



Merri-bek
City Council

Minutes of the Special Council Meeting

Held in Bunjil (Council Chamber), Merri-bek Civic Centre,
90 Bell Street, Coburg
on Wednesday 15 April 2026

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The Mayor opened the meeting at 6.32 pm and stated the Council meeting is being held on the traditional country of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people and acknowledged them as Traditional Owners. The Mayor paid respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging, and the Elders from other communities who may be here today.

| Present | Time In | Time Out |
|---------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Cr Nat Abboud, Mayor | 6.32 pm | 6.55 pm |
| Cr Helen Davidson, Deputy Mayor | 6.32 pm | 6.55 pm |
| Cr Sue Bolton | 6.32 pm | 6.55 pm |
| Cr Liz Irvin | 6.32 pm | 6.55 pm |
| Cr Dr Jay Iwasaki | 6.32 pm | 6.55 pm |
| Cr Chris Miles | 6.32 pm | 6.55 pm |
| Cr Helen Politis | Apology | |
| Cr Adam Pulford | 6.32 pm | 6.55 pm |
| Cr Ella Svensson | 6.32 pm | 6.55 pm |
| Cr Katerine Theodosis | 6.32 pm | 6.55 pm |
| Cr Oscar Yildiz JP | 6.32 pm | 6.55 pm |

OFFICERS

Acting Chief Executive Officer – Sue Vujcevic
 Acting Director Business Transformation – Anita Curnow
 Acting Director City Infrastructure – Greg Rodwell
 Director Place and Environment – Pene Winslade
 Director Community – Eamonn Fennessy
 Chief Financial Officer – Jemma Wightman
 Manager Governance and Strategy – Yvonne Callanan
 Risk and Resilience Officer – Glen Moore

APOLOGIES

Cr Politis was an apology to the meeting.

DISCLOSURES OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Cr Irvin disclosed a general conflict of interest in the Proposed Budget item relating to Kendall/Harding Street footbridge – BR070 over Merri Creek as her employer is involved in the project.

Cr Theodosis disclosed a general conflict of interest in the Proposed Budget capital works funding allocation for all items relating to DeChene Reserve projects, Balfe Park drainage & irrigation upgrade, Dunstan Reserve South Sportsfield redevelopment, Holbrook Reserve pavilion & gender inclusive change rooms, McBryde St Reserve (Moomba Park) projects, and Wallace Reserve projects as her employer is potentially involved in several of the projects listed under that item.

COUNCIL REPORTS

4.1 PROPOSED MERRI-BEK CITY COUNCIL BUDGET 2026-2030

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 Merri-bek City Council's Proposed 4-year Budget 2026-2030 (the Proposed Budget) for endorsement for public exhibition.

The Proposed Budget continues to deliver services to Merri-bek's 195,000-plus residents within the 2.75 per cent rate cap set by the State Government. The Proposed Budget also funds strategic priorities aligning with the Council Plan and delivers critical major projects while maintaining Council's financial sustainability.

Key features of the budget include:

- An operating projects program of \$3.2 million in 2026-27 featuring:
 - Continued funding of (\$0.5 million annually for the next 3 years) for the Urban Forest Strategy which includes both regular tree planting and planting trees in tricky places (capital);
 - Continued funding of the outdoor help for seniors program - \$0.5 million annually for the next 3 years);
 - Additional community grant funding of \$250,000;
 - A Ramadan Nights community event at Bonwick Street, Fawkner - \$50,000;
 - Continuing the solar and/or thermal grants for low-income earners (\$0.3 million annually for the next 3 years);
 - Increased grant opportunities to support local artists (\$175,000 additional); and
 - Continuing the homelessness assertive outreach program for the next 3 years (\$200,000 per year).
- A capital works program of \$91.6 million featuring:
 - Complete detailed design for the \$60 million Coburg library and piazza, working towards construction commencing in mid-2028;
 - Commencing construction of the \$12.5 million Brunswick Early Years Hub;
 - Continuing to spend over the four year budget well above the \$12 (and indexed) per head per capita rate on transport infrastructure spend (at an average spend of \$15.43 per capita), despite a lower spend due to project delays in 2026-27 of \$8.94;
 - Roads and carparks renewal and maintenance (\$10.6 million);
 - Improvements to parks, open space and streetscapes (\$11.5 million); and
 - Footpaths, bicycle paths and transport infrastructure (\$5.8 million).
- As part of Council's participatory budgeting process earlier this year, funding six community budget ideas totalling \$400,000:
 - Adding dedicated risky play elements (risky playground) to the playground upgrade at ATC Cook Reserve, Glenroy \$145,000;
 - Cool playgrounds, Safe Kids: Sun-Smart Shade for our Parks \$80,000;
 - Additional tree planting \$60,000 (split between tree planting and tricky tree planting);

- Rehearsal, art production and group space subsidies \$60,000;
 - Picnic tables in neighbourhood parks \$50,000; and
 - Free band programs for youth \$5,000.
- The Proposed Budget continues Council’s strong commitment to delivering on its major projects pipeline with funds set aside for the Significant Projects Reserve to fund future projects. This reserve is being used as a part of the funding strategy for the Coburg library and piazza project.
 - A minor unrestricted result of \$326,517 is proposed to be kept aside as a contingency to allow for any unknown costs arising out of current fuel price and supply chain uncertainty and/or for potential allocation following feedback received through the public exhibition process.
 - The budget is informed by the Proposed Merri-bek Council Action Plan 2026-2027 provided as Attachment 5. The Council Action Plan is developed annually to support implementation of the Merri-bek Council Plan 2025-2029 and identifies the strategic objectives and actions to deliver against the major initiatives and priorities (as contained in the Council Plan).

This report presents the Proposed Budget (Attachment 1) for Council endorsement to make it available for public exhibition and comment.

Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Endorses the Proposed 4-year Budget 2026-2030 (provided as Attachment 1 to this report), for the purpose of community exhibition commencing 21 April 2026 until 5pm on 21 May 2026.
2. Notes the voting outcomes of the Community Budget Ideas Process (provided as Attachment 2 to this report), and the inclusion of the below six ideas totaling \$400,000 in the draft budget:
 - i) Adding dedicated risky play elements (risky playground) to the playground upgrade at ATC Cook Reserve, Glenroy \$145,000
 - ii) Cool playgrounds, Safe Kids: Sun-Smart Shade for our Parks \$80,000
 - iii) Additional tree planting \$60,000 (split between tree planting and tricky tree planting)
 - iv) Rehearsal, art production and group space subsidies \$60,000
 - v) Picnic tables in neighbourhood parks \$50,000
 - vi) Free band programs for youth \$5,000.
3. Notes that the 4-year budget includes proposed borrowings for strategic land assembly in 2026-27 as well as borrowings in future years for the Coburg Library and Piazza project.
4. Notes that a minor unrestricted result of \$326,517 is proposed to be kept aside as a contingency to allow for any unknown costs arising out of current fuel price and supply chain uncertainty and/or for potential allocation following feedback received through the public exhibition process.
5. Invites feedback on the Proposed 4-year Budget 2026-2030 made available for public inspection on the Council website, at the three civic centres and all libraries.

6. Establishes a hybrid Hearing Committee, consisting of all Councillors, and appointing the Mayor as Chair, to be held on Tuesday, 26 May 2026 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 2026-2030.
7. Receives a further report at its Special Council meeting on Monday 22 June 2026 outlining the feedback received and recommending a final 4-year Budget 2026-2030 for adoption.
8. Notes the Proposed Merri-bek Council Action Plan 2026-2027 (provided as Attachment 5) as the second year of actions to deliver against the Merri-bek Council Plan 2025-2029, which will be presented for endorsement at the time of Budget adoption.

Separating the Motion

Resolution

Cr Davidson moved, Cr Bolton seconded -

That Council separates those parts of the Proposed Budget relating to Kendall/Harding Footbridge – BR070 over Merri Creek, DeChene Reserve projects, Balfe Park drainage & irrigation upgrade, Dunstan Reserve South Sportsfield redevelopment, Holbrook Reserve pavilion & gender inclusive change rooms, McBryde St Reserve (Moomba Park) projects, and Wallace Reserve projects to enable those Councillors with a disclosed conflict of interest to participate in the remainder of the Proposed Budget.

.Carried

6.36 pm Having declared a conflict of interest in the Proposed Budget item relating to Kendall/Harding footbridge – BR070 over Merri Creek, Cr Irvin left the meeting.

Resolution

Cr Bolton moved, Cr Davidson seconded -

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 21 April 2026 until 5pm on 21 May 2026.

Carried unanimously

6.38 pm Cr Irvin returned to the meeting.

6.39 pm Having declared a conflict of interest in the Proposed Budget the capital works funding allocation for all items relating to DeChene Reserve projects, Balfe Park drainage & irrigation upgrade, Dunstan Reserve South Sportsfield redevelopment, Holbrook Reserve pavilion & gender inclusive change rooms, McBryde St Reserve (Moomba Park) projects, Wallace Reserve projects, Cr Theodosia left the meeting.

Resolution

Cr Bolton moved, Cr Miles seconded -

That Council endorses as part of the budget for public exhibition the capital works funding allocation for all items relating to DeChene Reserve projects, Balfe Park drainage & irrigation upgrade, Dunstan Reserve South Sportsfield redevelopment, Holbrook Reserve pavilion & gender inclusive change rooms, McBryde St Reserve (Moomba Park) projects, Wallace Reserve projects., for the purpose of community exhibition commencing 21 April 2026 until 5pm on 21 May 2026.

Carried unanimously

6.42 pm Cr Theodosia return the meeting.

Resolution

Cr Irvin moved, Cr Davidson seconded -

That Council:

1. Endorses the Proposed 4-year Budget 2026-2030 (provided as Attachment 1 to this report), for the purpose of community exhibition commencing 21 April 2026 until 5pm on 21 May 2026 subject to:
 - i) Bring forward \$275,000 of the park, playground and reserve renewal and improvement funding from 2027-28 into 2026-27 (open space reserve funded) for Playground renewal Duggan Reserve.
 - ii) Remove the \$240,000 budget for Symons Reserve (design and construct) in 2026-27 and allocate it into 2027-28 capital works program.
 - iii) Reduce the budget by \$200,000 in 2026-27 for Park renewal Volga Street/Middle street (construction), and allocate the funding into 2027-28 capital works program.
 - iv) Bring forward \$100,000 from 2030-31 (budget allocation of \$2.8 million) into 2029-30 capital works program for design works relating to Raeburn Reserve, Sportsfield upgrade.
 - v) Offsets the above, by reducing the transfer to the significant projects reserve by \$100,000.
2. Notes the voting outcomes of the Community Budget Ideas Process (provided as Attachment 2 to this report), and the inclusion of the below six ideas totaling \$400,000 in the draft budget:
 - i) Adding dedicated risky play elements (risky playground) to the playground upgrade at ATC Cook Reserve, Glenroy \$145,000.
 - ii) Cool playgrounds, Safe Kids: Sun-Smart Shade for our Parks \$80,000.
 - iii) Additional tree planting \$60,000 (split between tree planting and tricky tree planting).
 - iv) Rehearsal, art production and group space subsidies \$60,000.
 - v) Picnic tables in neighbourhood parks \$50,000.
 - vi) Free band programs for youth \$5,000.
3. Notes that the 4-year budget includes proposed borrowings for strategic land assembly in 2026-27 as well as borrowings in future years for the Coburg Library and Piazza project.

4. Notes that a minor unrestricted result of \$326,517 is proposed to be kept aside as a contingency to allow for any unknown costs arising out of current fuel price and supply chain uncertainty and/or for potential allocation following feedback received through the public exhibition process.
5. Invites feedback on the Proposed 4-year Budget 2026-2030 made available for public inspection on the Council website, at the three civic centres and all libraries.
6. Establishes a hybrid Hearing Committee, consisting of all Councillors, and appointing the Mayor as Chair, to be held on Tuesday, 26 May 2026 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 2026-2030.
7. Receives a further report at its Special Council meeting on Monday 22 June 2026 outlining the feedback received and recommending a final 4-year Budget 2026-2030 for adoption.
8. Notes the Proposed Merri-bek Council Action Plan 2026-2027 (provided as Attachment 5) as the second year of actions to deliver against the Merri-bek Council Plan 2025-2029, which will be presented for endorsement at the time of Budget adoption.

Amendment

Cr Theodosis moved, Cr Miles seconded –

That Council includes in the Proposed 4-year Budget 2026-2030 the following item under Point 1 of the motion:

- vi) Allocating up to \$80,000 from the capital works project Cool Playgrounds, Safe Kids: Sun–Smart Shade for our Parks to shade sail/s in parks at HM Dowd Reserve.

Lost on the casting vote of the Mayor

The substantive motion was put to the vote.

Carried

The Council meeting closed at 6.55 pm.

Confirmed

Cr Nat Abboud
MAYOR