

### Revenue

 **Grants – Operating** ended $1.5 million (30%) unfavourable primarily due to delays in the receipt of the CHSP Grants ($1.3 million). This variance will be resolved in the coming months when payment is received.

### Expenditure

 **Contracts, Materials & Services** ended $1.7 million (12%) favourable due to a minor savings in insurance policies ($0.3 million - permanent), as well as timing variances in areas such as communications ($0.4 million) and cleaning & waste removal ($0.3 million).

### 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 $4.5 million on capital expenditure year to date which is tracking $0.6 million (12%) below the YTD forecast of $5.1 million, with $97.7 million (96%) of the revised budget remaining.

### Cash

Council’s cash assets were $79.9 million as at 31 August 2025. This is a $16.5 million decrease on 30 June 2025 cash levels.

Cash fluctuates frequently over the year due to a number of factors, mainly due to the timing of when the rates instalments fall due. The first instalment for 2025-26 rates payments are due 30th September 2025.

### Solvency Assessment

Council officers have reviewed Council’s liquidity (Current Assets divided by Current Liabilities) at 31 August 2025 as 4.1. 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 2025-26 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 - August 2025 | D25/486024 |  |

7.16 Governance Report - October 2025 - Cyclical Report

**Director Business Transformation, Sue Vujcevic**

**Governance and Strategy**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Notes the Records of Meetings, at Attachment 1 to this report.

2. Notes responses to questions taken on notice during Public Question Time at the 13 August and 10 September 2025 Council meetings, provided as Attachment 2.

3. Notes the summary of minutes from the Audit and Risk Committee held 2 September 2025 at Attachment 3 to this report.

4. Endorses the Merri-bek City Council Audit and Risk Committee Performance Report 2024/25 at Attachment 4 to this report.

5. Notes the Merri-bek City Council Audit and Risk Committee Recommendations and Findings Report at Attachment 5 to this report.

6. Endorses the updated Audit and Risk Committee Charter as provided in Attachment 6 to this report (as recommended by the Audit and Risk Committee).

**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 13 August and 10 September 2025 Council meetings, with a recommendation that Council notes the responses.

 The summary of minutes from the Audit and Risk Committee held 2 September 2025.

 The Merri-bek City Council Audit and Risk Committee Performance Report 2024/25.

 The Merri-bek City Council Audit and Risk Committee Recommendations and Findings Report.

 The updated Audit and Risk Committee Charter.

**Previous Council Decisions**

Nil.

**1.** **Policy Context**

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.

## 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.

## 3. Issues

**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 1** as follows:

 Councillor Briefing – 8 September 2025

 Councillor Briefing – 15 September 2025

 Councillor Briefing – 22 September 2025

 Councillor Briefing – 29 September 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 questions are recorded in the meeting minutes.

The responses to questions taken On Notice at **Attachment 2** to this report relate to questions from 13 August and 10 September 2025 Council meetings regarding:

 Governance Rules

 Merri-bek library staff

 Tate Reserve.

**Audit and Risk Committee minutes**

A summary of the minutes from the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held 2 September 2025 is provided at **Attachment 3**.

**Merri-bek City Council Audit and Risk Committee Performance Report 2024/25**

The Audit and Risk Committee is required to report its performance annually to Council.

At the Audit and Risk Committee meeting on 2 September 2025, the Merri-bek City Council Audit and Risk Committee Performance Report 2024/25 was endorsed by the Committee for presentation to Council for endorsement.

The Merri-bek City Council Audit and Risk Committee Performance Report 2024/25 is shown at **Attachment 4**.

**Audit and Risk Committee Recommendations and Findings Report**

The Audit and Risk Committee is required to report its Recommendations and Findings report to Council twice a year.

The Audit and Risk Committee recommendations and findings report is shown at **Attachment 5**.

**Audit and Risk Committee Charter**

The Audit and Risk Committee Charter, originally adopted in November 2023, remains compliant with Council’s obligations under the *Local Government Act 2020*.

At its meeting on 2 September 2025, the Audit and Risk Committee reviewed the Charter and endorsed several updates. While the Charter retains most of its existing provisions, the proposed amendments include minor grammatical and administrative refinements.

The Committee also endorsed the following key changes:

 The formal three-year Risk Management Improvement Plan has been replaced with targeted actions incorporated into the Integrity, Risk and Resilience Team’s annual operational plan. References to the original plan have been removed from the Charter, with ongoing improvements now monitored and tracked through annual planning processes.

 The annual Audit and Risk Committee meeting schedule will now be presented to the Committee in September each year, rather than in November.

 The Charter review cycle has been extended from every two years to every three years, based on the observation that significant changes are uncommon unless prompted by legislative reform

The reviewed Audit and Risk Committee Charter can be viewed at **Attachment 6**.

**Human Rights Consideration**

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

Advisory committees provide a valuable communication and consultation link between the organisation, Councillors, Council and the community.

## 5. Officer Declaration for a Conflict of Interests

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflicts of interest in the matters contained therewith.

## 6. Financial and Resources Implications

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:

 The Audit and Risk Committee Performance Report 2024/25 and revised Audit and Risk Committee Charter will be published on Council’s website.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Records of Meeting - October 2025 | D25/522375 |  |
| **2** | Responses to questions taken On Notice - October 2025 | D25/522306 |  |
| **3** | Summary of Audit and Risk Committee Minutes - 2 September 2025 | D25/522498 |  |
| **4** | Audit and Risk Committee Performance Report 2024-25 | D25/469422 |  |
| **5** | Recommendations and Findings Report - September 2025 | D25/470083 |  |
| **6** | Audit and Risk Committee Charter - 2025 | D25/469778 |  |

7.17 Contract Award: RFT 2025-36 Electrification Project Oak Park Sports and Aquatic Precinct

**Director Community, Eamonn Fennessy**

**Community Wellbeing**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to:

a) Make a formal offer to **Entire Service & Maintenance Pty Ltd** (**Contractor**) to award contract **RFT-2025-36** for the **Electrification of Oak Park Sports and Aquatic Precinct** (**Contract**) on the following terms and otherwise subject to and in accordance with paragraph 1(b) of this Resolution:

i. For the maximum lump sum of $1,947,820.00 (excluding GST) plus provisional sums totaling $50,000 (excluding GST), totaling $1,997,820.00 (excluding GST)

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; RFT-2025-36

b) Advises all tenderers of Council's decision in relation to the Contract.

3. Refers the remaining budget shortfall of $386,392 to the relevant quarterly budget review.

REPORT

## Executive Summary

Oak Park Sports and Aquatic Centre (OPSAC) closed at the conclusion of the 2017 summer season for redevelopment following an extensive planning period. The precinct including the Aquatic and Leisure Centre and Sports Pavilion reopened in November 2018.

This project will be the next stage, transitioning the site to near net zero by removing sole reliance on gas boilers for pool water heating. Electric heat pumps were initially installed for the domestic hot water for the aquatic and leisure center, new plant will be installed and commissioned to provide the primary source of pool heating while the existing gas boilers for the pool will remain only as a back-up measure in case of equipment failure and extreme climate events. The sports pavilion’s existing gas cooktop will also be replaced with an electric equivalent.

With electricity backed by certificates from the Crowlands Windfarm, the project will significantly reduce Council's carbon emissions.

By retrofitting an aquatic centre to all-electric and sharing lessons learnt, we will encourage other councils to do the same.

The infrastructure works need to be delivered in the winter season commencing May 2026 to limit service impact on the Oak Park Sports and Aquatic Precinct and to be acquitted by October 2026.

Council was successful in obtaining $740,000 through the Community Energy Upgrade Fund and has budgeted an additional $1,110,150 for the delivery of the project and services associated with the project deliverables.

The tender complies with section 109(1) of the *Local Government Act 2020*

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Phasing out gas use in Council’s Aquatic and Leisure centres -** 12 March 2025

*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.*

*4. That when the Aquatic and Leisure Centre Strategy comes up for review in 2025, consider bringing forward the installation of infrastructure for electrification of the Coburg Leisure Centre.*

**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

## 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 $350,000 (incl GST) as well as the policy commitments contained in the Procurement Policy.

## 2. Background

Officers developed a written project specification with specialist external review and input that outlined Council’s requirements for the electrification of OPSAC. The tender documentation was released as a performance specification to encourage market design innovation.

The specification was developed to ensure the requirements of the Federal Grant received by Council were adhered to.

The project scope largely consists of swapping the pool heating capacity of existing gas boilers with new, energy efficient, electric heat pumps. The specification sizes the heat pump output to allow winter heating of the outdoor 50m pool. This added capability will provide Council with the ability to provide future year-round aquatic facilities at OPSAP should Council decide to expand the service offering at this facility.

Existing gas boilers that are only 7 years old, will be preserved to provide back-up heating capacity in the event of new heat pump system failures and extreme weather events. This will provide an extra layer of operational certainty to the aquatic facilities.

Furthermore, the existing gas cooktop located in the sports pavilion will be replaced with an electric equivalent.

Council initially undertook an expression of interest process to gauge market interest. Following evaluation of submissions, it was decided to proceed to an open market request for tender.

An advertisement was placed in *The Age* newspaper on 05/07/2025 inviting tenders via the e-tender portal. The request for tender closed on 15/08/2025 and 2 tenders were received and deemed as conforming submissions.

It is understood that at the time of tender, the industry was quite busy with the release of other Community Energy Upgrade Fund projects.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Tenderers Name** | **ABN** |
| Entire Service & Maintenance Pty Ltd | 36 083 650 695 |
| Hirotec Maintenance Pty Ltd | 84 075 569 541 |

The conforming tender submissions were evaluated in accordance with Council’s Procurement Policy, at the time of tendering.

**Tender Evaluation**

The following is a breakdown of the Evaluation Criteria applicable to this procurement project.

| **Criteria** | **Weighting** |
| --- | --- |
| Capability (Experience) | 10% |
| Capacity (Resourcing) | 10% |
| Methodology and Task Appreciation | 10% |
| Tender Program | 5% |
| Design and Technical Review | 10% |
| Social, Environmental, and Economic Sustainability | 10% |
| Value Adds | 5% |
| Cost | 40% |
| **Total** | **100%** |

The membership of the tender evaluation panel was as follows.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Title and/or company** | **Project Mgr/ Generalist or Nominated Speciality** | **Full Voting / Advisory Member** |
| Unit Manager Aquatic and Leisure Services | Generalist | Full |
| Zero Carbon Merri-bek Technical Lead | Generalist | Full |
| Senior Project Manager Aquatics | Generalist | Full |
| Sustainable Buildings Officer | Generalist | Advisory |
| Senior Project Manager – Donald Cant Watts Corke | Project Manager | Full |
| Associate Mechanical Engineer - Bridgeford Group | Speciality – Services consultant | Advisory |
| Senior Procurement Partner | Procurement | Advisory |

The evaluation process identified Entire Service & Maintenance Pty Ltd as the preferred tenderer based on the results of the evaluation matrix. Further details of tender evaluation are shown in the Tender Recommendation Report (**Confidential Attachment 1**).

## 3. Issues

### Officers elected to proceed with an amended AS4300 Design and Construct contract. The form of tender documentation, being a performance specification without a preliminary design, required tenderers to exhibit sufficient understanding and experience in design development and Principal Project Requirement delivery. The project team wanted to ensure innovative, industry leading design solutions were presented at tender rather than releasing a completed design to the market for pricing. The AS4300 contract places the design responsibility on the Contractor while the performance specification ensures Council’s minimum project expectations are met

**Collaboration**

Note that section 109(2) of the *Local Government Act 2020* requires that any report to the Council that recommends entering into a procurement agreement must include information in relation to any opportunities for collaboration with other councils or public bodies which may be available.

Under this contract there are no opportunities to collaborate with other Councils or public bodies because it is a local stand-alone construction project with specific timing requirements.

**Interviews**

No interviews were held because all post tender clarifications raised were closed.

### Social / Environmental / Local Implications

### Entire Service & Maintenance function under a social procurement policy. They partner with RAW, an Indigenous employment organisation, to support and train Indigenous apprentices, actively employing RAW staff on projects. They are also involved with the AMCA’s Women in Construction body.

### The tenderer has an environmental management policy and an Environmental Management System (EMS) certified and audited by an external authority

### The tenderer is committed to providing products and services consistent with ecological sustainable development and circular economy principles, including reducing waste, recycling, and efficient resource use

### 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. Consultation / Recommendation from Management

Aquatic and Leisure Services as the leading service unit for this tender process consulted Sustainable Building Department and Industry Specialist Bridgeford Group and Introba on best practice solutions for the Electrification of Oak Park Sports and Aquatic Centre. Based on industry learnings from other all-electric aquatic projects, the project team has decided to retain the existing gas boilers as a backup heating system for the pools. These learnings highlighted that heat pumps can fail to operate effectively during extreme weather events—such as temperatures below 3 degrees or periods of high humidity—which can cause the units to freeze and the pools to lose temperature. Furthermore, heat pumps involve more moving parts than traditional gas boilers, resulting in increased maintenance requirements and a higher risk of operational failure. The gas boilers will only be used when the heat pumps are not functioning to ensure pool temperatures are maintained and community impact is minimised.

## 5. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council Officers, external consultants and all other parties involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

## 6. Financial and Resources Implications

The current total budget available for the delivery of this project is $1,850,000 (excluding GST). The table below shows the estimated overall expenditure for the project, including funds spent to date.

| **Item** | **Amount (excluding GST)** |
| --- | --- |
| 2024-25 forecast (less EOFY carry forwards) | $37,484.00 |
| 2025-26 adopted budget | $1,750,000.00 |
| 2025-26 additional EOFY carry forwards (endorsed at September Council meeting) | $62,516.00 |
| **Total allocated budget** | **$1,850,000.00** |
| Less |  |
| 2024-25 actuals | $37,484.00 |
| 2025-26 actuals (YTD August) | $5,000.00 |
| Recommended contract amount RFT-2025-36 *(Electrification of Oak Park Sports and Aquatic Centre)* | $1,997,820.00 |
| Provision for latent conditions or unforeseen costs | $99,891.00 |
| Estimated additional project expenditure including other costs outside of contract award) | $96,197.00 |
| Total project shortfall | $386,392.00 |
| **Estimated Total Project Cost** | **$2,236,392.00** |

The contract tender prices for the main works contract have come in higher than originally budgeted for. This is due to the fact that project scoping and initial cost estimates were completed two years prior to tender, during which time there has been significant cost escalation across the construction sector. In addition, contractor availability has been constrained, and the release of substantial federal funding through the Community Energy Upgrade Fund has increased competition for resources, further driving up costs.

As a result, additional budget of approximately $386,392.00 (excluding GST) is required to complete the project.

It is also noted that despite the proposed allocation of additional budget, projects of this nature will often require further contract variations due to latent conditions or unexpected costs outside of Council’s and the Contractor’s control. Should these circumstances arise, it will be dealt with in accordance with Council’s procurement and budget protocols.

## 7. Implementation and Timeline

This report is seeking a Council decision to authorise the Chief Executive Officer to do all things necessary to execute the contract and any other required documentation.

Upon approval by Council of this report, a contract between the Contractor and Council is estimated to be executed in October 2025.

The contract will commence as soon as possible following Council endorsement.

It is estimated that the works will take 9 months and there will subsequently be a 52 weeks defects liability period under the Contract.

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Tender Recommendation Report - Oak Park Sports & Aquatic Precinct Electrification  *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.* | D25/530222 |  |

7.18 Contract Variation: EXE-2023-546 Pathway and ePathway Software Maintenance and Support

**Director Business Transformation, Sue Vujcevic**

**Information Technology**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Approves an increase to the maximum additional spend for EXE-2023-546 Infor Software Maintenance and Support from $960,021 to $1,050,000 (excluding GST) under the 3-year extension options;

2. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to do all things necessary to approve the contract exemption and related documentation as identified in point one above.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

## Council awarded an extension on 14 May 2025 for three years for the existing contract EXE-2023-546 which expired on 30 June 2025 for Software maintenance and support for Infor Global Solutions, the provider of the Pathway and ePathway platforms. These platforms support core functions, including property management, regulatory management (i.e. planning and building), and revenue management.

The extension specified a maximum additional spend of $960,021 (excluding GST). By granting approval for up to 3-years of exemptions allowed for an orderly transition to the new Enterprise Resourcing Planning (ERP) system.

Following this decision, Council has been in negotiations with the vendor for the extension. The purpose of this report is to obtain Council approval for a contract variation for an additional maximum allowable spend of $1,050,000 (excluding GST) which is an increase of $89,979.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Contract extension: EXE-2023-546 Pathway and ePathway Software Maintenance and Support** – 14 May 2025

*That Council:*

*1. Approves a procurement exemption under section 6.1.4.2 (a) of the procurement policy for EXE-2023-546 Info Software Maintenance and Support for:*

*a) Additional maximum spend of up to $960,021 (excluding GST) under this extension;*

*b) For a term of three (3) one-year extension options commencing 1 July 2025 at the discretion of Council.*

*2. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to do all things necessary to approve the contract exemption and related documentation as identified in point one above.*

**Elevate Customer and Digital Transformation Program** – 12 March 2025

*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.*

*…*

*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.*

## 1. Policy Context

This report is in keeping with Council’s commitment to accountability and sound financial management. Contract variations exceeding Council’s delegation to the CEO require Council approval.

## 2. Background

On 12 March 2025, Council resolved as a part of the Elevate customer and digital transformation program, to commence the procurement tender process for an Enterprise Resourcing Planning (ERP) System. This procurement process is currently underway.

This contract extension is allowed under section 6.1.4.2 (a) of the Procurement Policy which states:

*The following circumstances are exempt from the general publicly advertised tender, quotation and expression of interest requirements.*

*Extension of contracts while Council is at market – this allows Council to extend an existing contract where the procurement process to replace the contract has commenced… This exemption may be used when the establishment of an interim short-term arrangement with an alternative supplier is considered not to be in the public interest, as it may be cost prohibitive and/or present a risk in the delivery of the critical public services to the municipality.*

In May 2025, Council resolved to extend the current contract for software and maintenance support for Pathway and ePathway for a period of three-years. The extension was for three (3) one-year extension options commencing 1 July 2025 at the discretion of Council for a maximum additional spend of $960,021 (excluding GST). By granting approval for up to 3-years of exemptions allowed for an orderly transition to the new Enterprise Resourcing Planning System.

Following this decision, officers have been negotiating with the supplier on the extension.

This report is seeking an additional $89,979 which would bring the total maximum spend under the extension options to $1,050,000 (excluding GST).

## 3. Issues

Infor Global Solutions presented Council the option for signing a 3-year SaaS agreement to the value of $1,050,000 (excluding GST) to ensure we maintain access to support and new version upgrades as needed. This is essential to ensure there is no disruption of operational services to the community and also to allow time for an orderly transition to the new Enterprise Resourcing Planning (ERP) system.

### Community impact

The ePathway product is our electronic services portal, used by the community for online transactions with Councils. It is imperative that there is no disruption to these services while we consider other platforms.

### Collaboration

Section 109(2) of the *Local Government Act 2020* requires that any report to the Council that recommends entering into a procurement agreement must include information in relation to any opportunities for collaboration with other councils or public bodies which may be available.

Under this contract there are no opportunities to collaborate with other Councils or public bodies because of lack of alignment with contract requirements.

### 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 is not required as the Pathway and ePathway platforms are already being utilised.

## 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 Information Technology - Applications Unit is responsible for the software budget and contract management.

The amended maximum spend within the extension is proposed to be $1,050,000 (excluding GST) for 3-years and is within the existing IT budget. No additional resourcing is required to implement this extension. If Council were to go to market for a short-term interim solution, while the Elevate customer and digital transformation program is being undertaken, additional resourcing would be required.

## 7. Implementation

Subject to Council’s decision, the next step would be entering into a contract extension to ensure continuity of Council’s Pathway/ePathway system whilst Council works towards implementing the Enterprise Resourcing Planning (ERP) System.

## Attachment/s

There are no attachments for this report.

**8. Notices of Motion**

**8.1 Harold Stevens Athletics Track**

**Cr Helen Politis**

## Motion

That Council receives a report reviewing the management model, inclusive of the lease arrangements, of the Harold Stevens Athletics Track.

## 1. Background

Cr Polits’s background:

The Harold Stevens Athletics Track is a local iconic track that has served the northern community since 1896. It has produced two Olympians and hundreds of other local athletes. It is inclusive and offers programs for children, seniors and women only events. Every year approximately 15 thousand school children participate in track and field events.

The track is managed by the Coburg Athletics Ground Management Committee who are all volunteers that maintain the site and hire it for use to schools and community groups. Urban density and the growth of community sports is likely to increase demands for track access and usage.

To ensure the long-term viability and investment in the track, a review of the current management model should be undertaken with a view towards:

 Maintaining the track for use by Coburg athletics and the Harriers club

 Developing the track and the field to meet both safety and international standards

 Future proofing the centre to meet the growing needs of the sport, school and local communities.

## 2. Policy Context

This Notice of Motion aligns with a range of Merri-bek strategies and policies, including the Council Plan 2025–29, the Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2020, the Allocation and Use of Sporting Facilities, Grounds and Pavilions Policy (2023), and the Community Infrastructure Plan. Together, these frameworks emphasise equitable access to quality community facilities, support sustainable management of sporting assets, and prioritise investment in infrastructure that meets current and future community needs.

A review of the Harold Stevens Athletics Track management model is therefore consistent with Council’s broader commitment to inclusive, sustainable and place-based community infrastructure.

## 3. Financial Implications

A review can be completed within existing budget allocations.

## 4. Resources Implications

A review and subsequent report can be completed with current resources.

**8.2 Councillor Attendance at ALGA Conferences**

**Cr Ella Svensson**

Council at its meeting on 10 September 2025 resolved that the matter be deferred to the meeting to be held on 8 October 2025.

## Motion

That Council:

1. Notes in accordance with the Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy an annual budget allocation for attendance at seminars, conferences and training and community events, including for attendance at the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) National General Assembly, which is an important forum for local government advocacy.

2. Notes the costs associated with Councillors attending ALGA multiple times in a single Council term can be significant, and that Council must balance professional development opportunities with responsible use of public funds.

3. Requests a report that reviews Council’s Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy regarding Councillor attendance at the ALGA National General Assembly.

4. Explores options for limiting paid councillor attendance such that each Councillor may only attend one National General Assembly at Council expense per Council term.

5. Considers necessary exceptions, such as where a Councillor is elected to a national local government body or holds a representative role that requires ongoing attendance.

## 1. Background

Cr Svensson’s background:

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) National General Assembly is the peak annual gathering of local governments in Australia. It provides Councillors with an opportunity to learn from experts, connect with interstate colleagues, and to advocate for issues that matter to our community on a national stage.

Nevertheless, attending the conference isn’t free. Registration, travel and accommodation add up, and when multiple councillors attend more than once in a term, the expense becomes significant. In the midst of a cost of living crisis, where residents are struggling and councils are asked to do more with less, it’s reasonable to consider how we can limit costs and ensure that opportunities are shared fairly.

Currently, our policy allows Councillors to attend the ALGA conference more than once per term at Council's expense. In practice, that means that some councillors might attend repeatedly, whilst others never do. Putting a cap of one funded trip per councillor, per term, levels the playing field and helps keep costs under control. There will be exceptions where multiple paid attendances are justified, particularly for the Mayor, or if a Councillor is elected to the ALGA board or another representative role that requires their presence.

By seeking a report this will allow us to compare options, weigh up costs, and adopt a policy that balances professional development with fairness and fiscal responsibility.

## 2. Policy Context

Officer’s comments:

The Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy establish the facilities, resources and support necessary or appropriate to provide to Councillors in the performance of their duties as elected representatives, this includes Councillor entitlements to paid professional development.

The Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy sets out the processes for ensuring that the costs of resourcing and supporting Councillors, and the value of any expenses reimbursed, are reported to the community quarterly to promote good governance, transparency and accountability.

The Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy includes that individual professional development expenditure should be tested against the following criteria:

 is it in the interest of the Merri-bek community,

 does it meet the budget determined by Council,

 does it clearly offer and promote public benefit, as distinguished from private benefit,

 is it directly relevant to the Councillor’s role, and

 does it take place and is it able to be utilised during the Councillor’s term of office.

Council at its meeting held 12 August 2020, in adopting the Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy, included the additional wording at Section 5.4 Professional Development as follows: “The cost of training and development programs for each Councillor during their term of office will be capped at $10,000.00 and a resolution of Council will be required to exceed this cap. Any individual training activity that exceeds $1,500.00 (excluding GST) will require approval by resolution of Council”.

In addition to the above, the Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy also sets out that Council will also provide access to professional development programs/initiatives that is not included in the capped amount of $10,000, including with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA), ALGA, Australian Local Government Women’s Association ALGWA etc.

## 3. Financial Implications

Officer’s comments:

There are no financial resource implications arising from a review of the Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy.

## 4. Resources Implications

Officer’s comments:

Addressing this motion can be delivered within existing staff resources.

**8.3 Bus shelter program in Merri-bek**

**Cr Sue Bolton**

## Motion

That Council:

1. Recognises the vital importance of increasing the number of bus shelters in Merri-bek, particularly in key locations.

2. Receives a report by February 2026 which includes information on:

 the estimated proportion of bus stops which have bus shelters or bus seats

 the progress towards increasing the number of bus shelters and/or bus seats

 recommendations on how to speed up the number bus shelters installed each year.

## 1. Background

Cr Bolton’s background:

Buses are an important part of the public transport network. A huge part of the Merri-bek community doesn’t live within walking distance of a train station or a tram line. One thing which deters people from catching buses is the lack of bus shelters, and particularly bus seats. There are many people who are elderly, or frail, or can’t stand for long periods while waiting for a bus. The lack of shelter from the heat and from rain also deters people from catching buses unless they have no other choice.

## 2. Policy context

Officer’s comments:

There are almost 700 bus stops located within Merri-bek, it is estimated that roughly 40% of these have a waiting area (a seat or a shelter) for bus passengers supplied by a mix of entities.

 Merri-bek City Council manages several bus shelters and has installed seats at bus stops around Merri-bek. These facilities are exclusively managed by council.

 Outdoor advertising company ooHMedia provides, owns, and maintains shelters at bus stops installed before 2003 on behalf of the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP), under the Bus Shelter Agreement licence.

 Outdoor advertising company JC Decaux provides, owns, and maintains bus shelters at 100 bus stops installed between 2003 and 2007 on behalf of Merri-bek Council under the ‘*Purchase agreement JC Decaux Australia Pty Ltd Contract No 1066*’ licence agreement.

If the motion is supported, council Officers can ensure data on bus stops is current, assess the proportion of bus stops with facilities, and advise which agency manages each facility. The report can assess recent progress and provide options and analysis for improving the provision of bus stop shelters and other facilities across Merri-bek.

## 3. Financial implications

Officer’s comments:

A report can be prepared with staff resources allocated in the existing council budget for 2025-26.

## 4. Resources Implications

Officer’s comments:

The motion can be delivered within existing council resources.

**8.4 Procurement policy and subminimum wages for disabled people in segregated workplaces**

**Cr Sue Bolton**

## Motion

That Council investigates the implications of not procuring from organisations such as prison industries and businesses which use the Supported Wage System such as Australian Disability Enterprises for future contracts and provides a report back to Council by December 2025.

## 1. Background

Cr Bolton’s background:

Merri-bek Council’s Procurement Policy has a section on Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) Procurement Considerations. This section of the policy (4.16) includes Social Sustainability which aims to elevate the inherent social value of doing business, by Increasing employment opportunities for people experiencing social and economic exclusion or disadvantage, including but not limited to a disability, refugees, disadvantaged people and long term unemployed. The policy also includes a minimum evaluation weighting 10 per cent for sustainability will apply to all public tender procurement activities.

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability final report, in 2023, made 222 recommendations.

Recommendation 7.31 relates to raising subminimum wages, and includes that the Australian Government takes a phased approach to introduce a scheme to ensure that employees with a disability are paid at least half the minimum wage by 2034; further that this scheme is reviewed after five years of operation and use the results of the review to develop a pathway to lift minimum wages payable to employees with a disability to 100% of the minimum wage by 2034.

Recommendation 7.32 relates to ending segregated employment by 2034. This recommendation calls for government to develop a roadmap to transform Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) and eliminate subminimum wages for people with disability by 2034; it also includes that this recommendation (7.32), would operate in advance of recommendation 7.31 to raise all subminimum wages to the full minimum wages by 2034.

In November 2024, The UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, Professor Tomoya Obokata, reported on his official visit to Australia. In his report after the visit, Obokata stated: “In Australia, persons with disabilities can be employed in sheltered workshops, referred to as Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs), where they engage in manual labour work, such as warehousing, ‘picking and packing’, cleaning and laundry services, sometimes against their will. Disturbingly, they are paid a sub-minimum wage as low as $3 per hour for their work when the national minimum wage not covered industrial awards and registered agreement is $24.10.”

Although ADEs are supposed to be transitional arrangements into the open market, the Special Rapporteur was informed that many are stuck with segregated employment for a long time. Furthermore, the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability noted that persons with disability who work in segregated workplaces may be at heightened risk of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The Special Rapporteur regards the ADEs to be discriminatory and therefore they should be abolished.

Currently, under the Fair Work Act, employees with disability have the same minimum wage entitlements as other employees except when the Supported Wage System covers them. Employees eligible for a supported wage, under Schedule D of the Supported Employment Award, are entitlement to a minimum supported wage that is calculated differently to other awards. Employees are entitled to a percentage of the relevant minimum pay rate for their classification. The percentage applied is the higher of:

 the employee’s assessed work capacity, rounded to the nearest whole percentage, or

 $3.12 per hour.

In most awards, employees eligible for a supported wage can't be paid less than $109 per week. This also applies to casuals, and junior employees. People with Disability Australia (PWDA) announced that it supports the Special Rapporteur’s recommendation to abolish ADEs, where workers with disability are often paid as little as $3 an hour.

## 2. Policy Context

Officer’s comments:

The Procurement Policy is made under Section 108 of the *Local Government Act 2020*. 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 procurement policy was reviewed and adopted by Council on 11 June 2025.

Section 4.16 of the policy states *Merri-bek City Council aims to use procurement processes to drive sustainability, using our buying power to make a difference beyond the financial value of the goods and services we purchase. We aim to contribute to a fair, inclusive, economically, environmentally and socially sustainable community for all, via our suppliers and supply chain, supporting the targets and measures established by Council.*

*Social Sustainability - aiming to elevate the inherent social value of doing business, by:*

 *Increasing employment opportunities for First Nations people and businesses to address inequity and strengthen their role in the Victoria economy*

 *Increasing employment opportunities for people experiencing social and economic exclusion or disadvantage, including but not limited to a disability, refugees, disadvantaged people and long term unemployed*

 *Promotion of equity, diversity and equal opportunity*

 *Ensuring suppliers do not exploit workers and provide fair wages, including business practices*

 *Respect for human rights, and the rule of law and international norms of behaviour*

## 3. Financial Implications

Officer’s comments:

The cost of preparing a report and (potentially) amendment to the procurement policy can be undertaken within existing resources/budget.

## 4. Resources Implications

Officer’s comments:

Preparing a report and investigating the implications of not procuring from organisations such as prison industries and businesses which use the Supported Wage System (such as Australian Disability Enterprises) for future contracts can be done with existing resources.

**8.5 Metropolitan Transport Forums**

**Cr Sue Bolton**

## Motion

That Council proposes to the Metropolitan Transport Forum that the forum that is organised in Merri-bek in the lead up to the 2026 State election occur in the north of Merri-bek near the Upfield Line, with subsequent forums rotating around different parts of Merri-bek.

## 1. Background

Cr Bolton’s background:

The Metropolitan Transport Forum comprises the representatives of 26 metropolitan local councils in Melbourne.

Its aim is to work towards effective, efficient and equitable transport in metropolitan Melbourne. In the lead up to each state election, the Metropolitan Transport Forum organises candidate forums in a number of local council areas in the lead up to state elections so that communities can raise transport issues in their areas.

The last three or four such forums have all been held in Brunswick. It is possible that all such forums have only been held in Brunswick. This has meant that the candidates don’t get to hear the transport issues effecting different parts of Merri-bek. The lack of having such a forum in the north of Merri-bek, means that candidates don’t hear about the distress caused by the high number of trains on the Upfield train line being cancelled as a result of the single track at the end of the Upfield line.

There is a need to rotate these forums around different parts of Merri-bek to allow candidates to hear about the different transport needs in different parts of Merri-bek.

## 2. Policy context

Officer’s comments:

Merri-bek City Council is a member council of the Metropolitan Transport Forum along with 25 other metropolitan local governments. The forum advocates for urban transport issues impacting metropolitan Melbourne.

The MTF’s current advocacy priorities include:

 *Active Transport*: Making it easier and safer to walk and ride. Safer cycling, safer walking and supporting active travel to school.

 *Buses*: More frequent, direct and reliable bus services across Melbourne.

 *Choices*: Good transport planning that provides more choices for how people move around.

Since 2014, the Metropolitan Transport Forum has hosted town hall candidate forums on transport issues during state government election campaigns. During the 2022 election campaign, the MTF hosted forums with state government representatives and candidates across the Melbourne metropolitan area. This included a forum at Brunswick Town Hall on 4 October 2022.

Should the MTF determine to host similar events ahead of the 2026 state election, Council can request that a forum be held in Merri-bek, including the north of the local government area near the Upfield line. Should the motion be passed, council can propose this item be discussed at the next meeting of the Metropolitan Transport Forum.

## 3. Financial implications

Officer’s comments:

The motion can be delivered within the existing council budget.

## 4. Resources implications

Officer’s comments:

The motion can be delivered with existing council resources.

**8.6 Air Conditioning in the Barkly St towers**

**Cr Helen Politis**

## Motion

That Council write to Homes Victoria requesting that given the age and vulnerability of the residents, that the installation of air conditioning units is prioritised with the aim of completion by the end of 2025.

## 1. Background

Cr Politis’s background:

The Barkly St towers house approximately 120 residents, aged 55 or older. The towers are being refurbished to allow residents to live there comfortably for at least another 25 years.

Recently residents have been notified by homes Victoria of upgrade works to prepare to install air conditioning in the building in 2026. This is good news, however many residents have health issues and are very concerned about another summer without sufficient cooling in their homes.

## 2. Policy context

Officers’ comments:

This motion is consistent with existing Council policy. This includes:

Climate Risk Strategy 2022-2030

5.2.1 Council advocates to and influences other levels of government and service providers to improve the provision of services that support climate resilience of the community, and particularly to vulnerable community members.

Affordable Housing Action Plan 2022-26

3.3 Promote the accelerated roll-out of thermal comfort / energy efficiency upgrades for public and community housing

The Barkly St Public Housing towers consist of two conjoined 11 storey blocks completed in 1972. All residents are over 55 with many living with significant health vulnerabilities. The Victorian Government announced in 2023 that Homes Victoria would invest $141m in cooling high-rise public housing sites but Barkly St was not included in the first tranche of installations. The Victorian Government also has the Energy Efficiency in Social Housing Program (EESHP) which is jointly funded with the Commonwealth investing $209.4 million to improve the energy efficiency and liveability of social housing properties across Victoria.

Officers are able to write to Homes Victoria requesting the installation of air conditioning as soon as possible.

## 3. Financial implications

Officers’ comments:

The cost of implementing this motion can be undertaken within existing operational budgets.

## 4. Resources implications

Officer’s comments:

Implementation of this motion can be undertaken within existing resource allocations.

**8.7 Solar energy system permit requirements in a heritage overlay**

**Cr Liz Irvin**

## Motion

That Council receives a report on commencing the process of reviewing the Merri-bek Planning Scheme to “switch off” permit requirements for visible solar energy systems within a heritage overlay, as permitted by VC226. This review can either be done as a standalone priority review, or as part of a broader review of the entire Planning Scheme.

## 1. Background

Cr Irvin’s background:

Merri-bek Council declared a climate emergency on 12 September 2018, which included a commitment to urgent action to respond to this emergency. This declaration included support for action on this issue by all levels of government, and an invitation for everyone in the community to get involved and do their part.

Council has several strategic directions to help us achieve our climate action goals, including sustainable transport, waste and consumption, and energy transition. Our strategic direction aims to:

 'green the electricity grid' by replacing use of fossil fuels with 100% renewables plus storage

 switch households and businesses to become 'all electric' (avoiding fossil fuels)

 account for impacts at the community level and incentivise sustainability across the municipality, not just from the council directly. We have made significant progress to achieve these aims as part of our 2020-2025 Zero Carbon Merri-bek Action Plan.

This action plan included a target of 44MW of rooftop solar by 2025. Thanks to the efforts and investment of 10,300 homes and 660 businesses and organisations, we exceeded this goal, and by December 2024 our community has 77.57MW of rooftop solar, which is around 220,000 solar panels.

But there is still a long way to go. In Victoria this year, 62% of all electricity generated was from burning brown coal, and only 10% came from rooftop solar panels (1). This is why Merri-bek continues to increase our targets for rooftop solar and energy storage - now aiming to reach 250MW by 2030. We also want to see at least 25% of Merri-bek households (up from 13.5%) and 20% of businesses (up from 11%) have rooftop solar systems. We will only get there with the help of our community.

We know Merri-bek residents and business owners are supportive of and enthusiastic about climate action and the transition to renewables. However, this enthusiasm is hindered in areas of our municipality that are covered by a heritage overlay. The current Merri-bek Planning Scheme states that a planning permit is required for visible solar energy systems (including solar panels) in a heritage overlay. This adds cost and complexity to the process of installing solar systems, and in some cases leads to demands that solar panels be repositioned or removed to reduce visibility. Each time this happens, our ability to produce our own renewable energy is decreased.

In 2022, the State Government recognised the impact that heritage overlays have on the ability to install solar energy systems. They introduced an amendment to the Victorian Planning Provisions that allows councils to provide exemptions from permit requirements for visible solar energy systems. This means council would have the ability to specify whether a place in a heritage overlay is subject to or exempt from visible solar energy system controls.

This motion calls for a review of the relevant Merri-bek Planning Scheme to start the process to remove the permit requirements for solar energy systems in areas impacted by a heritage overlay. 1. Open Electricity <https://explore.openelectricity.org.au/energy/vic1/>. Accessed 24/9/2025

## 2. Policy context

Officers’ comments:

The Notice of Motion requests a report on the process to remove planning permit requirements for solar energy systems in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay. A report addressing this request can be prepared. A brief outline of the policy context is provided below.

**Policy context**

*Planning Policy Framework*

The Merri-bek Planning Scheme includes several policy objectives and strategies relevant to this matter:

 **Clause 13.01 – Climate change impacts:** Support adaptation and mitigation actions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

 **Clause 15.01 – Environmentally sustainable development:** Supports energy efficiency and solar energy generation.

 **Clause 15.03 – Heritage:** Ensure development respects and conserves heritage values, with alterations designed to be visually recessive and not dominate heritage places.

*Heritage Overlay (HO)*

Places included in the Heritage Overlay (Clause 43.01) have been identified as having cultural heritage significance. The Overlay seeks to ensure that development does not adversely affect this significance.

The Heritage Overlay does not prohibit solar energy systems. However, under the Merri-bek Planning Scheme, a planning permit is required for solar energy systems unless an exemption applies. This requirement is intended to balance heritage protection with environmentally sustainable development objectives during assessment. Where solar panels are the sole trigger for a permit, applications are processed through Council’s Fast Track planning process to minimise delays.

In 2022, the State Government introduced Amendment VC266, which amended Clause 43.01 to allow councils to include exemptions in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay for visible solar energy systems. This provision effectively enables councils to “switch off” the permit requirement. Merri-bek has not adopted this exemption.

**Council’s review pathways**

Should Council wish to progress this matter, it could be considered either as:

 a stand-**alone** review, or

 part of the upcoming Planning Scheme Review under Section 12B of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.

A review would assess whether removing the permit requirement is consistent with the broader strategic objectives of the Merri-bek Planning Scheme and would provide the necessary strategic justification for any change.

**Planning Scheme amendment**

To remove permit requirements for visible solar energy systems, a Planning Scheme amendment would be required under Section 8A of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. This is a formal statutory process that requires the support of both Council and the Minister for Planning, as well as periods of public exhibition – and can take two to three years to complete.

## 3. Financial implications

Officer’s comments:

This Notice of Motion has no direct financial implications. The work can be supported through existing strategic planning functions.

## 4. Resources implications

Officer’s comments:

This Notice of Motion can be delivered within existing staff resources.

**8.8 Preserving Merri-bek's Proud Migrant History Through Art and Storytelling**

**Cr Katerine Theodosis**

## Motion

That Council investigates options for building upon previous materials and resources to collect and record migrant stories and history across Merri-bek, including those relating to residents, people, community clubs, buildings and other places and things with a migrant connection. That Council explores how it can curate those stories through an arts program and share them through our libraries.

## 1. Background

Cr Theodosis’s background:

Merri-bek has a long and proud migrant history. For generations, people from across the globe have moved to Merri-bek to build a better life for themselves and their families. They have worked hard, across our factories, our restaurants, our medical centres, our schools, our local businesses, and so much more to build the vibrant community we are lucky to call home. As our community continues to evolve, Council should lead an initiative that celebrates, shares and preserves our rich migrant story through art and our libraries.

## 2. Policy Context

Officer’s comments:

Merri-bek is committed to preserving, sharing and celebrating our diverse local history, and works closely with community groups to engage residents in matters of history and heritage. Council’s library service and local history initiatives are currently digitising a number of migrant oral histories captured on tape in the 1970’s and 80’s. From time-to-time art commissions have also captured migrant history. Key policies that guide this work include:

Council Plan 2025-2029

 4. Thriving economy and culture: A lively and inclusive Merri-bek where the economy supports local business and industry growth, celebrates artistic and creative expression, and connects the community through vibrant cultural experiences.

Merri-bek Heritage Action Plan 2017 - 2032

 Objective 4: Communicating: To celebrate, connect with and enjoy our heritage places. Strategy: Create opportunities to raise awareness and appreciation of the heritage of our City.

Library Services Strategy 2019

 Key Priority 4: Learning. Supporting lifelong learning for community and staff.

Merri-bek Arts & Culture Strategy 2023 - 2030

 Priority 2: Connection. We will foster connections between artists, audiences and community.

## 3. Financial Implications

Officer’s comments:

Exploratory and investigative work proposed by this motion can be accommodated within existing budgets.

Commissioning or presentation of new works as an outcome of exploration and investigation may require future budget considerations.

## 4. Resources Implications

Officer’s comments:

This motion can be supported with existing resource allocations.

1. World Health Organization (2022). *Decade of Healthy Ageing (2020-2030)*. [online] www.who.int. Available at: https://www.who.int/initiatives/decade-of-healthy-ageing. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)