**special Council MEETING AGENDA**

Monday 23 June 2025

Commencing 6 pm

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



**1. WELCOME**

**2. APOLOGIES/LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**3. DECLARATIONS OF CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS**

**4. COUNCIL REPORTS**

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4.2 Endorsement of Draft Merri-bek Community Vision and Draft Council Plan 2025-2029 for Public Consultation 16

**4. Council Reports**

**4.1 Proposed Merri-bek City Council 4-Year Budget 2025-2029 - For Adoption**

**Director Business Transformation, Sue Vujcevic**

**Finance and Procurement**

**Officer Recommendation**

That Council:

1. Having considered all submissions received and in accordance with Section 94 of the *Local Government Act 2020*, adopts the Annual Budget 2025-2029 (Attachment 1 to this report) and the 4-year Revenue and Rating Strategy 2025-2029 (Attachment 2 of this report).

2. Formally declares the Rates Levies and Annual Service Charges for the 2025-26 rating year as follows:

a) Declaration of Rates and Charges:

In accordance with section 158 of the *Local Government Act 1989*, the following rates and charges are declared for the rating year commencing 1 July 2025 and ending 30 June 2026.

b) Amount intended to be raised:

An amount of $200,522,426 (or such other amount as is lawfully raised as a consequence of this resolution) be declared as the amount which Council intends to raise by general rates and the annual service charge, which is calculated as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Amount** |
| Residential properties | $157,125,438 |
| Commercial properties | $9,990,013 |
| Industrial properties | $7,054,169 |
| Municipal charge | $0 |
| Service charges | $26,338,626 |
| Charge in lieu of rates on cultural and recreational lands | $14,180 |
| **Total** | **$200,522,426** |

Rates Information:

i. General rates:

A general rate to be declared for the 2025-26 financial year. The rateable amount per property will be determined by multiplying the Capital Improved Value of each rateable property by the rate in the dollar indicated in the following table:

| **Category** | **Rate** |
| --- | --- |
| Residential properties | 0.0023883  (0.23883 cents in the dollar of Capital Improved Value) |
| Commercial properties | 0.0023883  (0.23883 cents in the dollar of Capital Improved Value) |
| Industrial properties | 0.0023883  (0.23883 cents in the dollar of Capital Improved Value) |

ii. No amount is fixed as the minimum amount payable by way of general rate in respect of each rateable property within the municipal district.

c) Municipal charge:

No municipal charge is declared in respect of the 2025-26 financial year.

d) Annual service charge:

i. An annual service charge, for the collection and disposal of refuse, be declared in respect of the 2025-26 financial year.

ii. The annual service charge be in the sum of, and be based on the criteria, set out below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Rate** |
| Household Rubbish - Shared | $108.10 |
| Household Rubbish - 80 litre | $166.31 |
| Household Rubbish - 120 litre | $374.20 |
| Household Rubbish - 160 litre | $457.36 |
| Household Rubbish - 200 litre | $498.94 |
| Household Rubbish - 240 litre | $582.09 |
| Household Rubbish - 160 litre (concession) | $228.68 |
| Household Rubbish - 200 litre (concession) | $249.47 |
| Household Rubbish - 240 litre (concession) | $291.05 |
| Household Rubbish – Fortnightly – Shared | $88.16 |
| Household Rubbish – Fortnightly – 80 litre | $101.73 |
| Household Rubbish – Fortnightly – 120 litre | $135.64 |
| Household Rubbish – Fortnightly – 240 litre | $305.18 |
| Household Rubbish – Fortnightly – 360 litre | $474.73 |
| Household Rubbish – Fortnightly – 240 litre (concession) | $135.64 |
| Household Rubbish – Fortnightly – 360 litre (concession) | $305.18 |
| Mixed Recycling - Shared | $36.14 |
| Mixed Recycling - 120 litre | $41.70 |
| Mixed Recycling - 240 litre | $55.61 |
| Mixed Recycling - 360 litre | $125.11 |
| Food & Garden Organics - Shared | $61.10 |
| Food & Garden Organics - 120 litre | $94.00 |
| Food & Garden Organics - 240 litre new services | $211.49 |
| Glass Recycling - Shared | $11.57 |
| Glass Recycling - 120 litre | $17.81 |
| Glass Recycling - 240 litre | $40.06 |

e) Cultural and recreational land:

In accordance with section 4(4) of the *Cultural and Recreational Lands Act 1963*, the following amounts be declared as a charge in lieu of the general rate (which would otherwise be payable):

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Glenroy Road, Glenroy | Northern Golf Club | 12,300 |
| Outlook Road, Coburg | Vic Amateur Basketball Association | 1,881 |
| **Total:** |  | **14,180** |

f) Incentives:

No incentives are declared for the payment of general rates (and annual service charge described earlier in this resolution) before dates fixed or specified for their payment under section 167 of the *Local Government Act 1989*.

g) Interest on rates and charges:

i. Interest is to be charged in accordance with section 172 of the *Local Government Act 1989*, on any amounts of rates and charges which have not yet been paid by the instalment dates fixed by the Minister in accordance with section 167 of the *Local Government Act 1989*;

ii. That the interest to be charged is at the rate fixed under section 2 of the *Penalty Interest Rates Act 1983*, that applied on the first day of July immediately before the due date for payment; and

iii. Interest on rates and charges is to be calculated from the date on which the instalment was due.

h) Interest on unpaid monies:

i. Interest is to be charged on any amounts of money (other than rates and charges) which a person owes to the Council, and which has not been paid by the due date;

ii. The interest rate shall be determined by Council from time to time and shall not exceed the rate fixed from time to time by the Order-in-Council; and

iii. That such interest is to be applied in accordance with the provisions of section 120 of the *Local Government Act 2020*.

3. Notes that the fees and charges in the Annual Budget 2025-2029 have been updated from the Proposed Annual Budget 2025-2029 with the following changes. Statutory Fees and Charges have been increased by 3.00 per cent due to the fees and fines being set as part of the Victorian State Budget and gazette 22 May 2025.

4. In accordance with Section 87(4) of the Road Safety Act 1986, resolves to fix at 0.5 penalty units the penalty for those parking infringements specified as Item 1 to 11 in Column 1 of Schedule 6 of the Road Safety (General) Regulations 2019 effective 12 June 2025, unless otherwise resolved

5. Advises submitters that Council has considered their submissions relating to the Proposed Annual Budget 2025-2029 and that the submitters 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.

6. Authorises the Director Business Transformation to finalise the Merri-bek Council Annual Budget 2025-2029, including any amendments as a result of the adoption of the Budget 2025-2029 and or/minor administrative changes, including making the final documents available for public inspection.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

Council must prepare and adopt a rolling 4-year Budget that contains financial statements and other matters. This must be finally approved by Council no later than 30 June each year.

The purpose of this report is to present for adoption the:

 4-Year Budget 2025-2029 (Attachment 1)

 4-Year Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029 (Attachment 2).

The 4-Year Budget 2025-2029 continues to deliver services to Merri-bek’s 191,000 plus residents within the 3.00 per cent rate cap set by the State Government. The 4-year budget funds key initiatives and delivers critical major projects while maintaining Council’s financial sustainability.

Key features of the budget include:

 An operating projects program of $2.8 million. Key projects in the program include:

 Continued funding for the Urban Forest Strategy - Tree Planting Regime ($470,000);

 Expanding our supporting seniors to live independently (outdoor help for seniors) ($540,000);

 Continuing the solar and/or thermal grants for low-income earners ($205,000);

 Continuing to fund the Youth Holistic Outreach Program ($120,000);

 Increased grant opportunities to support local artists ($110,000); and

 Doubling the funding for the Renuwall mural program ($60,000).

 A capital works program of $90.5 million in 2025/26. Key projects in the program include:

 Commencing planning and design for the $60 million Coburg library and piazza project;

 Continuing to spend well above the resolved $12 per head per capita rate on transport infrastructure spend, with $17.62 per capita allocated in 2025-26;

 Roads and carparks renewal and maintenance ($27.3 million);

 Improvements to parks, open space, and streetscapes ($12.8 million); and

 Footpaths, bicycle paths and transport infrastructure ($6.7 million).

 As part of Council’s participatory budgeting process earlier this year, funding three community budget ideas in 2025/26 totalling $313,573:

 Improving Gilpin dog park $160,000;

 Lizard with bikes – revitalising the Coburg velodrome underpass $100,000; and

 Challenging gender-based violence through youth led initiatives $53,573.

As well as funding the top voted project, Native understorey planting, for $0.3 million over the next 4-years as a strategic priority.

 The 4-Year Budget 2025-2029 continues Council’s strong commitment to delivering on its major projects pipeline with a further $7.9 million set aside for the Significant Projects Reserve to fund future projects. This reserve is being used to save for the next significant project – the Coburg library and piazza.

Since public exhibition of the Proposed 4-Year Budget 2025-2029 which occurred from 24 April to 22 May 2025, amendments have been made to develop the Proposed budget based on new information (e.g., changes to fees as set by the State Government), final rates figures and minor capital works changes (phasing and funding assumptions). Details of the changes are summarised in section 3 of this report.

196 submissions were received on the proposed budget in the second round of community engagement; these submissions are in addition to the 42 eligible community budget ideas received in the first stage of engagement. A copy of public submissions received, and Council officer commentary is provided as Attachment 3.

The proposed budget has an unrestricted surplus of $483,970. Following the community consultation period, officers have highlighted the below projects that are a high priority to fund, however, cannot be funded without creating a budget deficit, these include:

 Ballerrt Mooroop ($500,000)

 Coburg basketball stadium feasibility study ($150,000);

 Morris Reserve cricket nets ($130,000);

 Beethoven music festival ($15,000 for the next 4-years).

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Proposed Merri-bek City Council 4-Year Budget 2025-2029 –** 16 April 2025

*That Council endorses as part of the budget for public exhibition the proposed capital works funding allocation for all items relating to McDonald Reserve Hockey Pitch project, for the purpose of community exhibition commencing 24 April 2025 until 5pm on 22 May 2025.*

*That Council endorses as part of the budget for public exhibition the proposed capital works funding allocation for all items relating to the Kendall/Harding footbridge – BR070 over Merri Creek, for the purpose of community exhibition commencing 24 April 2025 until 5pm on 22 May 2025.*

*That Council endorses as part of the budget for public exhibition the proposed capital works funding allocation for all items relating to De Chene Reserve car park upgrade and De Chene Reserve – Gender Inclusive changerooms, for the purpose of community exhibition commencing 24 April 2025 until 5pm on 22 May 2025.*

That Council:

*1. Endorses the Proposed 4-year Budget 2025-2029 (provided as Attachment 1 to this report), for the purpose of community exhibition commencing 24April 2025 until 5pm on 22 May 2025.*

*2. Endorses the Proposed 4-year Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029, at Attachment 2 to this report (developed to inform the Proposed Budget), for the purpose of community exhibition.*

*3. Endorses the voting outcomes of the Community Budget Ideas Process (provided as Attachment 3 to this report), noting that the proposed budget includes the following selection of community budget ideas totaling $313,5730 (higher than the $250,000 set aside):*

*i) Improving Gilpin dog park $160,000*

*ii) Lizard with bikes – revitalising the Coburg velodrome underpass $100,000*

*iii) Challenging gender-based violence through youth led initiatives $53,573.*

*4. Notes that $8.0 million will be transferred to Significant Projects Reserve to accumulate funding for Council’s long-term significant priorities including Coburg library and piazza.*

*5. Notes that a minor surplus of $309,630 is proposed to be kept aside for potential allocation following feedback received through the public exhibition process.*

*6. Invites feedback on the Proposed 4-year Budget 2025-2029 and makes available for public inspection the Proposed 4-year Budget 2025-2029 on the Council website and at the three civic centres and all libraries.*

*7. Establish a hybrid Hearing Committee, consisting of all Councillors, and appointing the Mayor as Chair, to be held on Tuesday, 27 May 2025 commencing at 6.00pm at the Coburg Civic Centre and invites any submitters who indicate they wish to be heard in support of their submission on the Proposed 4-year Budget 2025-2029.*

*8. Receives a further report at its meeting on 23 June 2025 outlining any feedback received on the Proposed 4-year Budget 2025-2029 and Proposed 4-Year Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029; presenting a final Proposed 4-year Budget 2025-2029 and a final Proposed 4-year Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029 for consideration for adoption.*

**1. Policy Context**

The Proposed 4-year Budget 2025-2029 has been prepared in accordance with the requirement of Section 94 of the LGA 2020 and part 3 of the Local Government (Planning and Reporting) Regulations 2020 which requires councils to prepare a budget for each financial year and the three subsequent financial years.

The declaration of Rates and Charges is made in accordance with section 158 of the *Local Government Act 1989.*

The Proposed Revenue and Rating Plan has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of Section 93 of the LGA 2020 which requires Councils to prepare and adopt a Revenue and Rating Plan by the next 30 June after a general election for a period of at least the next 4 financial years.

**2. Background**

Council is required to produce a 4-year budget for each financial year by 30 June. Council held community consultation from November 2024 through to March 2025 (stage 1) and from 24 April through to 22 May 2025 (stage 2) to inform the budget. On 16 April 2025, Council resolved to endorse the proposed budget and make it available for public exhibition.

**3. Issues**

**Proposed 4-Year Budget 2025-2029**

In a ‘normal’ year, it can be challenging to fund the delivery of services to Merri-bek’s 191,000 plus residents and deliver on the ambitious Council goals all within the rate cap of 3.00 per cent set by the Minister for Local Government. The budget delivers key outcomes for the Merri-bek community while maintaining Council’s financial sustainability. The proposed budget was developed alongside the gender impact assessment **Attachment 4**,which aims to create better and fairer outcomes and ensure all people have equal access to opportunities and resources.

This proposed Budget provides for an underlying surplus (excluding capital and developer contributions) of $22.1 million, this surplus is required to contribute towards the rates funded component of the capital works program, as well as loan repayments and transfers to the reserves.

The underlying operating result is an important measure of financial sustainability. This measure demonstrates Council’s ability to self-fund its operations, and excludes funding related to Council’s capital works program.

Council remains in a healthy financial position through prudent financial management ensures sufficient cash is available to fund our operations, projects, and balance sheet items. Total Council expenditure will amount to $237.9 million and requires a Comprehensive Income Statement surplus of $43.4 million to meet the following requirements:

 $14.2 million in loan principal repayments. Noting that the Local Funding Vehicle Reserve loan is due this financial year and funds have been set aside in the reserve to pay this off. Repayment of loan interest is included in the income statement whilst the principal repayment is a balance sheet item and requires cash funding;

 A further $7.9 million set aside for the Significant Projects Reserve to fund future projects, such as Coburg library and piazza;

 $9.6 million in additional rates funded capital expenditure beyond depreciation. Depreciation being non-cash expenditure, reflects the level of asset consumption.

The proposed budget has an unrestricted surplus of $483,970. Following the community consultation period, officers have highlighted the below projects that are a high priority to fund, however, cannot be funded without creating a budget deficit, these include:

 Ballerrt Mooroop ($500,000)

 Coburg basketball stadium feasibility study ($150,000);

 Morris Reserve cricket nets ($130,000);

 Beethoven music festival ($15,000 for the next 4-years).

It is noted that construction costs have continued to remain high due to external factors outside of Councils control. While estimated cost increases that been applied to the capital works program, accurate costs are not known until the time of tendering and adjustments may be made through the forecasting process as required.

The adoption of the Moving Around Merri-bek Transport Strategy (adopted in March 2024) has also included additional spending on active transport infrastructure, with minimum allocation of rates funding per person in Merri-bek re-set from $10 per head to $12 per head, to be indexed by the rates cap for future years. The value of $3.38 million in 2025-26 on active transport infrastructure represents $17.62 per person. Full details are provided in Attachment 1 – appendix C.

**Adjustments to the proposed budget**

After considering all submissions received as well as new information received after the proposed budget was developed, the following key adjustments are made in the 4-Year Budget 2025-2029:

 **Rates and Charges:** The final valuation information has been received from the Valuer General to support the setting of rates.

 **Fees and Charges:** Statutory fees and charges set by the State have been increased by 3.00 per cent increase for statutory fees and fines for the 2025-26 financial year.

 **Operating Grants:** The Financial Assistance Grant that is expected to be received from the Federal Government has been increased to align with the latest estimate received.

 **Capital works program**

 Addition of the Brunswick Early Years Hub in years 2-4 of the capital works program;

 The Sportsfield redevelopment program in year 5 (2029-30) has been split out to show more detail as follows (this change has no financial impact):

 Balfe Park Sportsfield redevelopment $1.1 million; and

 Sportsfield redevelopment (ground to be determined) $1.7 million;

 Charles Mutton Reserve East & West Sportsfield Lighting Upgrade (no overall change to the total project cost – change in funding source is shown to account for the $200,000 partial grant funding);

 Bringing forward $400,000 for the Sportsfield Lighting – Dunstan Reserve (North and South) into 2025-26, which was previously in 2027-28 (no overall change to the total project cost – change in funding source is shown to account for $200,000 grant funding and $200,000 in rates funding);

 Bringing forward $100,000 to complete the design works for the Sportsfield lighting upgrades at Wallace Reserve (North, South, East and West).

 CERES grant funding: Notes the draft budget included $261,182 grant funding to CERES which was previously split across the capital works program ($140,000) and the operating budget ($121,182). The budget now has this money all within operating for the 2025-26 financial year (this is a cost neutral change).

**Financial Sustainability**

Council is committed to the sustainable management of its resources. The 4-year Budget 2025-2029 aims to ensure that Council continues to deliver vital services to the community and essential infrastructure while maintaining accountability for prudent financial management.

**Carry Forwards of capital works program from 2024-25 to 2025-26**

Council incurs delays on the capital works program, both internal and external delays. Attachment 5 includes a detailed list of all projects declared throughout the quarterly forecast process to be carried forward from 2024-25 to 2025-26.

The full extent of projects that will need to be carried forward into 2025-26 will be reported to Council in September 2025 in the Annual Report.

**Waste Charges**

The 2025-26 proposed budget proposes the charge for the standard kerbside waste services to increase by 20 cents per week or $10.36 per year (to a total cost of $333.73 per annum). The proposed waste charges have been set in accordance with the Kerbside Waste Service and Charge Policy which was authorised by Council 21 December 2022. The waste charge has been developed in accordance with the good practice guidelines which were issued under the Local Government Act 2020 (s.87) by the Minister in December 2023.

The increase of $1.4 million or 6% in total kerbside waste collection costs is directly linked to the cost of providing the kerbside waste services (household rubbish, mixed recycling, food organics and garden organics (FOGO) and glass), on a cost recovery basis. The increase is primarily driven by the 31% increase in the waste levy (State government levy) from 2024-25 to 2025-26.

The 2025-26 proposed fees and charges includes the reduced cost for the residents who are participating in the fortnightly household rubbish trial. For those households participating in the trial, if they have a standard household rubbish bin, they will be paying $30.67 less for the household rubbish bin than those receiving weekly pickups.

The below table shows the current waste charge by stream for those with the standard bin size for each stream in 2024-25. The table show as well as the proposed full cost recovery for each stream for those the proposed costs, the table shows the proposed costs for those receiving the weekly household rubbish collection, as well as for those that are in the trial of fortnightly household rubbish in 2025-26.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Weekly household rubbish** | | | **Fortnightly household rubbish** | | |
|  | **2024-25** | **2025-26** | **$ increase** | **% increase** | **2025-26** | **$ increase** | **% increase** |
| Household rubbish | 148.07 | 166.31 | 18.24 | 12% | 135.64 | - 12.43 | - 8% |
| Mixed recycling | 57.50 | 55.61 | - 1.89 | - 3% | 55.61 | - 1.89 | - 3% |
| Food and Organics | 100.49 | 94.00 | - 6.49 | - 6% | 94.00 | - 6.49 | - 6% |
| Glass Recycling | 17.31 | 17.81 | 0.50 | 3% | 17.81 | 0.50 | 3% |
| **Total** | **323.37** | **333.73** | **10.36** | **3%** | **303.06** | **- 20.31** | **-6%** |

**2025-26 Operating Projects Program**

The operating projects program amounts to $2.8 million; this significant investment is to progress key Council Plan linked initiatives. These projects are detailed in **Attachment 1** – Appendix A. Key projects in the program include:

 Continued funding of $0.5 million for the Urban Forest Strategy - Tree Planting Regime;

 Expanding our supporting seniors to live independently (outdoor help for seniors) ($540,000);

 Continuing the solar and/or thermal grants for low-income earners ($205,000);

 Continuing the funding of $120,000 to fund the Youth Holistic Outreach Program;

 Increased grant opportunities to support local artists ($110,000); and

 Doubling the funding for the Renuwall mural program ($60,000).

**2025-26 Capital Works Program**

The proposed new Capital Works Program for 2025/26 amounts to $90.5 million ($52.3 million funded by rates, $13.0 million from grants, $6.2 million from contributions, and $19.1 million from reserves including rates funded carry forwards of $15.8 million). Key deliverables in the program include:

 Commencing planning and design for the $60 million Coburg library and piazza project;

 Continuing to spend well above the resolved $12 per head per capita rate on transport infrastructure spend, with $17.62 per capital allocated in 2025-26;

 Roads and carparks renewal and maintenance ($27.3 million);

 Improvements to parks, open space, and streetscapes ($12.8 million); and

 Footpaths, bicycle paths and transport infrastructure ($6.7 million).

Council is delivering on our commitment to increase our per capital spend of rates funding on active transport infrastructure (walking and cycling infrastructure). The budgeted spend on active transport infrastructure per capita of $17.62 exceeds the commitment of $12.36 per head (to be indexed by the rate cap each year) in this 4-year budget. Appendix C of **Attachment 1** provides further information on the level of spending on active transport infrastructure per capita and the locations of projects that are being designed and consulted upon in the 2025-26 financial year.

The below table shows the per capita spend on active transport that is included in the budget.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Year | 1. 2025/26 | 1. 2026/27 | 1. 2027/28 | 1. 2028/29 | 1. 2029/30 |
| 1. Target per capita rate | 1. $12.36 | 1. $12.67 | 1. $12.99 | 1. $13.25 | 1. $13.51 |
| 1. Per capita rate achieved | 1. $17.62 | 1. $20.54 | 1. $15.05 | 1. $16.74 | 1. $13.95 |

The capital works program is presented two ways in **Attachment 1** to ensure we are meeting our legislative reporting requirements as well as a more user-friendly view of the capital works program.

**Attachment 1** - section 4.5 of the budget document shows the capital works program as per the financial asset classes. This is prepared in accordance with the *Local Government (Planning and Reporting) Regulations 2020* to ensure our capital works program is classified in accordance with the accounting treatment of the asset created. This is in alignment with the model budget released by Local Government Victoria and the annual financial statements.

Additionally, **Attachment 1,** appendix Cshows the full view of the capital works program categorised by the functional groups (e.g. early years assets and open space assets). This view makes it easier for the community to look at the overall project funding for multi-year projects, as well as total spend by groupings.

**Borrowings**

Council have proposed no increase to borrowings in the 2025-26 financial year.

**4-Year Revenue & Rating Strategy**

Council’s Revenue & Rating Strategy provides the legislative and practical background for the rating framework and outlines the logic behind the Council’s current rating structure.

The proposed Revenue and Rating Strategy 2021-25 is at **Attachment 2**.

Average rates in 2025-26 will increase by 3.0 per cent, in line with the rate cap set by the Victorian Government under the Fair Go Rates System. The valuation function is centralised with the Valuer-General of Victoria and the valuation figures used in this 2025-26 proposed budget are now the certified valuations.

**Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications**

Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications are addressed throughout the Council Plan 2021-2025 but primarily under strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3. The below list are examples of key initiatives Council is funding on climate-related initiatives (this is not an exhaustive list):

 Tree Planting ($1.9 million)

 AG Gillon Stormwater Harvesting ($1.0 million)

 Oak Park Aquatic Centre Electrification ($0.9 million)

 Electricity Capacity Upgrades at Hadfield Depot ($0.8 million) Solar Thermal Subsidy Program ($0.2 million)

 Ride and Stride Active Transport Program ($0.3 million)

 Circular Economy Programs and Support ($0.2 million)

 Biodiversity & Climate Change resilience top up grants ($0.1 million)

**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**

**Engagement Activity for the Budget**

In accordance with Council’s Community Engagement Policy 2020 the engagement process for the budget included gathering community budget ideas from the community to inform the draft budget between November 2024 and January 2025.

As part of Council’s participatory budget process, $250,000 was set aside to fund community ideas and include into the proposed budget.

In the initial stage of engagement, we called for community ideas that met the criteria. In the second stage we ran a community voting program, including five pop-up sessions, each person had three votes to allocate to their top three projects.

A range of engagement methods were used to maximise participation and to ensure that people could contribute ideas to the budget in an accessible and inclusive way. Engagement activities included:

 Post cards were available at customer service, senior citizens centres, Oxygen, and libraries to provide a written idea

 Call for written submissions by Merri-bek social media pages (Facebook and Instagram)

 Call for written submissions by post and via our digital engagement platform Conversations Merri-bek

 Customer service had an on-hold message

 Promotion and assistance with submissions via libraries and library staff.

In this initial stage of engagement Council received 97 submissions, 42 projects meeting the criteria to progress to the second stage for community voting.

This is the fourth year that Council has run the community budget ideas and has continued to grow in popularity amongst the community. The participation rates in stage one engagement for the community budget ideas were higher than the previous year (which was the highest that Council budget process has ever reached, ahead of a typical formal public exhibition process).

The second stage of the community budget ideas occurred in March where the community had the opportunity to vote on three projects which they supported. 1,060 people participated in the voting process, with over half of the voting occurring in person. The participation rate remains similar to the previous year, and every project received some level of support via the voting process.

The 2025/26 budget includes three community budget ideas totaling $313,573, as voted by the community:

 Improving Gilpin dog park $160,000

 Lizard with bikes – revitalising the Coburg velodrome underpass $100,000

 Challenging gender-based violence through youth led initiatives $53,573.

As well as funding the top voted project (Native understorey planting) for ($0.3 million) over the next 4-years as a strategic priority.

**Stage Two – Budget Exhibition and Feedback**

The purpose of the exhibition stage of engagement was to share the proposed budget with the community and invite comments on the draft. Council resolved to make the Proposed 4-year Budget 2025-2029 available on the Council website and hard copies were available at the three civic centres and all libraries. The exhibition period commenced on 24 April for a 28-day public exhibition period that closed on 22 May 2025.

During this period, we engaged the community both in person and online through:

 A dedicated Project Page: a dedicated project page was created on Council’s engagement website, Conversations Merri-bek, which helped to create a consistent location for the community to access information and participation online.

 Communications Campaign: This included promotion on Council’s corporate channels and social media as well as hardcopies of the proposed budget 2025-2029 document in customer service centres and libraries.

 Email: 4,905 people were emailed through the Conversations Merri-bek members list. This list includes the registered submitters from the Community Budget Ideas project. Of this 2,721 people opened the email and 295 people clicked through to the website.

 Going to where people enjoy gathering: Pop ups were held at locations where a cross-section of the community would gather, inviting feedback community ‘drop-in’ information sessions at the following locations and times:

o Coburg Library 6 May 11.00am – 1.00pm

o Brunswick Library 12 May 12.00pm – 2.00pm

o Glenroy Community Hub 14 May 11.00am – 1.00pm.

Community submissions to the 4-year Budget closed on 22 May, with 196 submissions to the proposed budget received. Of the 186 participants that identified their gender 39 per cent are women, 56 per cent are men and 2 per cent are non-binary. There were 5 participants that preferred not to disclose their gender.

Submitters of feedback were invited to attend a Hearing of Submissions/Feedback Forum event on Tuesday 27 May where community members attended Council in person and online to share their feedback on the proposed budget with Councillors. This event was facilitated by Mayor Councillor Davidson, and of the 196 submissions received, 20 members of the community attended the Hearing of Submissions to present their ideas directly with Councillors and staff.

Of the 196 submissions, 85 related to Dunstan Reserve, 41 related to carshare parking fees, and 33 related to Allard Park.

A detailed listing of all submissions and officer comments are included in **Attachment 3.**

**Affected persons rights and interests**

The rights of persons affected by Council’s decision have been provided with the opportunity to contribute their views through the Community Engagement process.

**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 the preparation of the 4-Year Budget 2025-2029 are funded from the 2024-25 operating budget allocations.

All actions documented in the Council Action Plan 2024-2025 are resourced through the 4-Year Budget 2025-2029.

**7. Implementation**

Following adoption of the 4-Year Budget 2025-2029, a copy will be displayed on Council’s website.

Once adopted, the 4-Year Budget 2025-2029 Budget will be loaded into Council’s financial management system to enable officers to implement budgeted activities.

Financial performance against budget will be reported to Council periodically to ensure sound financial management.

**Attachment/s**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Merri-bek City Council Proposed Budget 2025-2029 | D25/307982 |  |
| **2** | Proposed Revenue & Rating Plan 2025 - 2029 | D24/529385 |  |
| **3** | Budget Community Feedback and Submissions and officer responses | D25/280447 |  |
| **4** | Gender Impact Assessment - Budget 2025-2029 | D25/304469 |  |
| **5** | Capital Carry Forwards into 2025-26 | D25/296458 |  |

4.2 Endorsement of Draft Merri-bek Community Vision and Draft Council Plan 2025-2029 for Public Consultation

**Director Business Transformation, Sue Vujcevic**

**Governance and Strategy**

## Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Endorses the draft Merri-bek Community Vision and the draft Council Plan 2025–29 (as provided in Appendix 1) for public exhibition commencing 25 June until 22 July 2025.

2. Establishes a Hearing Committee, consisting of all Councillors, and appointing the Mayor as Chair, to be held on Tuesday, 29 July 2025 commencing at 6.00pm at the Coburg Civic Centre, and invites those wishing to be heard in support of their submission to the Hearing Committee.

3. Acknowledges and thanks the deliberative Merri-bek Community Panel members for their participation and the preparation of the draft Merri-bek Community Vision.

**REPORT**

**Executive Summary**

This report seeks Council endorsement to release the 4-year draft Merri-bek Council Plan, incorporating the Community Vision and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, for public exhibition and community feedback (as provided in **Attachment 1**).

The draft Community Vision and Council Plan 2025-29 have been developed through a comprehensive and collaborative engagement process, which has supported both to reflect the values, aspirations and priorities of the Merri community.

The existing Community Vision was independently reviewed and refined by Community and Youth Panels (the Panel), broadly representing the community’s diversity. Through a series of workshops and working groups, panel members considered feedback and developed a revised Community Vision statement, which was endorsed by a majority of the Panel. The Panel also identified key community priorities, with each priority refined and tested for broad support.

Advice from the Panel ensured that both the revised Community Vision and the identified priorities informed the development of the draft Council Plan 2025-29.

The draft Council Plan 2025-29 sets out Council’s priorities for the next four years, structured around five strategic directions:

1. Care for Nature and Climate Resilience

2. Healthy and Inclusive Communities

3. Beautiful and Liveable City

4. Thriving Economy and Culture

5. Engaging and Responsible Council.

Each strategic direction is supported by clear objectives, strategies, initiatives and performance indicators. The Council Plan is fully integrated with the Community Vision and the Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan and aligns with legislative requirements.

Implementation of the Council Plan will be supported by annual action plans, aligned with the budget process, enabling Council to remain flexible and responsive to emerging needs and opportunities. Progress will be tracked through regular performance reporting, supporting ongoing accountability and adaptability.

**Previous Council Decisions**

**Adoption of the Moreland Community Vision 2021-2031, Moreland Council Plan 2021-2025 and Moreland Council Action Plan 2021-2022** – 10 October 2021

*That Council:*

*1. Adopts Moreland Community Vision 2021-2031 (provided as Attachment 1) in accordance with legislative requirements of the Local Government Act 2020.*

*2. Adopts Moreland Council Plan 2021–2025 (provided as Attachment 2) in accordance with legislative requirements of the Local Government Act 2020 and the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008, noting that it incorporates the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025 with the following amendments:*

*…*

## 1. Policy Context

The review of the draft Community Vision and development of key strategic documents are guided by Council’s commitment to integrated planning and community engagement, as required under the Local Government Act 2020 and the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008.

These legislative frameworks ensure that Council’s strategic direction is informed by community aspirations and supports transparent, inclusive decision-making. The Community Vision also serves as a foundation for other key plans, including the Council Plan (incorporating the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan), Asset Management Plan, and 10-Year Financial Plan.

## 2. Background

In late 2024, Council initiated a comprehensive engagement process to review the existing Community Vision and prepare a draft Community Vision and inform the development of other strategic documents. An independent organisation was engaged to invite every household in Merri-bek to register interest in joining the Merri-bek Community Panel. Over 1,000 community members responded, and 44 were selected to ensure diverse representation across age, gender, suburb and cultural background. To further broaden perspectives, a Youth Panel of 24 individuals aged 12-17 was also established.

The Panel met over three days in February 2025, participating in a deliberative process designed to ensure inclusivity and accessibility. Panel members were provided with an array of Council information, presentations and an overall Community Context Report (which summarised key engagement activities and community priorities identified over the previous four years). This information informed their review of the Community Vision and input into the development of strategic documents.

The Panels’ objectives included:

 Reviewing and refining the Community Vision to reflect current aspirations and ensure clear communication.

 Providing input into integrated planning documents, including the Council Plan (which includes the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan).

 Building trust and buy-in through a transparent, deliberative process.

This approach supports the revised Community Vision and related plans to be both relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of the Merri-bek community.

## 3. Issues

**Draft Merri-bek Community Vision**

The Panel independently reviewed the existing Community Vision, identifying areas for improvement to better reflect the values and aspirations of the Merri-bek community. To further refine the vision, a working group comprising four young people and three adults was formed. This group synthesised key themes from broader panel discussions, assessing which elements of the current vision aligned with these themes and which required revision.

The working group collaborated in various format: individually, in pairs and as a whole to draft a succinct and inspiring Community Vision statement. Their aim was to produce a version that would motivate both Council and the community to pursue an ambitious future for Merri-bek by 2035.

A draft of the revised vision was then presented to both Panels for feedback. Feedback was documented by a Council’s facilitator, and consensus was reached on several points. A subsequent working group, consisting of two young people and two adults, incorporated the remaining feedback to finalise the vision. This final version was presented to all panel members and was endorsed by a super majority (over 70%) of both the Panel, forming a key part of their advice to Council.

The advice was presented to Councillors by representatives from the Panel. The Youth Panel selected a representative to present the Community Vision and share reflections on their experience. Community Priorities were presented by the respective topic champions, highlighting those that achieved super majority support (over 70%).

Through this collaborative and inclusive approach, the revised Community Vision and related strategic documents reflect the community’s needs, values and aspirations. This has resulted in the following revised Community Vision presented for Council endorsement:

**The Vision**

Merri-bek leads, and leaves no one behind.

**In 2035:**

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.

The draft Community Vision now forms part of the draft Council Plan.

**Developing Community Priorities**

The Panel revisited their previously identified values and aspirations, brainstorming and consolidating these into a set of community priorities. The Youth Panel’s priorities were shared with the Community Panel for consideration alongside their own. Each priority area was assigned a ‘champion’ responsible for guiding its refinement.

**Draft Council Plan 2025-29**

The draft Council Plan 2025-29 sets out Council’s priorities for the next four years, structured around five strategic directions.

This four-year plan incorporates the Community Vision, and it also integrates the Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan. It outlines Council’s intentions for its term in a manner that aligns with the requirements of the Local Government Act 2020 and the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008.

Councillors played a vital role throughout the process, meeting regularly over the past seven months to shape the strategic direction of the plan. Their efforts focused on defining what they aim to achieve over the next four years, while also ensuring that community voices were heard and thoughtfully considered during the development of the draft Council Plan.

This deliberative and collaborative process has led to the draft Council Plan being developed under the following 5 strategic directions:

 Care for Nature and Climate Resilience

 Healthy and Inclusive Communities

 Beautiful and Liveable City

 Thriving Economy and Culture

 Engaging and Responsible Council.

In achieving each strategic direction, the Plan sets out:

a) Strategic objectives: these describe the long-term outcomes Council wants to achieve, progress or contribute to in achieving the strategic direction;

b) Strategies: these outline the outcomes the plan aims to achieve and how we Council will meet objectives.

c) Initiatives and Priorities: where Council will allocate funding and resources to achieve these objectives through programs, projects and service delivery.

d) Indicators: Indicators to define how Council will measure success; and

e) Related Strategies and Plans: Strategies and Plans relevant to each objective.

The layout of the Plan will enable flexibility to deliver initiatives and priorities being able to cascade into service unit and individual work plans through yearly action plans.

**Implementation of the Council Plan**

The draft Council Plan 2025-29 will be implemented through an Annual Council Action Plan, developed each year to identify key initiatives, priorities and actions that deliver on the Strategic Objectives outlined in the Council Plan. Aligning the Annual Action Plan with the budget process will support a fully integrated approach to planning and resource allocation.

Adopting an annual planning cycle enables Council to respond flexibly to changing or unforeseen circumstances, new partnership or grant opportunities, and the development of long-term plans like the 10 Year Asset Plan and Community Infrastructure Plan. This approach allows Council to be both proactive and responsive, ensuring that strategic priorities remain relevant and achievable.

Progress against annual commitments will be tracked through quarterly and annual performance reports to Council. Council officers are currently developing the Year 1 Council Action Plan, which, while not incorporated into this report, it will be presented to Council for consideration and adoption alongside the Council Plan. This approach for Merri-bek City Council is designed for adaptability and to support sound decision-making in a dynamic environment.

### Gender Equity Impact Assessment

The draft Merri-bek Community Vision and draft Council Plan 2025-29 aims to have an overall positive impact on gender equality in Merri-bek. In particular, positive impacts are likely to arise from assessing gendered impacts in planning for delivery of services and infrastructure to support the broader community, including women and other human rights priority groups and disadvantaged community members.

A Gender Equity Impact Assessment report is in progress and once all engagement activities have been undertaken it will be provided for adoption alongside the final Council Plan.

### Community impact

Council’s Community Engagement Policy recognises the community’s right to participate in matters that impact and interest them. In particular, it seeks to increase the participation of groups at risk of underrepresentation, including older adults, children and young people, people from multicultural backgrounds, people from the LGBTIQA+ community, and First Nations people.

The principles contained within the Policy and their associated guidelines ensure Councils community engagement is inclusive, accessible and timely, giving members of the community the opportunity to participate in Council decision-making.

### Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

The draft Community Vision and Council Plan 2025-2029 have identified goals and initiatives to address climate emergency and environmental sustainability for the municipality.

### Economic sustainability implications

The draft Community Vision and Council Plan 2025-2029 have identified goals and initiatives to address economic sustainability for the municipality.

### Legal and risk considerations

The draft Merri-bek Community Vision and draft Council Plan 2025-29 and processes associated with the development of these documents have been undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020* and the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* and aligns with Council's established deliberative engagement practices as outlined in the Community Engagement Policy.

### Human Rights Consideration

Council takes a proactive approach to human rights, as stipulated in our Human Rights Policy (2016-2026). The implications of this report have been considered in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. The right to take part in public life and participate in public affairs includes helping making decisions on local issues, either directly or through representation. Significant consideration is being given to how to reach the Merri-bek community, including through the use of a deliberative community panel.

## 4. Community consultation and engagement

Consultation, engagement and communications are the key issues outlined in this report. A deliberative panel was established to review the Community Vision, and Council has taken into account the aspirations of the draft Community Vision to inform the development of the draft Council Plan 2025-2029.

**Public Exhibition**

Council will exhibit the 4-year Council Plan (incorporating the Community Vision and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan) for public viewing and community feedback from 25 June 2025.

The draft Plan will be available to download via the Conversations Merri-bek website, and will be available at Coburg Library, Brunswick Library, Fawkner Library, Fawkner Senior Citizens’ Centre, Glenroy Community Hub, Coburg Customer Service Centre and Brunswick Customer Service Centre.

Submissions can be made online via Conversations Merri-bek, in writing at the above locations, by post or via email.

## 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 public exhibition and hearing of submissions process supports community consideration of community views.

## Communications

## As detailed throughout the report, Council will be seeking community feedback and will be inviting interested individuals to register to speak in support of their feedback at a hearing of submission 29 July 2025.

## 5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

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

## 6. Financial and Resources Implications

There are no direct financial implications for the Council in endorsing the draft Council Plan 2025-29 and Community Vision for community engagement.

## 7. Implementation

Pending endorsement of the draft Council Plan 2025-29 and draft Community Vision and for community feedback, the following outlines the final stages of the project schedule for the anticipated final adoption of the draft Council Plan 2025-29 and Community Vision and:

1. Public Exhibition: 25 June to 22 July 2025;

2. Hearing of Submissions: Tuesday 29 July 2025;

3. Merri-bek Council Plan and Community Vision and is presented to Council for adoption, Wednesday, 10 September 2025

## Attachment/s

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | Draft Council Plan 2025-29 | D25/309688 |  |