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**11.3 Victoria Street Precinct and Reimagining Victoria Street update**


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Trim Record Number: D17/189212

Responsible Officer: Unit Manager Social Policy and Research

### Purpose

1. To provide Councillors with an update on several matters relating to the Victoria Street precinct and work relating to the outcomes of the Reimagining Victoria Street engagement.

### Background

2. In July 2017 Council resolved to:
  - (a) *note the outcomes from the Reimagining Victoria Street community engagement process;*
  - (b) *note that the an internal working group will be set up, which will report back to the Executive and Council;*
  - (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;*
  - (d) *note the community desire for urgent action on the public health, safety and amenity issues in the Victoria St precinct; and*
  - (e) *use the data collected in this project as the basis of an increased advocacy campaign for a medically supervised injecting facility in North Richmond.*
3. The Reimagining Victoria Street community engagement process identified drug use and community safety as the two biggest concerns for the community.
4. As a follow on from Reimagining Victoria Street, and as per the resolution above, an internal working group has been formed with membership from across Council. There are a number of current and proposed activities that seek to address the themes and key issues that were identified during the community engagement process. Council is undertaking a number of initiatives to improve Victoria Street. These include the following:
  - (a) works to improve the amenity, safety and public realm in Victoria Street, at the intersection of Lennox and Nicholson Streets;
  - (b) initiation of the shopfront improvement program which was informed by a systematic audit of shopfronts and consultation with traders;
  - (c) working with community and local agencies to improve the function, vibrancy and amenity of the precinct through the Local Safety Reference Group, Victoria Street Business Association Inc. and Victoria Street Consultative Group;
  - (d) ongoing delivery of parking and traffic and cleansing services, including litter and graffiti removal; and
  - (e) continued delivery of Council's Syringe Management Services.
5. To date in 2017, two parliamentary inquiries have been undertaken, several coroner reports and findings released and in specific relation the precinct, the Victorian Government has installed CCTV cameras and to undertake a two year trial of a Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC).

## **Victoria Street precinct - internal and external initiatives**

### Urban design works forming part of the Public Safety Infrastructure Fund grant

6. Council endorsed the Victoria Street Streetscape Masterplan in September 2015. The Masterplan identifies seven key projects, including the Lennox Street/Nicholson Street intersection upgrade. 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. A condition of the grant is to undertake a shopfront improvement program.
7. At its meeting on 19 September 2017, Council endorsed design concept plans for the Lennox Street/Nicholson Street intersection upgrade and authorised officers to proceed with detailed design documentation, tendering and construction. The works include new seating, paving, lighting, plantings, and improvements for cyclists and pedestrians. The works are to commence in 2018 after the Lunar Festival.
8. A condition of the funding was a formal evaluation of the work's impact upon public amenity and community safety. The evaluation involves pre and post observational studies, street intercept surveys and analysis of pertinent data sets. The following are the defined indicators of success:
  - (a) An increase in the number and diversity of people visiting, accessing and utilising the space;
  - (b) A reduction in criminal offences recorded across the different crime categories;
  - (c) Decreases in drug activity;
  - (d) Increases in perceptions of safety; and
  - (e) Positive feedback from the community.
9. Council officers are also exploring activation opportunities and potential activities for this space once the works are completed.
10. It is also noted that planning permits have been granted to the adjoining properties to the east and west of the existing Lennox Street seating area that would lead to an increase in building height but also potential street level improvements.
  - (a) the site to the east was granted a planning permit for the construction of a three storey building, containing shops at ground floor and dwellings above in July 2016. The permit contained several conditions, and while the applicant has since lodged revised plans for approval, these were deemed unsatisfactory in February 2017; and
  - (b) the site to the west was granted a planning permit in May 2006 for an extension to the existing building. Since this period a number of amendments have been received, including one that is under current consideration that proposes to construct a fourth floor and roof top terrace to the existing building.

### Audit of existing shopfronts and commencement of a shopfront improvement program

#### *Audit of existing shopfronts and trader intercept surveys*

11. A condition forming part of the Public Safety Infrastructure Fund grant agreement is to undertake a shopfront improvement program. The first step of the program involved an audit of the existing shopfronts. This captured information such as type of roller shutter (if present), presence of graffiti and any readily visible security measures such as CCTV. Over one third of shopfronts within the precinct (36%) have a roller shutter, the majority of which are solid metal.
12. The second step involved undertaking intercept surveys of traders to examine their thoughts on improving shopfronts, including any barriers and enablers. Fifty-two businesses completed the face-to-face survey. A majority of respondents (60.8%) had roller shutters installed for safety and security reasons. The most common issues affecting these businesses were graffiti (75%), shoplifting (71.2%), drug dealing (61.5%), drug use (61.5%), and discarded syringes (57.7%).

13. There was very little interest in roller shutter removal with just one business indicating they would support removal and one other saying they may consider it. However, over half (52%) of the interviewed traders were interested in other forms of shopfront improvements including:
  - (a) window and shopfront cleaning;
  - (b) shopfront and entry repair;
  - (c) painting of walls/shutters (solid colour or murals); and
  - (d) consultant to assist with window dressing techniques.

*Visual merchandising, shopfront cleaning/maintenance*

14. Given the strong desire for respondents to retain their roller shutters, several other approaches have been explored to improve shopfronts.
15. The pilot program involves working in close partnership with at least five business/property owners on Victoria Street to improve shopfronts within a short timeframe. The area between Church and Lennox Streets on the southern side of Victoria Street will be targeted to maximise program impact.
16. The project involves one-on-one consultation with participating businesses to develop an achievable shopfront design that fits within the program budget.
17. Participating traders are not expected to contribute any financial amount to this program. However, they are expected to maintain the upkeep of their shopfronts to the standard provided to them at the close of the program. Each participating business will also be provided with a shopfront cleaning/maintenance kit and a shopfront maintenance checklist at the close of the program.
18. It is envisaged that this program will run over a three year period and is planned to commence in January 2018. The program will be evaluated to inform the implementation of a further roll out over an additional two year period.
19. The participants of the pilot will be encouraged to become champions of the program and help promote the benefits to other businesses in the street.

*Cleaning blitz on shopfronts / aesthetic improvements to the roller shutters*

20. These works will also target the area between Church and Lennox Streets on the southern side of Victoria Street.
21. They will be implemented in conjunction with a number of other initiatives across Council. These include the visual merchandising / shopfront cleaning/maintenance work outlined above, minor improvements to street furniture and signage and some painting of Council infrastructure.
22. A range of options to treat the roller shutters were investigated including cleaning only, block single colour painting, painted murals/artwork, vinyl cut out decals, and full graphic vinyl wrap. Criteria that were taken into account included longevity and sustainability of the treatment, aesthetics, graffiti resistant surfaces, ease of cleaning and past experience of graffiti in Victoria Street.
23. Cleaning of all shopfront facades including roller shutters will be undertaken in the first instance. After this, a graphic vinyl wrap will be applied to the roller shutters on nine shops. The graphics will potentially reflect the merchandising of the shop and visually indicate the types of businesses occurring behind the roller shutters.
24. The vinyl wraps will be graffiti resistant and traders would be issued with appropriate cleaning products and instructions on maintaining the shutters in a graffiti free condition.

Supporting community groups and promoting Victoria Street

25. Council is committed to supporting the Victoria Street Business Association (VSBA) to become an effective and transparent business association and to promote Victoria Street as a visitor destination.
26. Council also provides opportunities for cultural celebrations including the Lunar Festival which is funded through the Celebrate Yarra Triennial Funding Grant.
27. Council has issued several other community grants to organisations that contribute to the local community, including to those who provide services to vulnerable groups.

Local Safety Reference Group

28. The Yarra Local Safety Reference Group was established to coordinate a whole of community partnership response to community safety issues in the City of Yarra.
29. The group meets on a quarterly basis and is co-chaired by Yarra City Council and Victoria Police. The membership also includes cohealth, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Justice and Regulation, Fitzroy Legal Service, Launch Housing, Neighbourhood Justice Centre, North Richmond Community Health, Women's Health in the North, and Yarra Drug and Health Forum.
30. The group provides a valuable mechanism for key stakeholders to discuss issues and share ideas relating to Victoria Street. Victoria Street is a standing agenda item for the group.

Victoria Street Consultative Group

31. The aim and purpose of the group includes to make Victoria Street a safer, more prosperous and welcoming environment; and to share information and ideas.
32. The group meets on a bi-monthly basis and is chaired by the Neighbourhood Justice Centre and Yarra Drug and Health Forum. The membership also includes Yarra City Council, Victoria Police, North Richmond Community Health, Youth Support and Advocacy Service, Department of Health and Human Services, and residents from the local area.
33. Council officers have presented several items to the group for information and discussion and will continue to attend and contribute.

Parking and traffic

34. The Local Area Place Making study in Abbotsford precinct (LAPM 13 bounded by Johnston Street, Hoddle Street, Victoria Street and Yarra River) has commenced and is seeking community input on ways to improve local streets and the safety of pedestrians and cyclists. The initial consultation concluded in late November and Council has received a significant number of responses to the online survey, and ideas and concerns through the interactive map.

Litter and graffiti

35. Council is working with businesses in Victoria Street to address the issue of bins being left on the street with enforcement action taken against a number of premises. The area is checked and cleaned every day by the litter control crews. Litterbins are emptied daily.
36. Posters and graffiti are cleaned daily from Council assets on a night shift by graffiti crews; however this does not include shopfronts because they are private property.

Council's syringe management services

37. The impacts of illicit drug use, including unsafely discarded equipment, are a major concern for the community. Council is committed to improving local amenity through reducing the presence of discarded needles, syringes and related waste.

38. Council contracts Innerspace (cohealth) to provide syringe management services. Syringe management services include removal of discarded syringes and related litter from public and private spaces in the City of Yarra via sweeps, and also by requests through the Yarra Syringe Disposal Hotline. Innerspace also regularly clear and monitor syringe disposal units, and collect any discarded syringes and related litter in the immediate area surrounding the units.
39. At its meeting on 17 October 2017 Council considered a report on Council's syringe management services. Council resolved that it:
  - (a) *notes that although the number of syringes collected via sweeps has almost doubled, this is offset by the decrease in the number of syringes collected via community request, and that the overall increase in syringes collected is around 11%;*
  - (b) *notes the current activity in this space, including Department of Health & Human Services' contract with cohealth and the installation of CCTV along Victoria and Lennox Streets, is impacting or is likely to impact on Council's syringe management services;*
  - (c) *notes that given the current activity in this space, it is inadvisable to make any changes to Council's syringe management services contract at this point in time; and*
  - (d) *notes that the contract manager will continue to monitor the situation and update Council as needed.*

#### Medically Supervised Injecting Centre

40. In October 2017, the State Government announced support for a two year trial of a Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) at North Richmond Community Health (NRCH). The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) held briefings with professional stakeholders (including Council) in mid-November 2017.
41. The Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) Bill 2017 has been introduced into parliament. The bill is anticipated to pass parliament before the end of 2017, and the centre is expected to open by July 2018.
42. The bill outlines the licensing regime (2 year trial with option for a 3 year extension and only at NRCH) and exclusions of liability (for drug users and centre staff).
43. The key differences between the proposed MSIC and the one already in Kings Cross Sydney are a longer trial period, deliberate focus on clinician-led service delivery, with the centre director and supervisor required to be registered medical practitioners, and strong integration with other health and support services.
44. Regulations and operating protocols are to be developed and will guide matters such as the type of substances that will be permitted to be used at the centre, what quantity will be deemed personal use for the purpose of injecting at the centre and whether people will be required to provide personal details before they can use the centre. Targeted consultation on the regulations will be undertaken and governance structures, including an advisory panel, are currently being considered. It has already been established that persons under 18 years of age will not be permitted to use the MSIC.
45. An evaluation will be undertaken, including a review after one year.
46. The MSIC forms part of a broader packaged of initiatives, including harsher penalties for heroin dealers.
47. Council has welcomed the decision by the State Government to support a trial of an MSIC in North Richmond. The centre will prevent unnecessary deaths, connect people to health and other services and reduce amenity impacts for the local community.

48. It should be acknowledged that no single intervention can address the breadth of complex and dynamic issues arising from injecting drug use and a suite of harm reduction responses will be required. It is currently unclear as to whether the existing Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) and after hours vending machine at NRCH will continue after the establishment of the MSIC. There appears to be some concerns as to whether such services are compatible with an MSIC. The need for clean injecting equipment for those cohorts who do not use the MSIC will still have to be addressed. There will also be a need for enhanced outreach services in the area to ensure that injecting drug users utilise the MSIC and receive help.
49. On several occasions Council has resolved to support a range of harm reduction measures, in addition to an MSIC. In 2013 Council resolved to endorse officers to engage with the State Government to discuss local implementation of harm reduction strategies. These positions have been articulated both in previous resolutions and strategies, including:
  - (a) supporting the peer administered naloxone program;
  - (b) extending the hours of needle and syringe programs;
  - (c) increasing outreach to people who inject drugs during evenings and weekends;
  - (d) enabling peer distributed needles and syringes; and
  - (e) installing syringe vending machines.
50. This report proposes that Council continues its advocacy for evidence based harm reduction measures. It also proposes that Council writes to the State Government to seek clarification on whether the NSP and after hours vending machine at NRCH will continue after the establishment of the MSIC and what enhanced outreach services are being proposed.
51. Officers from Council and DHHS have had initial engagement with regards to the establishment of the MSIC. Officers and DHHS have agreed to meet monthly commencing in January 2018.
52. Whilst the DHHS has indicated willingness to further work with Council officers, to date, there has been no formal correspondence between the Victorian Government and the Mayor and Councillors of Yarra City Council. An opportunity exists for better engagement with Councillors to understand DHHS' plans for implementation, community engagement and communications. Officers have made representations to the Department to determine whether DHHS would be able to provide a briefing for Council. DHHS has subsequently extended an invitation to attend a future Council briefing to better inform Councillors of the project.
53. An expert panel of health and community representatives will be established to report on the effectiveness of the medically supervised injecting room. The full membership of this panel has not been decided. Early indications are that a locally based reference group will also be established containing representatives of key local stakeholders.
54. There are also several other evidence based harm reduction strategies and services that could be considered for advocacy which have not been previously considered by Council. For example, strategies to increase the number of pharmacotherapy (methadone and buprenorphine) prescribers and dispensers to help addicted persons transition away from licit and illicit opiates or support for safety testing advisory services for amphetamine-type stimulants. This report proposes that another report is provided to Council in 2018 on these matters.

#### Parliamentary inquiries

55. Council made submissions to the two recent inquiries. The Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee Inquiry into Drug Law Reform completed hearings in November 2017. The committee will submit their inquiry findings report to the State Government by 9 March 2018, and the State Government has six months to respond.

56. The Legislative Council Inquiry into the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pilot Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) reported their findings in September 2017. While the report did not directly recommend an MSIC trial, it did note that the issue had 'reached crisis level' and described residents dealing with overdoses in their laneways and discarded syringes in front gardens as intolerable; that MSICs improve the health of IDUs, address visible impacts and reduce demand for ambulances; and MSICs do not have a 'honey pot' effect on crime.

Coroner reports and findings

57. There are four recent coroner reports that specifically address the implementation of harm reduction measures in North Richmond:
- (a) the first by Coroner Jacqui Hawkins (Court Reference COR 2016 2418, February 2017) made recommendations to establish a safe injecting facility trial in North Richmond, to expand the availability of naloxone, and that DHHS undertake a review of DHHS funded services that support the health and wellbeing of injecting drug users and that consultation is undertaken with relevant stakeholders to identify opportunities for improvements. The DHHS review has commended and Council officers were interviewed by consultants in November 2017;
  - (b) the second by Coroner Audrey Jamieson (Court Reference COR 2016 2722, February 2017) supported the recommendation by Coroner Hawkins to introduce a trial safe injecting facility; and
  - (c) the third by Coroner Gregory McNamara (Court Reference COR 2016 3735, July 2017) supported the recommendations made by Coroner Hawkins.
58. The fourth, again by Coroner Jacqui Hawkins, (Court Reference COR 2017 1152, October 2017) reiterated earlier findings made by Coroner Jacqui Hawkins.
59. Additionally, Coroner Judge Sara Hinchey made a submission into The Inquiry into the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pilot Medically Supervised Injecting Centre). The transcript of the submission acknowledged that in 2016 the City of Yarra had the highest frequency and rate of overall overdose deaths in Victoria, as well as the highest frequency and rate of heroin involved overdose deaths in Victoria. It discussed how a comparative analysis of heroin involved overdose deaths for 2016 across several Victorian local government areas showed that the City of Yarra had the highest proportion of deaths occurring in public places rather than in private residences, and the highest proportion of heroin involved overdose deaths where the deceased usually resides in another local government area and travelled to inject heroin within the City of Yarra.

CCTV cameras

60. The State Government has now installed 13 cameras in total, affixed to 5 poles in North Richmond, this includes:
- (a) 8 cameras affixed to 3 poles along Lennox Street, located between Victoria Street and Highett Street (east side of Lennox Street and within the boundary of the housing estate); and
  - (b) 5 cameras installed on Victoria Street and affixed to 2 poles, one located on the corner of Nicholson Street (on the eastern side) and the other installed opposite Little Lithgow Street (southern side of Victoria Street).

**External Consultation**

61. Extensive consultation was undertaken with the community as part of the Reimagining Victoria Street process.

**Internal Consultation (One Yarra)**

62. Updates were sought from relevant staff across the organisation, including from those that form part of the Reimagining Victoria Street internal working group.

### **Financial Implications**

63. Funding has been allocated within the existing budget to undertake the shopfront improvement initiatives outlined. If deemed successful, further funding may be sought in subsequent years to extend the improvements to additional shopfronts. Funding has also been allocated for the urban design works at the intersections of Victoria and Lennox/Nicholson Streets.

### **Economic Implications**

64. Not applicable.

### **Sustainability Implications**

65. Not applicable.

### **Social Implications**

66. Improvements to Victoria Street will contribute to a positive impact on the social environment.

### **Human Rights Implications**

67. Not applicable.

### **Communications with CALD Communities Implications**

68. Not applicable.

### **Council Plan, Strategy and Policy Implications**

69. The Council Plan 2017-2021 identifies higher rates of drug and alcohol abuse, lower perceptions of safety in some parts of Yarra as key issues. It notes that the drug trade and associated health behaviours and outcomes affect the community from both a community safety perspective and a health and wellbeing perspective. Relevant strategies include:
- (a) *promote a community that is inclusive, resilient, connected and enjoys strong mental and physical health and wellbeing; and*
  - (b) *assist to reduce the harms from alcohol and drugs on individuals and the community in partnership with state agencies and key service providers.*
70. The Council Plan also includes actions to:
- (a) *advocate to the state government for a medically supervised injecting facility and other harm minimisation measures in the Victoria Street precinct; and*
  - (b) *work with local partners and agencies to increase health and education, community partnerships and harm minimisation from the abuse of drugs and alcohol.*

### **Legal Implications**

71. Not applicable.

### **Other Issues**

72. Not applicable.

### **Options**

73. Not applicable.

### **Conclusion**

74. This report provides an update on several matters relating to the Victoria Street precinct and work relating to the outcomes of the Reimagining Victoria Street engagement. It also acknowledges the significant efforts of numerous organisations and individuals have undertaken as part of the campaign to establish a Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) in North Richmond. It recommends that Council continues with advocacy for harm reduction measures and that clarification is sought on several outcomes relating to the MSIC.



## RECOMMENDATION

1. That Council:
  - (a) notes the updates in this report relating to the Victoria Street Precinct and Reimagining Victoria Street;
  - (b) authorises the CEO to write to the Department of Health and Human Services to:
    - (i) express support for the implementation of a trial of a Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) in North Richmond;
    - (ii) accept the invitation that DHHS provide a briefing to Council on the intended implementation, community engagement and communications plans; and
    - (iii) provide clarification on the future of the Needle and Syringe Program and after hours vending machine located at North Richmond Community Health Centre; and
  - (c) recognises the loss of many lives as a result of drug use in the City of Yarra and thanks the numerous organisations and individuals who campaigned tirelessly and acknowledges their significant contribution towards the establishment of trial Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) in North Richmond;
  - (d) continues its advocacy and support for evidence based harm reduction measures that have proven to be effective in reducing the transmission of blood borne viruses (BBVs) and other health impacts associated with injecting drug use; and
  - (e) seeks a report from officers in 2018 that provides an update on best practice harm reduction strategies for drug use and options for Council in relation to policy positions on service delivery as well as strategic advocacy.

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### Attachments

There are no attachments for this report.