



# Merri-bek City Council

## Minutes of the Council Meeting – Election of the Mayor

Held at the Council Chamber, Merri-bek Civic Centre,  
90 Bell Street, Coburg  
on Wednesday 15 November 2023

Cr Panopoulos opened the meeting at 7.06 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 Angelica Panopoulos	7.06 pm	7.44 pm
Cr Helen Davidson	7.06 pm	7.44 pm
Cr Adam Pulford	7.06 pm	7.44 pm
Cr Annalivia Carli Hannan	7.06 pm	7.44 pm
Cr Helen Pavlidis	7.06 pm	7.44 pm
Cr James Conlan	7.06 pm	7.44 pm
Cr Lambros Tapinos	7.06 pm	7.44 pm
Cr Mark Riley	7.06 pm	7.44 pm
Cr Monica Harte	7.06 pm	7.44 pm
Cr Oscar Yildiz JP	Apology	
Cr Sue Bolton	7.06 pm	7.44 pm

### Officers

Chief Executive Officer – Cathy Henderson  
Manager Governance and Strategy – Yvonne Callanan  
Unit Manager Governance – Troy Delia

### Apologies

Cr Yildiz was an apology to the meeting.

## **Declaration of Interests and/or Conflict of Interests**

Nil.

## **Term of Mayor**

To fulfil the statutory obligations of section 26(3) of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act), before the election of the Mayor, a Council must determine by resolution whether the Mayor is to be elected for a 1 year or a 2 year term.

As this is the final year of the Council term, the recommendation is that Council sets a 1 year term for the 2023/24 Mayoral year, as it has done in previous years.

The Mayoral term will end at 6 am on 26 October 2024, being the day of the next General Election.

In accordance with Council's Governance Rules, the Mayoral term determined by Council will also apply to a Deputy Mayor.

## **Recommendation**

That Council:

1. Elects a Mayor for a one year term.
2. Notes the term of any Deputy Mayor is identical to the term of the Mayor.

## **Resolution**

**Cr Riley moved, Cr Davidson seconded -**

**That Council:**

1. Elects a Mayor for a one year term.
2. Notes the term of any Deputy Mayor is identical to the term of the Mayor.

**Carried unanimously**

## **Presentation to Outgoing Mayor and Deputy Mayor**

The Chief Executive Officer, Cathy Henderson thanked the outgoing Mayor Cr Panopoulos and Deputy Mayor Cr Davidson and made presentations on behalf of Council.

The outgoing Mayor, Cr Angelica Panopoulos made a brief statement.

## **Election of Mayor**

The Chief Executive Officer, Cathy Henderson, in accordance with section 25 of the *Local Government Act 2020* and Merri-bek's Governance Rules, invited nominations for the office of the Mayor for the 2023-2024 Mayoral year.

Cr Tapinos nominated and Cr Riley seconded Cr Pulford as Mayor of Merri-bek City Council for the 2023-2024 Mayoral year.

Cr Pulford accepted the nomination.

Cr Pavlidis nominated and Cr Harte seconded Cr Davidson as Mayor of Merri-bek City Council for the 2023-2024 Mayoral year.

Cr Davidson accepted the nomination.

## **Resolution**

**Cr Bolton moved, Cr Conlan seconded –**

**That Council invites the Mayoral candidates to address the meeting before the voting is held.**

**Carried**

Cr Pulford addressed the meeting.

Cr Davidson addressed the meeting.

**With 2 nominations for the office of Mayor, the Chief Executive Officer put it to the vote in the order the nominations were received.**

**With more than the required absolute majority of six votes, the Chief Executive Officer declared Cr Pulford elected as Mayor of Merri-bek City Council for the 2023-2024 Mayoral year.**

## **Newly Elected Mayor – Mayoral Chains and Assumes the Chair**

The newly elected Mayor, Cr Pulford received the Mayoral Chains and assumed the Chair.

7.29 pm Cr Pulford assumed the Chair.

## **Ceremonial Mayoral Speech**

In accordance with sub-rule 4.7(1) in Chapter 4 of the Governance Rules, upon being elected, the Mayor made a ceremonial speech, outlining the priorities of the year ahead based on the previously adopted Council Plan.

### **Mayor Cr Pulford**

Thank you everybody, and I would also like to begin by acknowledging that this meeting is being held on the lands of the Wurundjeri Woi wurrung people. I wish to acknowledge them as the Traditional Custodians of these lands and waterways and would also like to pay our respect to their Elders past, present, and emerging, as well as to all First Nations communities, who significantly contribute to the life of this area. I acknowledge their cultural heritage, their relationship with Country and the contribution they make to the life of our city.

I would also like to acknowledge members of parliament, former mayors and councillors, and the other community leaders who have joined us or may be watching online tonight.

To my fellow Councillors, residents of Merri-bek, friends and family. I am honoured to be elected as Mayor of this city that is enriched by its diverse and engaged community.

I am proud to lead this Council over the next 12 months and with the support of my fellow councillors. I will serve the people of Merri-bek with integrity, keeping their best interests at the heart of everything we do.

I commit to leading Council in building on the great strides we have made during the third year of our Community Vision and Council Plan.

To the outgoing Mayor, Cr Angelica Panopoulos; thank you very much for your hard work and dedication to our community over the last year, I don't know whether you had a weekend free. To hear about how you obviously finished uni and ran a State election

campaign and went into Mayor. I hope you can finally have a rest now, obviously still doing your Councillor duties.

To highlight some of Council's directions and projects that you have overseen, over the past year Council has delivered on some really big projects like Angelica highlighted, the Fawkner Leisure Centre and the Saxon Community Centre.

And a sustainable future remains high on our priority list, with tree planting increasing by 30% from the previous year. Which is good because trees help make our city more beautiful but also help cool the city and streets for the members of the community getting around. We installed subsidised rooftop solar systems on homes in Merri-bek, secured a \$500,000 Federal Government grant towards a project to install a community battery in Brunswick, that will improve network conditions and reduce energy bills and emissions. We introduced big changes to our waste service and we are already sending fewer and fewer tonnes to landfill. We continued our work on reconciliation. We continued to advocate on important topics such as duplicating the Upfield rail, improving our bus network, and social and affordable housing. So thank you Cr Angelica and congratulations on your Mayoral year.

Thank you also to Cr Helen Davidson for your work as Deputy Mayor over the past year.

I just wanted to say to everyone here that I am really grateful to be here tonight having been entrusted with the role of Mayor, elected by my fellow Councillors.

I am a proud queer person, and I absolutely love our thriving and diverse and progressive community. It is a huge honour to be in this role for the next year and I will give it my all and I don't want to waste a minute, follow Angelica's lead.

I am not actually from here originally, I was born in Nhulunbuy up in Arnhem land. Last year I had to step out of Council for a little bit because my Mum was diagnosed with Pancreatic Cancer, she lived in South Australia so I spent a bunch of last year travelling to S.A. to help care for Mum. I think she would be proud but also find it funny, that her little boy from Nhulunbuy is now the Mayor of Merri-bek for the next 12 months. My Dad is also very surprised I am a Green.

I have made home here, I don't want to live anywhere else. I feel like when you lay down roots in the community your invested in it. Even if I do at some point of my life disappear for a while, this is home to me.

I am grateful for all of our community members and groups who are so engaged with the work that we do, who push us to be better, who hold us to account, who get in touch with us.

I am grateful for the support and love from my incredible husband Niccolò who is out in the audience there, and my family and my friends the Kelso crew and so many more to mention.

The last thing I would say is thank you to my current colleagues at the First People's Assembly of Victoria, they are the organisation leading the journey to Treaty Victoria. Mob in Victoria are leading the country in terms of advancing self-determination and there is so much exciting work happening here, check them out and check out the Yoorrook Justice Commission who is also leading Australia's first formal truth telling process.

I do have to speak for a little bit longer sorry, but I just want to talk about some of the work that we have been doing as Council and we've got coming up for the last twelve months of this term.

As you know we are the closest level of government to our community. Our staff maintain our roads our parks and playgrounds, and interact with our community through many of our more than 150 services, in our libraries, maternal and child health centres and when visiting older residents.

Although we are in the fourth and final year this term, the way the cycle works out is we are currently in Year Three of our Council Plan. I am delighted to say we are making great progress across the goals and actions in the plan.

We have five themes in our Council Plan:

- An environmentally proactive Merri-bek
- Moving and living safely in Merri-bek
- A healthy and caring Merri-bek
- Vibrant spaces and places in Merri-bek
- An empowered and collaborative Merri-bek

I am so pleased to be able to say that redevelopment works at Fawkner Leisure Centre are progressing on time and on budget. Internal and external demolition is now complete. I am also pleased that it is my role to tell people that internal and external demolition is now complete. The 50-metre pool floor slab is complete, wall construction is progressing well. The foundations for the pool slab have been completed. The gym extension is getting underway. Well done to that team, managing that.

The headline there is we are on track to complete the Fawkner Leisure Centre redevelopment by summer next year.

Exciting changes are also happening at 33 Saxon Street in Brunswick. We are redeveloping the site to create a cultural and community hub that will draw in visitors to experience a range of activities and events. The upgrade will create approximately 3,500 sqm of floorspace and will deliver an accessible and functional building with welcoming and affordable spaces for creatives, artists and the Merri-bek community. Construction has already begun and completion is expected by the end of next year.

Just to highlight a little bit of work on some of our five council themes, for the first one achieving an environmentally proactive Merri-bek, climate change and the risk it presents to us will continue to be front-of-mind in council decision-making, as we work to continue cutting our own emissions and also mitigate the impacts of climate change on our community. We are in a climate emergency and I am so proud to be part of this council that is leading on climate action but also facing up to climate risks and how that will affect our community, because climate change will affect every part of our community and everyone in our community.

Some of the actions we are taking under that are:

- Installing 44 subsidised rooftop solar systems on eligible residents' homes, helping households save \$750 a year. Another 77 households received subsidies from us to upgrade the heating of their home to help reduce energy demand as well.

For the second theme, moving and living safely in Merri-bek:

- We are improving pedestrian safety by implementing 40 kilometres an hour on all of our local roads that are currently 50 kilometres an hour.

- We are building and maintaining infrastructure to support active transport, and planning to increase our investment every year and at the last meeting Council voted to build protected bike lanes in De Carle street, which is an exciting project we have coming up.
- We are finalising our Transport Strategy following community feedback, it is now out for the last round of engagement, please do give your feedback on that.
- We are continuing to advocate for improved public transport capacity and equitable access across Merri-bek. Including better bus networks, which we do need, my bus was 15 minutes late tonight, but also duplicating the Upfield Rail Line and investments in making tram lines more accessible for residents. That's particularly important given the proposed level crossing removals in Brunswick, which we will continue to advocate for great outcomes on.

The theme, healthy and caring Merri-bek:

- We are continuing with our Children, Young People and Families Plan, including support for the new group of Youth Ambassadors and our Children's Reference Group.
- Delivering a large program of investment in expanding and building kindergarten and early years facilities, co-funded by Council and State Government.
- Implementing our LGBTIQ+ action plan, in collaboration with our queer reference group
- Fawkner Leisure Centre development
- The Ballerit Mooroop project in Glenroy, as well as the community services we continue to provide.

And on our theme creating vibrant spaces and places in Merri-bek:

- We will keep going with the Saxon Street redevelopment.
- We will renew shopping strips with new footpaths, lighting, art and trees, and
- Continue to run our incredible festivals including the Sydney Road Street Party, Brunswick Music Festival, Coburg Night Markets, Glenroy Festival and Fawkner Festa and;
- Finally continue to improve access to parks, through our park close to home program.

And now finally for the theme, empowered and collaborative Merri-bek:

- We will continued to support our Community Connectors who are a group of residents who help pass Council information amongst their local religious or ethnic communities
- To keep going with our Community Engagement Policy and our Accessible and Inclusive Communications Policy.
- Making sure Snap Send Solve works better with our customer systems.
- We are also asking for more feedback on budgets as we enter our final budget of this year.
- All of this and more means that we are delivering our largest capital works program ever (in real dollar terms) of \$127 million this year, which is huge.

Finally, our wonderful community make Merri-bek the great place to live, work, play or visit – we are one community, we are proudly diverse. Of course, there is always more work to do, so please do keep showing up and calling us, emailing us and hassling us. It’s interesting talking to Councillors in other communities, some of them say they barely get an email a week from resident, but here you guys are a lot more active and it’s good because you give us ideas, you hold us to account, you put the pressure on and we all benefit from that.

I look forward to working with Councillors, council officers and the community over the next year and thank you again for your support.

### **Election of Deputy Mayor**

The Chief Executive Officer, Cathy Henderson, in accordance with section 27 of the *Local Government Act 2020* and the Governance Rules, invited nominations for the office of the Deputy Mayor for the 2023-2024 Mayoral year.

Cr Panopoulos nominated and Cr Carli Hannan seconded Cr Tapinos as Deputy Mayor of Merri-bek City Council for the 2023-2024 Mayoral year.

Cr Tapinos accepted the nomination.

**With 1 nomination for the office of the Deputy Mayor, the Chief Executive Officer declared Cr Tapinos elected as Deputy Mayor of Merri-bek City Council for the 2023-2024 Mayoral year.**

### **Meeting Close**

The meeting closed at 7.44 pm.