

**Subject:** **Submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Expanding Populations**

**Purpose:** To inform Councillors of the submission made by management

**From:** Alison Leighton, General Manager, Strategy, Planning and Climate Change, City Strategy **Date:** 07 October 2020

## **Background**

1. On 1 May 2019, the Victorian Legislative Assembly resolved for its Environment and Planning Committee (the 'Committee') to conduct an inquiry into current and future arrangements to secure environmental infrastructure, particularly parks and open space, for a growing population in Melbourne and across regional centres. The Terms of Reference for the Inquiry are at Attachment 1.
2. The inquiry was created to primarily focus on the impacts of rapid population growth, but pivoted to include the implications of COVID-19 on community access and usage of open space.
3. Management made a submission to the Committee on Monday 28 September 2020 (Attachment 2).
4. The Committee is due to report back to the Legislative Assembly by no later than Wednesday 30 June 2021.

## **Key issues**

5. The submission by management was presented in two sections:
  - 5.1. A description of what the City of Melbourne is doing to protect, optimise, enhance, and expand open space in the municipality. This section includes summaries of the suite of strategies and actions the City of Melbourne has developed to ensure open space and environmental infrastructure is working for the community, the environment, climate change readiness, an expanding population and increased urban density.
  - 5.2. A presentation of the key challenges the City of Melbourne and the Victorian Government face in safeguarding environmental infrastructure. This section addresses the shortcomings of the planning and funding systems as mechanisms for securing open space, and also describes the challenges associated with the climate change and biodiversity emergency and the importance of access to open space in the 'COVID-normal' world. This section informs the submission's 11 recommendations to the Committee.

## **Recommended action**

6. That Councillors note management's submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Expanding Populations.

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**SF case number:** 422812



PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA – COMMITTEES

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

## Terms of Reference

59th Parliament

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### **Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations**

**On 1 May 2019, the Legislative Assembly agreed to the following motion:**

That this House:

An inquiry into the current and future arrangements to secure environmental infrastructure, particularly parks and open space, for a growing population in Melbourne and across regional centres to the Environment and Planning Committee for consideration and report no later than 31 December 2020.



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28 September 2020

The Committee Manager  
Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee  
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Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

To The Committee Manager of the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee,

### **SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO ENVIRONMENTAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR GROWING POPULATIONS**

The City of Melbourne is pleased to provide an officer submission to the Environment and Planning Committee's Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations. Please note that this submission is provided on behalf of the management of the City of Melbourne and does not represent an endorsed position of the Council.

The City of Melbourne would welcome the opportunity to further discuss any aspect of this submission.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this feedback.

Yours sincerely

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CoM reference DM 13960112

# SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO ENVIRONMENTAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR EXPANDING POPULATIONS 28 SEPTEMBER 2020

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## Executive Summary

The City of Melbourne welcomes the Environment and Planning Committee's Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Expanding Populations.

The City of Melbourne's environmental infrastructure is foundational for the community's physical and mental health and wellbeing and plays an important role in ensuring the city's ecosystem is adaptive and healthy. As we continue to grow as a capital city, it is essential that the City of Melbourne's parks and gardens are protected and the expansion of the open space network is facilitated by the Victorian Government so that it serves the needs of the community and environment.

The open space network plays a critical role in ensuring that the various members of our population – residents, workers, students – as well as metropolitan, interstate and international visitors and tourists have access to our globally recognised parks and gardens.

The challenges facing the City of Melbourne's open space network are varied and require unique solutions due to its role as the state's capital. This includes an expanding population and increased urban density, the nature and number of events, a changing climate and extreme weather events, significant urban renewal projects and the impacts of COVID-19. These challenges have led to our open space network needing to work harder for community needs and our changing environment.

City of Melbourne's policies and strategies are designed to address the importance of protecting and expanding our parks and gardens, as part of a larger network of environmental infrastructure that includes the urban forest, waterways and green infrastructure.

This suite of strategies includes the Open Space Strategy, Urban Forest Strategy, Nature in the City Strategy, Green Our City Strategic Action Plan, Climate Change Adaptation Strategy Refresh, Integrated Water Management Plan, Planning for Waterways strategies, and various Melbourne Planning Scheme Amendments for Sustainable Building Design (C376), Sunlight to Public Parks (C278), and Public Open Space Contributions (C209).

The focus of these documents range from community needs, climate change preparedness, the urban forest and the city's ecosystem, integrated water management systems, urban renewal areas and recommendations for the Melbourne Planning Scheme to ensure we are planning for the future of our city.

The most recent addition to the City of Melbourne's suite of strategies is the COVID-19 Reactivation and Recovery Plan. This plan emphasises, among other issues, the importance of an expanding open space network as part of Melbourne's 'road to recovery'. It includes planting 150,000 trees, shrubs and grasses, improved linkages of parks, investment in public open space as part of the Queen Victoria Market precinct redevelopment and optimisation of public space to facilitate reimagined events that will bring people back to the city and stimulate the economy.

The importance of pro-active planning for new open space is already highlighted in the strategies and projects undertaken by City of Melbourne. The way the city's population lives, works and plays in Melbourne has dramatically changed due to the impacts of COVID-19, restrictions and physical distancing measures. As we navigate towards a 'new-normal', there is an important opportunity for Council and state government to work together to plan for the future of our capital city and the role open space will play in our recovery.

This submission responds to the terms of reference of your inquiry by describing:

- What the City Of Melbourne is doing to protect, optimise and expand environmental infrastructure;

- How the Victorian Government can help facilitate the acquisition and expansion of the City of Melbourne's open space network; and
- The importance of environmental infrastructure during COVID-19.

### Summary of recommendations

1. Within the City of Melbourne, set aside state government-owned land for new open space in urban renewal areas to create new Capital City open space as well as providing for the municipal (sporting) and local open space needs of emerging neighbourhoods. At least 40 hectares across multiple sites is required to address the current shortfall.
2. For the state of Victoria, set an evidence-based target for open space provision per resident. This could inform the basis of a review of the open space contributions system.
3. Provide support for Amendment C278 Sunlight to Public Parks to protect access to winter sunlight in parks.
4. Contributions system reform. The contributions system must adequately address the real cost of land for public purposes in urban renewal areas and support the provision of critical public infrastructure.
5. Provide support for local government to secure public open space and required funding earlier in the development planning or subdivision process.
6. Declare a Climate and Biodiversity Emergency for the State of Victoria.
7. Provide funding support for projects that enhance water security.
8. Provide support for Amendment C376 to incorporate contemporary urban ecology and sustainability standards into the Melbourne Planning Scheme.
9. Drive implementation of the Living Melbourne: Our Metropolitan Urban Forest strategy and fund additional local government urban greening initiatives.
10. Support partnerships between land management agencies to improve planning, funding, design and management of land required for drainage purposes, so that it provides community, amenity and biodiversity benefits.
11. Given the current and anticipated future pressures on existing open space from COVID-19 restrictions, all recommendations should be implemented with a greater sense of urgency.

## Introduction

Parks and open space in the City of Melbourne are fundamental to the city's liveability. Our parks and gardens are greatly loved and heavily used community assets.

They are important for the health and wellbeing of the community on many levels, providing both physical and mental benefits to people of all ages and abilities. Usage ranges from active recreation including organised sport, to passive activities such as simply sitting and relaxing in a park. The parks are also venues for a range of gatherings held throughout the year, including major events such as Moomba.

They play a significant role in our response to climate change. To adapt our city to climate change we need to mitigate the urban heat island effect by bringing inner city temperatures down, creating healthy ecosystems and integrating water management into landscapes. The city's parks are places that support important values and functions ranging from heritage to biodiversity. They play an important role in the ecology of the city.

The 19th century planners responsible for the early planning of Melbourne deserve much credit in establishing a park system to meet the needs of a growing city. The reservations for many of Melbourne's iconic parks, including Fitzroy Gardens, Carlton Gardens, Princes Park and Royal Park date from this period.

This was based on the notion established in the Victorian era that access to good quality public open space is critical for public health and wellbeing. This is now supported by a significant body of research confirming the physical and mental benefits parks provide to the community.

Today the City of Melbourne is renowned for its 'emerald necklace' of parks and gardens. These heritage parklands are complemented by contemporary open spaces including Birrarung Marr and Federation Square, and are significant contributors to the culture and identity of Melbourne and its community.

The City of Melbourne has experienced significant growth in residential and worker populations in recent years. This growth has placed considerable pressure on the parks network to continue to meet community needs.

Council's Open Space Strategy (Planning for Future Growth) was endorsed in 2012. The Open Space Strategy addresses the challenges and pressures created by urban renewal and population growth, the unique circumstances of being a capital city, climate change and the planning system. It sets out Council's overarching framework and strategic direction for open space planning in the City of Melbourne.

The creation of significant areas of new open space in the city's urban renewal areas – City North, Docklands, Flemington Racecourse rail corridor, Arden and Macaulay, Southbank and West Melbourne – was a key recommendation of the Open Space Strategy. The Fishermans Bend area hadn't yet been flagged for urban renewal at the time of the Open Space Strategy, but separate planning has since been undertaken specific to that precinct.

Securing land for and delivering new open space has been and continues to be a significant challenge. The cost of land and the setting of high development yield targets in urban renewal areas increases expectations that open space will serve multiple functions: passive recreation, integrated water management, biodiversity, sport, events. While many of these functions can happily co-exist in a well-designed and well-managed open space, it relies on sufficient space being set aside for the purpose. Without sufficient space, the effectiveness of the functions will be compromised.

Good parks don't happen by accident, they take commitment at all stages: planning, delivery, management, activation and maintenance. By tailoring open space to suit the needs of the

surrounding area, particularly in urban renewal areas, we can ensure that our parks and gardens successfully serve multiple functions for the community and environment. This includes planning for sufficient canopy coverage and understorey growth, integrated water management (particularly for flood prone areas), and ensuring that network links between nearby bodies of water and other natural areas are activated to improve local biodiversity.

Since a state of emergency was declared in Victoria due to the COVID-19 pandemic on 16 March 2020 and the subsequent introduction of physical distancing measures, our city's parks and gardens have been some of the most heavily utilised assets in the municipality; in many cases they have been the only public assets that have remained available for community use.

During this time, open spaces have provided an essential service to residents and workers looking to exercise, or simply enjoy the physical, social, mental and emotional respite that a natural environment can provide.

### **Open space planning in the capital city**

There is more than 580 hectares of public open space in the City of Melbourne, of which 460 hectares is managed by Council. As the state's capital, many of Melbourne's parks and gardens must cater to users from a far wider catchment than just the local community, and must be managed in a way to support far more intensive use. Many of the city's parks and gardens are recognised on the Victorian Heritage Register for their historical, aesthetic, architectural, scientific (horticultural) and social and other significance to the State of Victoria. Carlton Gardens is part of the World Heritage listed Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens site.

The City of Melbourne's open spaces provide services and a connection to Melbourne for many far beyond city residents – they belong to the whole state – and they are functionally different to open spaces provided outside of the capital city. Visitor surveys conducted in 2017 estimated that parks such as Carlton Gardens and Birrarung Marr each receive approximately 2.8 million visits per year (outside of special events).

The large parks and gardens around the north, east and south of the central city are synonymous with the character of Melbourne. Many of these play a Capital City open space role (per the Open Space Strategy hierarchy), meaning they are iconic and primarily established and managed to stage activities and events of international, national, state and metropolitan importance. Events and activations play an important role in bringing communities together to socialise and interact and access to public open space will be more important than ever for event organisers as they design events and activations that adhere to the COVID-normal social distancing requirements. The impacts of events in parks need to be carefully managed to ensure local communities' continued access.

While Capital City open space will continue to be a unique and valuable feature of Melbourne, there is a shortage of land that is needed to accommodate for the local community's use and needs.

The park that is closest to a resident or worker is typically the most important and most easily accessible open space in that person's life – whether it's a large heritage park of state significance or a local pocket park. Opportunities for achieving a good level of wellbeing should be provided to all residents and workers as much as feasibly possible within walking distance of their place of residence or work. This need for accessible open space is compounded by an increased number of people living in apartments or working in high density environments who generally have very limited access to private green open space.

This tension is heightened by high capital city land values which pose a significant barrier to being able to acquire land for the creation of new open space.



## City of Melbourne actions to secure environmental infrastructure for an expanding population

The City of Melbourne has a number of key strategies that address the provision of environmental infrastructure, particularly parks and open space. A brief summary of the key strategies and processes follows.

### Open Space Strategy

Council's Open Space Strategy 2012 identifies the parks and open space as a major contributing element to Melbourne's liveability. The Open Space Strategy Technical Report and Open Space Contributions Framework, which form part of the strategy, contain actions to support securing additional open space to meet the identified shortfall, which was significant in 2012 and is even more so in 2020.

The Open Space Strategy assessed open space provision by classifying open spaces and ascribing target walking distances to them. The different types and functions of open space within the municipality include:

- Capital City and State open spaces: synonymous with the identity of Melbourne
- Municipal open spaces: visited primarily by City of Melbourne population and including facilities for organised sport and recreation
- Neighbourhood open spaces: provide a diversity of facilities at the neighbourhood level
- Local and Small Local open spaces: complement larger reserves and are within a safe and easy walking distance of the local community

The strategy reviewed the distribution of open space across the municipality to identify where the community is unable to access open space within easy walking distance. A 500 metre walkable distance is used for State, Capital City, Regional, Municipal and Neighbourhood open space, and a 300 metre walkable distance is used for Local and Small Local open space. Based on this and forecast population growth, the strategy identifies the locations where additional open space is required.

Council has been implementing this strategy over the past eight years, and while the incorporation of new open space contribution rates into the Melbourne Planning Scheme was a significant achievement (see below), many other actions relating to the securing of substantial parcels of land to deliver open space have not yet been successful.

### Melbourne Planning Scheme Amendment C209 Public Open Space Contributions

Amendment C209 implemented the Open Space Strategy by introducing a requirement under clause 52.01 (now 53.01) of the Melbourne Planning Scheme for mandatory contributions to public open space, of either land or cash, when land is subdivided, and introducing a new local policy (Public Open Space Contributions) at Clause 22. The Amendment also added the City of Melbourne Open Space Strategy and associated technical documents to the list of Reference Documents in Clause 22.26.

The amount of the contribution is 7.06 per cent of the land or the land value in the Hoddle Grid and urban renewal areas. The rest of the municipality was set at 5 per cent (except for Docklands which is exempt due to development agreements).

The inclusion of the increased public open space contribution rate in the Planning Scheme has increased income to the Public Open Space Reserve, but a key intended benefit of the amendment has not been realised: provision of land instead of cash from development sites in nominated areas. The local policy 22.26 Public Open Space Contributions only applies to a development proposal

where it includes a subdivision. Council's request, which was different to the Panel recommendation and was not supported by the Minister for Planning, was for the policy to apply to a development proposal where there is a "potential for future subdivision".

As Council foresaw, the policy has resulted in lost opportunity to secure land from new development proposals. Applications for subdivision typically occur well after a development proposal has been made; by the time the opportunity comes around at subdivision, it is too late in the process to secure land out of the development site. Under the current policy, it is not possible to foreshadow a requirement for an open space contribution through a condition on the development permit. Only a handful of subdivision applications since C209 was gazetted in 2016 have resulted in a land contribution being made to Council.

### **Urban Forest Strategy**

City of Melbourne's work in open space also includes ensuring we foster a resilient, healthy and diverse tree population. Our Urban Forest Strategy (2012) sets out the target of increasing public realm canopy to 40% by 2040. As part of this we are committed to planting 3,000 trees a year. In 2019-20 we planted a total of 3,058 trees and 153 individual tree species increasing the resilience of our urban forest.

The addition of trees and other vegetation to the built environment provides the greatest benefit in mitigating the urban heat island effect. Through the process of transpiration and the provision of shade, trees help reduce day and night-time temperatures, especially during summer. They shade streets and footpaths, and their leaves reflect more sunlight and absorb less heat than built materials, reducing the heat absorbed by the built environment. During transpiration, plants draw water from the soil and release moisture through their leaves into the air.

Our vision, as set out in the Urban Forest Strategy is for a healthy, resilient and diverse urban forest that contributes to the health and wellbeing of our communities, and to a liveable city.

### **Nature in the City Strategy**

In 2017 we introduced our Nature in the City Strategy to create and maintain healthy ecosystems and thriving biodiversity in the city.

Melbourne is rich in biodiversity, with at least 239 species of birds, 12 species of reptiles, 18 species of mammals, seven species of frogs, at least 1500 species of insects, and 31 species of fish recorded in the last 20 years in the municipality.

Unfortunately, many of these species are threatened and how the municipality responds to these challenges will fundamentally affect which species live and thrive in the city, the services that ecosystems can provide, and subsequently the liveability of the city for people.

Our vision is for the municipality of Melbourne to support diverse, resilient, and healthy ecosystems that improve the environment and wellbeing of our community, providing the foundation for a liveable city. Our Nature in the City Strategy has goals and priorities that guide planning, development, and management of the city's biodiversity and ecosystems. It also details a set of actions and targets to evaluate the success of implementation.

Through this strategy, in conjunction with the Open Space Strategy and Urban Forest Strategy, City of Melbourne has been able to contribute towards greater ecological connectivity, increased biodiversity and understorey planting. This includes a partnership with University of Melbourne that has seen 1 million seeds planted along Gatehouse Street in Royal Park to test creating large areas of indigenous wildflower meadows. The Nature in the City Strategy is part of City of Melbourne's commitment to

supporting diverse, resilient, and healthy ecosystems that contribute and are co-dependent on a successful and thriving city.

### **Green Our City Strategic Action Plan 2017–2021**

In addition to its commitment to the protection and expansion of open space, the City of Melbourne is actively exploring the role of green infrastructure and greening in the private realm, as a complement to the open space network, as we prepare for greater urban density in the future. The Green Our City Strategic Action Plan considers the role of private property in contributing to the delivery of environmental infrastructure.

The four-year plan aims to improve the quality and quantity of green roofs and vertical greening in the municipality to support amenity, liveability and adapt to climate change.

The City of Melbourne owns and controls less than one third of the city's land area, limiting the reach and impact of our own projects to deliver on our greening goals and provision of spaces for recreation and social connection and increasing the importance of the contributions to greening made by private landowners.

By working to promote green roofs and vertical greening, City of Melbourne recognises that providing new green space in the central city is increasingly difficult, and that additional measures to support future greening targets for a growing population are required.

The size of the challenges faced by Melbourne demand a greater degree of green infrastructure than the city can deliver on its own.

Actions focus on:

1. Leading by example
2. Expanding urban greening in public areas
3. Making relevant information and data available to the public
4. Introducing changes to the planning scheme to deliver sustainable design and green infrastructure on private developments.

### **Melbourne Planning Scheme Amendment C376: Sustainable Building Design**

The City of Melbourne is proposing an amendment to the Melbourne Planning Scheme – Amendment C376: Sustainable Building Design. This amendment incorporates standards to ensure development contributes to the City of Melbourne's sustainability and green infrastructure goals, and ultimately helps tackle the climate and biodiversity emergency.

A key standard in Amendment C376 is the mandatory provision of on-lot green infrastructure for all new developments. To provide a metric for benchmarking and a design tool for practitioners, we have developed the Melbourne Green Factor tool, an Australian first online platform for the use of developers, designers, decision makers and the community. The Green Factor tool encourages a greater quantity and quality of green infrastructure to be incorporated in building design through a range of options such as canopy trees, green roofs, vertical greening and other external landscaping. The Green Factor tool encourages designers to include green spaces that are publicly accessible and provide multiple benefits to occupants, users and visitors.

### **Climate Change Adaptation Strategy Refresh**

The Climate Change Adaptation Strategy Refresh (2017) details how Melbourne will work towards the vision of a city that is adapting well to climate change and in particular address the need to create stronger partnerships with others and empower the community to act. The refreshed strategy was

guided both by our understanding of climate risks and strategic priorities identified by the community. Climate change risks from insufficient water supply, floods, heatwaves and storms remain a priority.

The strategy outlines how the city will deliver, partner and advocate for effective adaptation through five strategic adaptation goals:

1. Enhance the natural environment and green spaces of our municipality
2. Shape our built form and urban renewal areas to withstand future climate change impacts
3. Strengthen the resilience of our inclusive, family friendly and culturally diverse community
4. Protect and enhance our diverse economy
5. Continue to build City of Melbourne's adaptation capabilities and expertise.

Climate change considerations have been integrated into our Asset Management Strategy 2015–2025, recognising the vulnerability of Melbourne's infrastructure, particularly in relation to drainage and irrigation.

### **Integrated Water Management Plan**

The City of Melbourne practices integrated water management, defined as the coordinated management of all components of the water cycle including water consumption, rainwater, stormwater, wastewater and groundwater, to secure a range of benefits for the wider catchment. Our Municipal Integrated Water Management Plan 2017 sets the strategic direction on water management across the municipality, using a place-based and catchment approach and will guide our effort, thinking and investment to 2021. The plan addresses key challenges including reducing the municipality's flood risk; ensuring our major waterways are clean and healthy and planning water supply infrastructure for current and future water demand.

### **Melbourne Planning Scheme Amendment C278: Sunlight to Public Parks**

The City of Melbourne is proposing an amendment to the Melbourne Planning Scheme – Amendment C278 Sunlight to Public Parks. The Amendment will introduce protections to winter sunlight access across a broader range of times during the day than the current policy, and extend it to all public parks outside the central city and Southbank. This policy does not apply to Docklands.

The proposed amendment recognises that sunlight is important for our well-being and particularly important in the winter months. Many Melburnians do not get enough sun exposure in winter. This is especially challenging for people living or working in high-density environments with limited access to private green space. Many City of Melbourne residents rely on parks for all their outdoor needs such as exercise, walking their dog or socialising.

The proposed amendment seeks to ensure that our existing parks continue to support our growing population and remain sunny and pleasant places to be, even while the city becomes more populated with residents and workers. Protecting access to sunlight in parks provides our community the opportunity to enjoy the winter sun in a park close to where they live or work.

### **Planning for waterways: the Yarra River Birrarung, Maribyrnong River and Moonee Ponds Creek**

The Yarra River Birrarung Strategy, Maribyrnong Waterfront: A Way Forward and the Moonee Ponds Strategic Opportunities Plan all outline the role and importance of our waterways as essential assets in the network of environmental infrastructure. These strategies recommend a range of actions that could achieve both flood mitigation and improvements to open space and recreational sites, integrating flooding and land use planning in a positive way.

## COVID-19 Reactivation and Recovery Plan

As part of the City of Melbourne's COVID-19 Reactivation and Recovery Plan (September 2020), we are committed to a number of innovative solutions to ensure the city bounces back from the impacts of the pandemic. This includes open space improvements and the utilisation of outdoor spaces to ensure city life can return in a safe and considered way. The Reactivation and Recovery Plan includes:

- Partnering with Working for Victoria to plant 150,000 trees, shrubs and grasses to green our city, providing jobs to 64 people who would otherwise be unemployed as a result of COVID-19;
- Capital works stimulus to enhance open space in the central city, fast track 40kms of bike lanes, and improve accessibility and gender-neutral sports facilities;
- Revitalisation of the North Bank of the Yarra Birrarung through improved linkages of parks and cultural and heritage places;
- Investment in 1.75 hectares of public open space as part of the Queen Victoria Market precinct redevelopment; and
- Optimisation of public space for events to deliver reimagined events such as multicultural celebrations, music, fashion, sporting and food and wine events with physical distancing measures in place.

## Urban renewal area planning

The City of Melbourne works collaboratively with state government agencies and departments on framework and structure planning for key urban renewal areas, such as Arden and Fishermans Bend. In addition, Council is currently undertaking a Macaulay Structure Plan Refresh, completed the West Melbourne Structure Plan in 2018 and continues to implement endorsed structure plans for other areas including City North and Southbank.

Framework plans and structure plans are critical to securing environmental infrastructure as they set out the precinct vision, land uses and layout. It is at the structure planning stage that requirements for parks and open spaces are determined, and their size and general location is confirmed.

Despite such planning, Council still faces challenges in securing appropriately sized and located open space in urban renewal areas. It is essential to secure open space at the earliest stages of visioning processes as green spaces are integral structuring elements of urban neighbourhoods, and are critical to the amenity and value of these future precincts.

## Ongoing strategy implementation programs

The following ongoing programs are examples of strategy implementation to create and secure public open space and to engage the community in its care.

### Climate adaptation streetscapes and park expansion program

A rolling capital program that implements Urban Forest Precinct Plans and water sensitive urban design in streetscapes by reclaiming areas of asphalt for greening. This program has also delivered expanded local parks by converting redundant streets. For example, Gardiner Reserve in North Melbourne reclaimed road reserve from Dryburgh Street to increase the size of Gardiner Reserve by 47%, improving recreation opportunities, amenity and contributing to the urban forest and biodiversity in the area.

### Protecting parks in roads program

Some areas of open space are inappropriately reserved and therefore do not have the benefit of protection as open space. The most common case of inappropriate reservations is where small parks

or reserves are within road reserve. Protecting parks in roads is a program that identifies such anomalies and rectifies them; a process that may involve road discontinuance, reservation of the Crown land reserve for public park purposes and appointment of Council as Committee of Management.

### Citizen science

Both nature and open space influence everyone in the community, and can be used to foster a greater sense of social connection and connection to nature. Engaging the wider community involves not only informing them about the important benefits, but also highlighting the role they play in ensuring Melbourne's liveability, sustainability and support of cultural identity. Programs such as our BioBlitz citizen science events, Junior Ranger Program, Citizen Forester Program and the Gardens for Wildlife program, which aims to inspire Melburnians to create space for nature in their own backyards, are designed to better facilitate the population's appreciation and connection to open space, nature and their community.

## Key challenges

### Meeting the open space needs of existing and future populations

As of 2020, City of Melbourne has a residential population of 190,238. Prior to COVID-19, City of Melbourne calculated daily worker population at 409,000 and metropolitan, interstate and international visitor numbers at 277,000 in 2020. Forecasts are expected to change significantly in light of COVID-19.

The most recently available data shows that as our residential population has risen, the rate of public open space available has decreased from 55.4m<sup>2</sup> in 2011 to 32m<sup>2</sup> per resident in 2019. The worker population is also a significant user of public open space. When workers are included, the rate of open space available has decreased from 10.5m<sup>2</sup> in 2011 to 9.8m<sup>2</sup> per resident + worker in 2019.

High density urban living, where residents have little or no private outdoor open space, places even greater importance on accessible, multi-functional, nearby open space that has access to sunlight in winter and shade in summer.

The decrease in open space available per person is an inevitable outcome of a planning system that determines open space contributions by percentage land area, rather than by population.

The quality of parks and gardens is under pressure from surrounding development that both threatens to overshadow the parks while also housing many more potential park users; intensifying the use of the park while simultaneously limiting its access to sunlight. Council's proposed Amendment to protect sunlight to public parks is a significant and necessary amendment to ensure that these precious city assets are not undermined by surrounding development.

For the City of Melbourne, the areas with the lowest amount of open space are Docklands, Southbank, North Melbourne and West Melbourne, as well as urban renewal areas such as Fishermans Bend. Many of the issues surrounding unequal distribution of open space in the municipality are due to historical planning decisions, rates of population growth, lack of land acquisition opportunities, surrounding land use and urban layout. Most of the opportunities for new open space identified in the Open Space Strategy are in these areas.

Provision of land of a quality and size to support future active open space needs is a complex and unresolved issue. The Open Space Strategy demonstrated that there was a lack of parkland for the existing population in 2012, in addition to identifying the future open space needs. With the dramatic growth in residential and worker populations anticipated in the urban renewal areas, it is clear these pressures will continue.

One of the implications of a growing population and an open space network struggling to keep up is that demand exceeds supply for sports fields. Land for municipal open space, which includes sporting facilities, is perhaps the most challenging to acquire; it must be large.

The cost of land is also a significant barrier to the provision of additional public sports fields to meeting growing demand. A City of Melbourne Sport Facility Provision Analysis undertaken in 2017 identified that across the municipality, there is a shortfall of:

- 10 ovals
- 10 indoor sports courts
- 1 bowling green
- 8 outdoor netball courts
- 8 soccer pitches

This shortfall has major implications for the population's ability to fairly use existing facilities, and has an impact on the community's need for exercise, social connectedness and physical and mental

wellbeing. The only way this shortfall will be addressed is by setting aside large areas of state government-owned land. For example, to accommodate 10 ovals, approximately 40 hectares of land is required. The more facilities to be provided in one place, the greater the economies of scale with supporting infrastructure (pavilions and car parking) and opportunities for other uses and functions to be accommodated, such as passive informal use and stormwater management.

There is potential to consider cross-council collaboration for large open space and sporting facilities that serve overlapping population catchments, however this should not replace City of Melbourne's, or any other municipalities' obligation to meet the open space needs of their population.

An example of a large open space that was designed and functions in a way that serves local, neighbourhood and regional (sporting) catchments well is Fawkner Park. The 42 hectare Fawkner Park is an excellent example of multi-purpose use for sport and passive recreation, serving a range of sport clubs while also meeting the needs of the community and environment.

The most likely locations for such large areas of land to be set aside for public benefit are the urban renewal areas of Fishermans Bend Employment Precinct, Dynon or E-Gate.

### Recommendations

1. Within the City of Melbourne, set aside state government-owned land for new open space in urban renewal areas to create new Capital City open space as well as providing for the municipal (sporting) and local open space needs of emerging neighbourhoods. At least 40 hectares across multiple sites is required to address the current shortfall.
2. For the state of Victoria, set an evidence-based target for open space provision per resident. This could inform the basis of a review of the open space contributions system.
3. Provide support for Amendment C278 Sunlight to Public Parks to protect access to winter sunlight in parks.

### **Funding new open space**

The current systems for funding open space in new developments do not adequately address the substantial cost and complexity of securing land in urban renewal development contexts, leaving significant funding gaps for local government to address. Competing demands for capital funds allocation, and the level of risk exposure associated with land acquisition impacts decision making for the allocation new open space, potentially resulting in significant under provision.

### Recommendations

4. Contributions system reform. The contributions system must adequately address the real cost of land for public purposes in urban renewal areas and support the provision of critical public infrastructure.
5. Provide support for local government to secure public open space and required funding earlier in the development planning or subdivision process.

### **Climate and biodiversity emergency**

On 16 July 2019 Council declared a Climate and Biodiversity Emergency. In making this decision, Council recognised the serious risks to the people of Melbourne and Australia from climate change as well as the City of Melbourne's long standing record of reducing emissions, restoring and conserving biodiversity, and preparing our community for the impacts of climate change.



Our city's current climate is already warmer and drier than historical averages. Over the past 20 years, Melbourne has experienced many extreme weather events and climatic trends. Every year in Australia new heat records are broken, the Climate Council Australia noted that in some locations in 2016-17 the number of days above 35 degrees exceeded what was projected for 2030. In the future, Melbourne is likely to experience ongoing changes to its climate, including:

- Less rainfall and longer, more frequent periods of drought
- More frequent and intense heavy downpours
- More frequent days of extreme heat, heatwaves and fire weather
- Rising sea levels

Environmental infrastructure is an important form of climate change adaptation. When open space includes integrated water management solutions, it can help to mitigate risks from heat, flood, storm events and drought while also enhancing community resilience to climate change. These benefits are increased with the inclusion of refuges from heat, flood retention and stormwater treatment, and can be further enhanced by ensuring open space corridors are protected, created and connected, including to waterways, transport hubs and other parks. These corridors provide pathways for active and sustainable transport, cooling, clean air and biodiversity.

The City of Melbourne's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy notes that climate change will impact on the most vulnerable people in our community. We recognise that urban, rural and regional communities will bear the brunt of climate change impacts due to increasingly severe heatwaves, bushfires, flooding and sea-level rise.

Action is needed to address and prepare for the interdependencies of climate change impacts; environmental infrastructure in the form of open space, vegetation cover and integrated water management make up part of the solution. Protecting open space, waterways and park assets from climate change while actively increasing existing and new open space will help protect our most vulnerable community members and ensure we are ready for the challenges climate change will bring to Victoria in the future. The supply of alternative water to open space will be critical in ensuring asset resilience to drought. We encourage the state government to consider projects that help to fund enhanced water security in urban, regional and rural environments.

By considering our city as one connected ecosystem, we can actively foster connections between people and the environment, to create a more balanced, resilient, healthy and adaptive urban environment.

To ensure cities remain liveable in a changing climate, it's essential that our urban ecosystems are well-adapted and thriving. This requires significant investment in the natural assets that support human life, including protection and expansion of climate-ready urban forests, creation of resilient and connected habitats, environmentally-focused development and water sensitive urban design. It's also important that people understand the role that healthy urban ecosystems play in supporting urban life.

In a thriving urban ecosystem, it is necessary to ensure:

- A diverse range of tree species provide shade, cooling, clean air, habitat for wildlife and improved water quality.
- High quality, connected habitat which supports biodiversity.
- Built form does not negatively impact the ecosystem.
- People are able to access and enjoy nature, improving their wellbeing
- Natural assets are valued, protected and enhanced.

There are a range of actions that help us to achieve thriving urban ecosystems, such as:

- Creating more natural spaces.

- Planting and protecting trees.
- Creating and enhancing habitat for native wildlife.
- Providing opportunities for people to have positive interactions with nature.
- Providing sustainable water sources to keep natural assets healthy.
- Ensuring that urban development does not negatively impact the ecosystem.

These types of activities need to be amplified to a greater scale across the public and private realm to ensure our cities remain liveable as urban populations grow.

City of Melbourne's proposed Amendment C376: Sustainable Building Design is a primary tool for enabling a response to the Climate and Biodiversity Emergency. This amendment will impact the future of our city, the way people live, work, explore and play in Melbourne, and positively contribute to how we care and maintain our environment. It will also ensure that we are planning for a responsible and sustainable city that will continue to attract residents and workers, and setting a standard for urban planning in Australia.

#### Recommendations

6. Declare a Climate and Biodiversity Emergency for the State of Victoria.
7. Provide funding support for projects that enhance water security.
8. Provide support for Amendment C376 to incorporate contemporary urban ecology and sustainability standards into the Melbourne Planning Scheme.

#### **Partnerships and amplified action**

The Living Melbourne strategy was developed by Resilient Melbourne in partnership with the Nature Conservancy. It provides a cohesive plan for the urban forest across metropolitan Melbourne. Endorsed by 41 organisations representing local government, Victorian government, water authorities, statutory agencies and industry bodies, this strategy has the potential to ensure excellent greening outcomes for millions of Melburnians but without leadership and funding at the Victorian Government level there is a risk it may not achieve its full potential.

#### Recommendations

9. Drive implementation of the Living Melbourne: Our Metropolitan Urban Forest strategy and fund additional local government urban greening initiatives.
10. Support partnerships between land management agencies to improve planning, funding, design and management of land required for drainage purposes, so that it provides community, amenity and biodiversity benefits.

#### **COVID-19 and future need for physical distancing measures**

Since Victoria has entered COVID-19 restrictions, including limits on travel outside 5km of a residence and a restriction on time spent outdoors, the way members of the community live, work, socialize, exercise and play in metropolitan Melbourne has drastically changed.

For perhaps the first time in the history of the City of Melbourne, the number of assets available to the community has been severely limited due to the temporary closures of recreation centres, including swimming pools and gyms, community hubs and libraries. As a result, our network of parks, gardens, plazas and hard open spaces have been an essential asset that allows community members to

adhere to physical distancing measures while exercising or seeking physical, emotional, mental and spiritual respite during this period of increased stress.

A recent study showed that “urban nature offers resilience for maintaining well-being in urban populations, while enabling social distancing”. It is well known that COVID-19 spreads more easily indoors than outdoors, however concentrated use of green space can still lead to community transmission.

As we enter the next stage of ‘COVID-normal’, the protection and expansion of environmental infrastructure is essential for future-focused planning. All levels of government should consider the possibility that the coming years may include more lockdowns or restrictions associated with COVID-19.

City of Melbourne welcomes the Victorian Government’s announcement regarding the investment of \$154 million to deliver 6,500 hectares of new and upgraded parks and trails under the Suburban Parks Program. Programs such as this will help ensure environmental infrastructure is distributed fairly and equitably across Melbourne, and increase our resilience to the effects of the pandemic.

In order for the City of Melbourne to be resilient and prepared for the turbulent changes that we have experienced and may continue to experience while living with COVID-19, we urge the Committee to view the recommendations made in this submission with a greater sense of urgency and clarity. By ensuring that our network of environmental infrastructure is fit for purpose, provides the community with the recreational opportunities it needs to maintain good health, is multifunctional and accessible and is climate change adaptive, we can ensure the community is resilient and our city is set up for success as we move forward towards ‘COVID-normal’.

#### Recommendations

11. Given the current and anticipated future pressures on existing open space from COVID-19 restrictions, all recommendations should be implemented with a greater sense of urgency.

## Supporting Documents

[Amendment C209: Public Open Space Contributions](#)

[Amendment C278: Sunlight to Public Parks](#)

[Amendment C376: Sustainable Building Design](#)

[Active Melbourne Strategy](#)

[Arden-Macaulay Structure Plan 2012](#)

[Climate Change Adaptation Strategy Refresh 2017](#)

[Climate Change Mitigation Strategy to 2050: Melbourne Together for 1.5°C](#)

[COVID-19 Reactivation and Recovery Plan: City of the Future](#)

[Green Our City Strategic Action Plan](#)

[Growing Green Guide](#)

[Inner Melbourne Action Plan 2016-2026](#)

[Living Melbourne: our metropolitan urban forest](#)

[Macaulay Draft Structure Plan Refresh 2020](#)

[Maribyrnong Waterfront: A Way Forward](#)

[Melbourne: A Great Place to Age 2020-24 \(DRAFT\)](#)

[Moonee Ponds Creek Strategic Opportunities Plan](#)

[Municipal Integrated Water Management Plan 2017](#)

[Nature in the City Strategy](#)

[Open Space Strategy 2011-2026](#)

[Open Space Strategy Contributions Framework](#)

[Open Space Strategy Technical Report \(2012\)](#)

[Resilient Melbourne Strategy](#)

[Total Watermark – City as a Catchment 2014](#)

[Transport Strategy 2030](#)

[Urban Forest Precinct Plans \(List\)](#)

[Urban Forest Strategy](#)

[West Melbourne Structure Plan 2018](#)

[Yarra River Birrarung Strategy](#)

## Additional References

City of Melbourne: Sports Facility Provision Analysis (December 2017)

[COVID-19 and outdoor safety: Considerations for use of outdoor recreational spaces \(National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health\)](#)

[Urban nature as a source of resilience during social distancing amidst the coronavirus pandemic, Samuelsson, K., Barthel, S., Colding, J., Macassa, G., & Giusti, M. \(2020, April 17\).](#)

## Appendix I: Definitions of Open Space (from Open Space Strategy Technical Report 2012)

Open Space	Size	Distance from the population	Purpose of open space
Capital City	Unlimited	No specific distance, as this open space is defined by its purpose	Iconic open space that is primarily established and managed to stage activities and events of international, national, state and metropolitan importance, catering to a broader public need. These spaces are synonymous with the character of the City of Melbourne and provide facilities that are known by and primarily for international and interstate visitors to Victoria and the City of Melbourne. Examples include Birrarung Marr, Domain Parklands, Federation Square, Royal Botanic Gardens, Fitzroy Gardens and the Yarra River Banks. Some have restricted access and include Melbourne Park, Olympic Park and the MCG.
State	Unlimited	No specific distance, as this open space is provided for a broad catchment of users	Open space that is primarily set aside and managed for the whole of the State of Victoria and are not integrally linked to the image of Melbourne as in the case with Capital City open Space. These areas include Royal Park, Yarra Park and Goschs Paddock.
Regional	Unlimited	No specific distance, as this open space is provided for a broad	Primary purpose caters to a broader Melbourne-wide catchment of

Municipal		regional catchment	visitors, as well as the local community. Generally, these are easily accessible to people from adjoining municipalities and may be of regional recreational importance and use and/or regional environmental value. For example, linear open space along the waters (other than those located through the central city adjacent to the Yarra River, which are designated as Capital City open space) with habitat connectivity in the riparian zone, and/or regional trails that extend beyond the City of Melbourne boundaries, or major features that attract people from a broader catchment than Melbourne. Examples include Princes Park, Maribyrnong River, Moonee Ponds Creek, Fawkner Park, Carlton Gardens North and Westgate Park
	Minimum 3 hectares	Located within 2 kilometres of all dwellings	Open space that is valued and visited primarily by the City of Melbourne population, providing facilities that of a broader scale than those of a local or neighbourhood focus. For example this may include sporting facilities or historical gardens. Examples include JJ Holland Park, North Melbourne Recreation Reserve and Powlett Reserve

Neighbourhood	Minimum 1 hectare	Located within 500 metres safe walking distance from all dwellings	Provides for Neighbourhood use within walking distance of home with a diversity of character and facilities that appeal to the local community at a neighbourhood level. This means a family or groups of people can visit the park for an extended time, with a suitable range of facilities to meet their different needs. Examples include Argyle Square and Docklands Park.
Local	Minimum of 0.26 up to 0.99 hectares	Located within 300 metres safe walking distance from all dwellings	Located within easy safe walking distance of home and large enough to provide for at least two activities in the one open space reserve - eg. a playground and open grassed area with seats. These are generally more intimate spaces that are not intended for large groups.  Examples include Clayton Reserve, Jolimont Reserve, MacArthur Square and Sturt Street Reserve
Small Local	Minimum of 0.03 up to 0.25 hectares	Located within 300 metres safe walking distance from all dwellings	Located within easy safe walking distance of home and generally able to accommodate a single use including rest and relaxation, play, socialising, urban heat mitigation, contact with nature and memorial. Examples include Bellair Street Reserve, Chapman Street Reserve, Peppercorn Park and Golden Elm

Small Local Link	Usually less than 0.03 hectares	Not applicable	<p>Reserve.</p> <p>These areas of open space provide improved connectivity between streets and open space reserves.</p> <p>They are less than 0.03 hectares in size and only provide for the single use of a path connection between streets or open space reserves. Examples include Barring Walk and parts of the Stockyard route in Kensington.</p>
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