

Activity Centres Program Phase 2: Position paper October 2025



Merri-bek
City Council

Council's position

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the need for more housing in well-serviced activity centres such as the Brunswick and Coburg Train and Tram Activity Centres (Activity Centres). As a key stakeholder, we welcome the State Government's ambition to meet our current and future communities' needs and the opportunity to provide further input into this phase of engagement on the Activity Centre Program (Program). However, we are concerned that the government's sole focus on housing without considering jobs, infrastructure, transport and open space puts the future liveability of these Activity Centres at risk.

Supporting growth through better infrastructure and services

The State Government must balance the need for more housing with delivery of affordable, sustainable, and diverse high-quality housing supported by essential infrastructure, transport, and open space. This remains central to our advocacy. We call on the state government to provide firm commitments to the infrastructure required to support population growth in the Activity Centres.

What we're asking for:

- **Prioritise upgrading the Upfield train line** – the poorest-performing train line in Melbourne, and critical to future growth. This is a community priority.
- **Revitalise the bus network and upgrade tram stops**, including meeting accessibility standards.
- **Deliver upgrades** to schools, including Coburg High School and John Fawkner College, to the regional drainage network and health services.
- **Ensure build-to-rent housing developments contribute fairly to the provision of new open space.**
- **Make timely decisions on current Merri-bek Planning Scheme amendments** which seek to secure essential open space and infrastructure funding and identify properties at risk of flooding from local stormwater drains.



A fair and transparent process for our community

The Program will drive significant housing growth and change. For this to succeed, it must be underpinned by transparent, inclusive engagement that values local knowledge. These are the same principles Council applies when amending its planning scheme. To date, in both Phase 1 and Phase 2, very limited information has been made public, limiting the scope for community feedback, leaving it unclear how Phase 1 feedback has been considered, what has informed decisions, and reducing opportunities for meaningful community participation.

What we're asking for:

- **Public release of all technical information and draft planning controls** for the Activity Centres, with adequate timeframes for community review. This should include basic strategic planning evidence such as the Movement and Place Framework, Public Realm Plan, Planned Transport Plan, Urban Design Background Report, Activity Centre Plan, and Built Form Overlay for each centre.
- **Provide a clear explanation of how all feedback in Phase 1 has informed Phase 2.**



Ensuring economic success and job growth

The commercial spines of the Activity Centres are thriving hubs of creativity, innovation, and economic diversity. They reflect Merri-bek's unique economic fabric and cultural identity. Good planning is essential to sustain and grow these dynamic economies—creating more local jobs and supporting inclusive, future-ready jobs for the communities living in the Activity Centres. To achieve this, it is critical to protect their mixed-use role and deliver diverse commercial spaces that meet the needs of a changing economy, ensuring the centres continue to function as key hubs for jobs, transport, infrastructure, services, as well as housing.

What we're asking for:

- Ensure that the Activity Centre Plan include an evidence-based and economically viable plan to grow jobs and employment floorspace with no loss of employment floorspace across the Activity Centres.
- Authorise the Merri-bek Planning Scheme amendment which aims to encourage business investment and jobs in the commercial and industrial areas of the Brunswick Activity Centre to ensure the vibrancy of the area does not decline.

Getting heights and boundaries right

The government has asked for the community's feedback about building heights and activity centre boundaries in this phase of consultation. Council has sought to respond constructively to this request based on the available material. Drawing on our extensive local knowledge, the government's identified typologies, and preferred future character, our feedback on the proposed heights and boundaries circulated as part of Phase 2 consultation includes:



- **On heights:** we generally support the overall level of growth but seek moderation in some locations. Some residential pockets in the proposed core would be more appropriate as a residential typology, with adjusted heights. To offset this, we have identified other sites with greater capacity and proposed clearer limits to remove uncertainty for the community.
- **On boundaries:** we have identified additional “strategic sites” that should be included in the core area. However, parkland-edge sites that are already developed or distant from transport should remain outside the core. The Hoffman Brickworks should also be excluded to protect its heritage value, and areas within residential Heritage Overlay precincts and where there is a high fragmentation / small lots or frontage should sit in the outer catchment.

Refer to Attachment 1 for proposed changes to consultation maps, and to Council's technical submission for more detailed information.

Council notes that residents of Glencairn Avenue, Coburg have raised with Council the existence of covenants and heritage overlays restricting height and development in that area. Council requests that DTP consider these and any other covenants which might have a bearing on heights in the surrounding area.

What we're asking for:

- Respond to Council's specific suggestions in Attachment 1 and the accompanying technical paper to Phase 2 engagement.

Our bottom line

Merri-bek City Council supports housing growth in the Activity Centres. But growth must be carefully planned, transparent, and supported by evidence, infrastructure, and jobs. Council seeks the timely release of all technical work and draft planning controls to enable informed, genuine community engagement, and a considered response to our technical submission.



Attachment 1

