



Fitzroy Residents' Association Response to the Draft Open Space Strategy

The Fitzroy Residents' Association (FRA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Draft Yarra Open Space Strategy. The strategy provides an important part of the jigsaw to deliver a liveable, equitable and sustainable City of Yarra.

The strategy builds on the 2006 Strategy with the aim to deliver an 'overarching vision and direction for the future provision, planning, design and management of open space in Yarra to 2031'.

The FRA welcomes the Strategy's aim to address key Issues confronting our suburb, the municipality and the inner urban region.

The FRA believes that only through the provision of additional open space and an expansion of existing open space will the City Council be able to meet the needs of future residents and the key issues that the Strategy seeks to address:

- Climate Change
- Urban heat island effect
- Substantial population growth
- Substantial forecast future population growth through to 2031
- Increased urban densities
- Changing patterns of community use of open space
- Changing community values of open space
- The high cost and difficulties associated with providing new areas of open space
- The existing 4.5% open space contribution rate is inadequate

The FRA believes however that the Strategy should be rebranded, and renamed the 'Public Open Space Strategy'. The inclusion of 'public' provides an opportunity to seek a vision, strategy and set of actions and timelines that are designed for the future needs of the community.

The FRA also believes that meeting the needs of an increasing population across the suburbs comprising the municipality, will require creative, innovative and at times disruptive interventions.

The municipality and especially the suburb of Fitzroy come off a low base with regard to the provision of open space.

We are pleased that the Strategy identifies and seeks to respond to the Yarra Council Plan Objectives – A Healthy Yarra, An Inclusive Yarra, A Sustainable Yarra, A Liveable Yarra, A Prosperous Yarra A Connected Yarra and a Leading Yarra. Only through joined up policies and applied administrative resources will the City of Yarra be able to live up to these objectives.

Cecilia Andersson in an article in The Journal of Public Space (Issue Vol 1 No 1 (2016) titled 'Public Space and the New Urban Agenda' (UN Habitat) states 'Cities that have a strong notion of the 'public' demonstrate a commitment to an improved quality of life for their citizens by providing adequate street space, green areas, parks, recreation facilities and other public spaces'.

We are concerned therefore that the Open Space Strategy is limited in its scope to act across the public domain and therefore is restricted in its response to the needs of residents now and into the future.

Whilst the Strategy identifies key issues and policies it falls short on addressing them. It seeks to provide direction for the 'provision, design and management of open space' but fails to address 'the elephant in the room', the current lack of open space and the limited opportunities to expand existing open space or increase its provision.

If Council is to meet future needs it will need to be bolder and certainly both innovative and creative if the strategy is to have credibility and applicability. To meet the current shortfall let alone increase open space to meet future needs will require new thinking and new forms of action.

The definition of 'open space' proposed by the Strategy is very limiting since it focuses on the 'space' and not its value to the public and the opportunities provided for social cohesion, well being, climate protection and biodiversity and eco-systems support.

The 'ancillary' open spaces referred to in the Strategy should be part of the solution to the dearth of public open space – streetscapes, urban spaces between buildings, school and educational facility grounds and community facility grounds, should be considered part of a public open space strategy.

They each should be seen not as complementary but integral to the public domain and therefore able to be incorporated into a public open space strategy that seeks to expand social, health, environmental and biodiversity benefits to the community.

Fitzroy

The suburb of Fitzroy is in dire need of more public open space to meet current needs and this will only be addressed through broadening the public open space canvas.

The nine existing open spaces in Fitzroy have a combined total area of 2.27 hectares or 1.6% of the total land area. This is the second lowest in the municipality. The anticipated population growth from 2016 11,465 to 2031 15,798 highlights the need to improve existing open space but more importantly deliver additional public open space for the Fitzroy community.

The Strategy identifies the existing open spaces in 4 precincts across Fitzroy with opportunities to upgrade, expand and identifies options for new open spaces. It does little to allay fears that Fitzroy will remain low on the scale of square metres of open space per person into the future.

The opportunities identified are more about minimalist upgrades including the removal of a fence, and vague offers of new small parks in unidentified locations.

There is no reference to road space or laneway opportunities to increase public open space and greening or how new apartment developments can contribute through setbacks for open space provision.

Nor is there reference to the opportunity school grounds can play in an open space strategy, such as Fitzroy Primary School.

There is a lack of detail on the use of current open spaces. The vague hierarchy of open spaces has no analysis of their current use and by whom and how they could be expanded or improved. The suggestion that the removal of the fence at Frank King Park, a fence that contributes to the heritage frontages of the street, is lip service when more obvious improvements could include better signage and more seating.

The expansion and upgrading of existing public open space is welcomed by the FRA and should include partial road closure around the Fitzroy Town with linkages to Condell Reserve and Whitlam Place.

This would create a 'square' like environment for community celebratory events, passive recreation, and activities that encourage neighbourliness. The greening of the the 'square' with indigenous plantings would reflect our indigenous history as well as our future in a climate changing world.

The FRA would encourage the Strategy to address Fitzroy's open space needs through the identification of road closures.

Fitzroy has a road network of 225 kms, together with 85 kms of laneways and 410 kms of pathways. There is a need to utilise road space for public open space by the closure or partial closure of roads especially where it can be added to existing public open space.

The Brunswick Street Streetscape Plan does offer some recognition that road space, that is those intersecting with Brunswick Street, can be developed into public open spaces through partial closure thus providing seating, traffic calming and a safe pedestrian environment.

The City of Melbourne has developed an extensive and strategic approach to reducing road space for vehicles and providing for walking, cycling and green public open space for residents.

There is also a need for our laneways to be seen as public open space for walking and cycling and for greening despite their often illegal use for the storage of bins or dumping of rubbish.

A select number of laneways should be identified for a pilot scheme across the suburbs comprising our municipality.

The selection of laneways should be negotiated with residents and businesses abutting the laneway seeking support in their monitoring and upkeep. This would provide an opportunity to build neighboured communities across our suburbs.

The laneways will be the arteries of our future urban environment as they will be cooler and safer for walking and cycling than our existing road network. We should be rolling out a planned approach to their increased use as an integral part of the Strategy.

In conclusion the FRA looks forward to the results of the consultative process and the adoption of a Strategy that has broad community support and of benefit to the City and its suburbs into the future. The FRA believes that a radical approach will be needed to meet the Strategy's key issues and policy objectives.

Martin Brennan
Chair
On behalf of the FRA Committee
12 March 2020