
11.8 Outcomes from 'Reimagining Victoria Street' Community Engagement Process and Next Steps

Trim Record Number: D17/84966

Responsible Officer: Group Manager - People, Culture and Community

Purpose

1. To update Councillors on the outcomes from the 'Reimagining Victoria Street' community engagement process, and to seek endorsement on the next steps.

Background

2. In July 2016 Cr Amanda Stone put forward a motion, which was endorsed by Council, asking Officers to report back on a process which would result in a greater understanding and appreciation for the diverse experiences and views of residents, traders and other key stakeholders, in order to develop a shared vision for the future of the Victoria St precinct.
3. The overall objectives included:
 - (a) improved public safety and amenity of the Victoria Street precinct for residents and businesses;
 - (b) enhanced experience of visitors to the precinct; and
 - (c) minimised harm to people who inject drugs and the wider community.
4. On 23 August 2016, Council endorsed the Reimagining Victoria Street community engagement project.

Issues

5. Since the project was endorsed by Council, numerous external influences have come into play that have impacted on the delivery of the project. These include:
 - (a) the State Government's announcement that it is installing CCTV on Victoria & Lennox Streets;
 - (b) a coronial inquest (and subsequent recommendation calling for a supervised injecting facility) into a fatal drug overdose on Hoddle Street;
 - (c) increased political support and media interest around the implementation of a Supervised Injecting Facility (SIF) in the Victoria Street precinct;
 - (d) the advent of Victoria Street Drug Solutions, a resident's group advocating for the implementation of a SIF;
 - (e) an external stakeholder group – Victoria Street Working Group – running a parallel process that also involves community engagement and the development of an action plan; and
 - (f) consensus amongst stakeholders that there is a sense of 'consultation fatigue' and Council needs to start doing, rather than keep talking.
6. This resulted in Council recognising the need to be responsive and adaptable depending on external influences.
7. Officers brought forward the community engagement component of the project, with the remainder of the project left open.

Comments/Discussion

8. Following extensive consultation across a range of activities, over 400 people contributed over 2300 ideas (see Attachment 1: Reimagining Victoria Street community Engagement Report).
9. Table 1 highlights how Council engaged with the community, and who Officers engaged with.

	<i>How we engaged</i>	<i>Who we engaged</i>
Online	<p>Your Say Yarra Online portal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.yoursayyarra.com.au/victoriastreet • Share your feedback • Map your experiences <p>4 February – 5 March 2017</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 89 registered participants • 489 ideas were contributed • 1190 page visits
	<p>Social Media</p> <p>Used to promote listening post location and times and direct people to the Your Say Yarra project page. Relevant comments in response to Twitter and Facebook posts were recorded</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook x 72 relevant comments
	<p>Written Submissions</p> <p>Open at any time during the public engagement period</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27 written submissions via email
In Person	<p>Listening Posts</p> <p>Five posts held in key locations in North Richmond & Abbotsford</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corner Victoria & Nicholson Sts Abbotsford (x2) • Richmond West Primary School • Abbotsford Primary School • Richmond Housing Estate <p>18 February – 3 March 2017</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 217+ conversations • 1280+ ideas
	<p>Targeted engagement sessions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NRCH Needle & Syringe Program clients • Young people (Richmond Soccer Program) <p>27 – 28 February 2017</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 34 participants • 65+ ideas
	<p>Trader surveys</p> <p>Surveys distributed to traders along Victoria Street</p> <p>13 – 14 March 2017</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 participants • 60+ ideas
	<p>Key Internal Stakeholders</p> <p>One on one meetings were held with key internal stakeholders</p> <p>March 2017</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 participants • 50+ ideas

Table 1: Methods of engagement

10. Engagement activities sought responses to two key questions:
 - (a) What do you see as the key issues facing Victoria Street?
 - (b) What do you think needs to happen to make Victoria Street safer and a more attractive and welcoming place?
11. The engagement process attracted feedback from a cross-section of Yarra’s community including residents and traders. It should be noted that this was not a research project, and participation in the engagement activities is not necessarily representative of the entire Yarra community.
12. The following data focuses on overall responses and the top 10 themes that were identified in the community engagement.
13. The community was largely concerned with drug use, community safety, crime prevention, and implementing harm reduction measures to reduce the harm arising from illicit drug use.

14. Other themes that attracted a large number of responses were economic development, open space, parking and traffic, street cleaning, sustainable transport and urban design.
15. The themes of drug use, community safety and crime prevention are also reflected in data collected from traders and residents of the Richmond Housing Estate.
16. This correlates with data collected through engagement for the Council Plan 2017 - 2021 where health and wellbeing issues such as alcohol and other drugs and community safety dominated the community feedback.
17. As demonstrated in Table 2, within each key theme, there were a range of issues identified by the community:

Themes (# comments)	Key Issues
Drug use (610)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing • Discarded syringes and other drug litter • Issues arising from public injecting such as overdose
Community safety (329)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antisocial behaviour such as fighting • Drug affected people • Loitering
Harm reduction (271)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of supervised injecting facilities • The need for a holistic approach to drug use
Crime prevention (206)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased policing • Implementation of CCTV
Parking & traffic (92)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traffic management & flow • Amount & cost of parking
Economic development (87)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve shop fronts including removal of shutters • Decrease footpath trading
Open Space (77)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased street trees • Increased facilities including public toilets & drinking fountains • Improved management of spaces including public toilets and parks
Urban design (73)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tram stops • Removal of seating and benches
Street cleaning (69)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased service levels including laneways • More litter bins
Sustainable transport (68)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance of bike lanes • Access to public transport • Wider footpaths • Safer pedestrian crossings

18. Once overall responses are broken down into key issues and suggestions for improvement, it can clearly be seen that drug use and community safety are the two biggest concerns for the community.
19. In keeping with this, implementation of harm reduction initiatives (primarily a supervised injecting facility) and crime prevention are the top two suggestions for improving issues arising from illicit drug use and perceptions of safety within the precinct.
20. These issues fall outside Council's remit however Council can advocate for these as a priority; dealing with issues arising around the Victoria Street precinct is of high priority to both Council and external stakeholders.
21. Many of the themes do fall within Council's jurisdiction, such as economic development, open space, urban design and street cleaning.
22. Indeed, there are a number of current and proposed activities that address the themes and key issues that were identified during the community engagement process.

Internal activities

Victoria Street Streetscape Masterplan

23. The Masterplan aims to define and retain the Victoria Street precinct's community identity and economic vitality and to make it a vibrant, safe and attractive area. It has the following six primary objectives designed to benefit residents, businesses and the wider community:
 - (a) enhance the cultural identity and unique qualities of Victoria Street;
 - (b) improve the quality of the public realm;
 - (c) investigate opportunities for new or improved public space;
 - (d) create more areas of shade and greenery in the street;
 - (e) implement a consistent street furniture program; and
 - (f) encourage crime prevention through environmental design.
24. The Masterplan identifies seven key projects that will create new and attractive spaces and foster a greater sense of community, promote a safer night-time environment and give the area a fresh, vibrant look.
25. The key projects are:
 - (a) Gateway Triangle – create a pocket park in North Richmond;
 - (b) North Richmond Public Plaza – create a public plaza and enhanced transport interchange at the intersection of Victoria Street and Jonas Street;
 - (c) Lennox Street/Nicholson Street intersection upgrade – provide a safer crossing for pedestrians and bicycles and enhance tram connections:
 - (i) Council received a \$200K grant from the Department of Justice and Regulation as part of the Public safety Infrastructure Fund grant stream. Council is making a co-contribution of approximately \$240K. The grant is conditional on the shopfront improvement program (see other report on Lennox Street in this agenda);
 - (d) Continuation of gateway theme throughout the retail precinct with the installation of smaller scale 'Non La' hats at major intersections:
 - (i) Council has tested options for the continuance of the 'Non La' hats but they are not feasible. \$ 30K funding has been requested under 2017-18 budget under the activity centre design funding for the design of intersection upgrades, which will have thematic components linking the intersections to the gateway;
 - (e) Shop Improvement Program – improve the appearance of shop fronts and their and relationship to the street:
 - (i) \$40K has been requested under 2017-18 budget for a shopfront improvement pilot scheme whereby traders can apply for grants on a dollar by dollar basis for removal of the shutters and associated improvements;

- (f) Williams Reserve upgrade - upgrade the existing reserve with new planting and play equipment; and
- (g) Walmer Street Plaza – create a new public meeting space and thoroughfare.

Graffiti Prevention Grant

- 26. Arts & Culture have applied for a Graffiti Prevention Grant to paint murals on the roller shutters along key areas in Victoria Street.
- 27. They have been progressively working on improving the area with murals, which have so far been limited to sites off Lennox St, Post Office Lane and a car park wall.
- 28. There has been another request for Council to do a larger project in Little William Street – this was initiated by a resident in response to Reimagining Victoria Street.

External activities

Victoria Street Working Group (VSWG)

- 29. The VSWG is a collection of stakeholder groups comprising Council, Neighbourhood Justice Centre, Yarra Drug & health Forum, Department of Health & Human Services, Vic Pol, Salvation Army, North Richmond Community Health, residents and traders, amongst others.
- 30. The VSWG is working towards a safer, more peaceful and prosperous Victoria Street that is inclusive of everyone, including people who inject drugs.
- 31. In early 2017, the VSWG developed an action plan which includes the following actions:
 - (a) shopfront improvements including removal of roller shutters;
 - (b) activate Lennox & Butler street corner;
 - (c) identify opportunities for active footpath & community activities;
 - (d) provide a safe space for people who use drugs that includes recreation and other activities;
 - (e) increased engagement with Richmond Public Housing Tenants;
 - (f) provide ongoing opportunities for the community to discuss & learn about what is being done in Victoria Street;
 - (g) work with local traders to clean up back of shops and manage waste;
 - (h) create a 'social behavioural campaign' to connect with dealers and people who use drugs;
 - (i) conduct a community education campaign addressing safety concerns; and
 - (j) identify groups for training in how to administer naloxone.
- 32. It should be noted that convenors of the VSWG made a conscious decision not to advocate for a Supervised Injecting Facility or any additional harm reduction strategies as they felt they could not progress these actions.

Implementation of CCTV

- 33. The State Government proposed installing some CCTV cameras along Victoria & Lennox Streets, in July 2017.
- 34. It may have an impact on the drug trade in terms of displacement, and may also have a positive benefit in terms of increasing perceptions of safety amongst traders (as per the impact of CCTV in Maribyrnong).

Advocacy re Supervised Injecting Facilities

- 35. Council and a number of key stakeholders including political parties, residents' groups and local organisations are strong advocates for the implementation of a SIF in the Victoria Street precinct.

Next steps

36. An internal working group will be set up, which will report back to the Executive. In the tradition of One Yarra, this group will comprise representatives from across Council.
37. Key priorities of the working group will include:
 - (a) mapping out which stakeholders play a part in addressing the issues raised, including Council's role and how this differs from the State and Federal Government's responsibilities;
 - (b) developing an action plan;
 - (c) engaging with key external stakeholders around how to best manage issues that are beyond Council's jurisdiction; and
 - (d) strengthening advocacy around the implementation of a Supervised Injecting Facility and other harm reduction strategies.
38. Councillors can play a key role by investing in the Victoria Street precinct by utilising both the outcomes from the community engagement process and the action plan to inform current and future advocacy opportunities with the State Government and the wider community.

External Consultation

39. These are explained in the report.

Internal Consultation (One Yarra)

40. These are explained in the report.

Financial Implications

41. Referenced in paragraph 25 of report.

Economic Implications

42. Improvement in image of Victoria Street will be expected to contribute to an economic boost to the locality.

Sustainability Implications

43. Not applicable to this report.

Social Implications

44. Improvement in image of Victoria Street will be expected to contribute to a positive impact to the social environment.

Human Rights Implications

45. There are no human rights implication in relation to the report itself.

Communications with CALD Communities Implications

46. The communications process was widely representative of the community make-up.

Council Plan, Strategy and Policy Implications

47. To undertake extensive community consultation and develop plans and strategies emanating therefrom.

Legal Implications

48. There are no legal implications with the report and will rely on Government assistance.

Other Issues

49. Not applicable.

Options

50. Not applicable.

Conclusion

51. As per recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That Council:
 - (a) note the outcomes from the Reimagining Victoria Street community engagement process;
 - (b) note that an internal working group will be set up, which will report back to the Executive; and
 - (c) note the working groups' key priorities, including mapping out which stakeholders play a part in addressing the issues raised, developing an action plan, engaging with key external stakeholders around how to best manage issues that are beyond Council's jurisdiction, and strengthening advocacy around the implementation of a Supervised Injecting Facility and other harm reduction strategies.

CONTACT OFFICER: Sarah Jaggard
TITLE: Community Advocacy Team Leader
TEL: 9205 5160

Attachments

- 1 Reimagining Victoria Street Community Engagement Report