

Community engagement options - Rushall Reserve

The following provides an outline of potential community consultation options for future improvements to Rushall Reserve, in response to the resolution of Council from 19 March 2019, which specifically called for:

“An outline of appropriate community engagement options to gather broad community opinions on desirable improvements for Council consideration.”

Background – previous community engagement on Rushall Reserve

Extensive community consultation was undertaken in 2016 seeking feedback from the local community on the proposal for a shared path in Rushall Reserve. This consultation included a community survey and on-site pop up information session. Following the consultation, in May 2016 Council determined to proceed with the share path.

However, following a range of complex logistical challenges and risks relating to the proposed path's proximity to railway and power infrastructure, and the adjoining embankment next to the Merri Creek, on 19 March 2019 Council decided not to proceed with plans to build the shared path. As part of this decision, Council called for an “outline of appropriate community engagement options to gather broad community opinions on desirable improvements for Council consideration”.

In early 2019, Council's Landscape Architect had two onsite meetings with several members of the Friends of Rushall Reserve group to seek feedback on potential locations for new seating and a water fountain with dog bowl, as well as discussing revegetation plans for the riverbank.

Following the feedback from the Friends group, signage showing the proposed locations for the new seating and water fountain with dog bowl were displayed in the park, and park users had the opportunity to provide comments. Some feedback was received, and the seat location was adjusted accordingly.

The seating and water fountain have since been installed. Works to revegetate the riverbank have also begun.

Options for future community engagement

Any plan for community engagement on potential future improvements to Rushall Reserve should consider the following factors:

- The extensive consultation with the community, including the Friends of Rushall Reserve group, which has already occurred over the past 3 years.
- The general acceptance from local residents that the shared path will no longer proceed.
- The strong recurring theme from previous community engagement activities that many local residents, including the Friends of Rushall Reserve group, like the reserve the way it is and wish for the reserve to be maintained as a place of natural values.
- The primary use of the reserve as a place for exercising dogs off lead and passive recreation.

- The current development of the Yarra Open Space Strategy, which will include further community consultation.

Purpose of engagement

There are no current specific plans or allocated budget for future improvements to Rushall Reserve. As a number of minor improvements have already been implemented recently (including new seating, water fountain with dog bowl, and revegetation of the riverbank), the purpose of any broad community consultation at this stage would be to illicit general feedback about any potential future improvements.

If Council decided to proceed with a broad community consultation, it would be important to acknowledge the previous community engagement that has already taken place over the past 3 years, including the feedback and sentiment already shared by the community.

Principles of engagement

Transparent – we will report back to the community on what we have heard.

Accountable – We will communicate the outcomes of the consultation to all participants.

Representative – We will actively encourage a range of park users and local residents to participate in the consultation, to ensure we hear from a broad range of voices.

Potential engagement activity options

Online

Your Say Yarra consultation page where community members can share their ideas.

In person

Pop up consultation session in the park (to be broadly promoted).

Onsite meeting with Friends of Rushall Reserve Group.

Promotion

To encourage participation from a broad range of voices within the local community, the consultation would be promoted via:

- Letterbox drop to surrounding residents, including residents of the Old Colonist assisted living facility.
- Signage in the reserve
- Local school newsletters
- Targeted social media promotion

Timing

The extensive community consultation that has been undertaken previously in relation to the proposed Rushall Reserve shared path has led to some in the local community to report

‘consultation fatigue’. This needs to be considered prior to conducting further non-specific consultation for future changes to the reserve.

Given the recent consultation over the shared path proposal, and the ensuing tension experienced by the local community, it may be beneficial to allow some time before embarking on broad community consultation for future improvements to the reserve. Timing of further consultation in relation to the Open Space Strategy should also be considered.

If Council decided to proceed with broad community consultation on Rushall Reserve, it would be preferable for this to take place in the warmer months, during daylight savings time, when the reserve is being used by more people, to ensure the best chance of reaching as many community members as possible.