

Victoria St speed cuts and Hawke St greening among latest West Gate Tunnel responses

Residents press Metro Tunnel team over rail noise near South Kensington



Kensington Primary School Council president Dave Frazer and vice-president Lisi Höbartner out the front of the school's main building. They are appealing to the state government to complete overdue upgrades to the structure. Photo: Hanna Komissarova.

Calls grow for state to finish outstanding works at Kensington Primary School

“ Fresh calls are being made for the Victorian Government to complete long-outstanding building works at Kensington Primary School, with the school council arguing that a major upgrade project signed off years ago remains only partially finished. ”

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



The school received \$7.365 million in state funding to upgrade the historic building, with works formally completed in 2022. But according to the school council, only around 60 per cent of the original scope was delivered after COVID-era cost escalations forced a substantial reduction in works.

In his letter to the minister, Mr Frazer said it was unreasonable for the project to be treated as complete when a significant portion of the original upgrade remained undone.

“The remaining 40 per cent of Block A has not been upgraded, despite being identified as requiring urgent modernisation more than six years ago,” he wrote.

Among the biggest concerns is disability access. More than 100 students and a number of staff still need to climb three flights of stairs to access four upstairs classrooms, with the current lift arrangement not reaching all parts of the building.

Mr Frazer said the issue came into sharp focus last year when a student with a broken leg could not access the required learning spaces.

Speaking to *North West City News*, he said the situation had become increasingly frustrating for the school community, particularly because the Victorian School Building Authority and the department continued to describe the project as finished.

Continued on page 2.



LOCAL NEWS, PAGE 12

Future Melbourne turns to Arden-Macaulay with Rohan Leppert

The latest episode of *Future Melbourne* turns its attention to Arden and Macaulay, two of Melbourne's most important and most contested urban renewal precincts.

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Calls grow for state to finish outstanding works at Kensington Primary School

Continued from page 1.

"We sort of feel like we're being gaslit a little bit," he said. "You contact the VSBA or the department and they say, 'What are you talking about? That project's completed.'"

"But we've only got 60 per cent of the original project or the original master plan complete."

He said the contrast within the school building itself made the problem obvious.

"If you turn left, the school looks brand new. It's all shiny and new carpets and painted," he said. "But you turn right and the thing looks like it did 25 years ago."

According to the school council, the unfinished parts of Block A still require upgrades to heating, insulation and carpets, repairs to deteriorating window frames, and acoustic treatment to classrooms. While the remaining classrooms are still usable, Mr Frazer said they were clearly below the standard the community had expected when the funding was first announced.

"We're not just talking about a lick of paint on a few classrooms," he said, pointing to rotting window frames and learning spaces that "just don't function in the way they should".

The frustration, he said, was not simply about the condition of the school, but the way the outstanding work was now being treated as if it were a new funding request.

"We just want to start to advocate a little bit louder than we have in the past to say, don't as a government treat this as a new request, because it's not a new request," he said. "This was work that should have been completed and it never was."

That concern is sharpened by growth in the surrounding area. Kensington and nearby Macaulay are absorbing hundreds of new apartments, with the local school



community warning that population growth will place more pressure on already ageing facilities.

Mr Frazer said the issue was not about wanting extras or optional upgrades, but about ensuring the school could meet future demand with modern, accessible infrastructure.

"We are a growing school," he said. "If our enrolments boom, then our doors are open and we've got to make do."

Greens MP and Kensington Primary parent Ellen Sandell has also been pressing the issue, arguing that families should not still be waiting years after the original funding announcement for basic repairs and accessibility improvements to be completed.

In his email to the minister, Mr Frazer said the school community remained grateful for the government's investment to date, but believed "the time has come to deliver these works in full".

The school has invited Mr Carroll to visit Kensington Primary for a tour of the

unfinished areas. Mr Frazer said the minister had previously indicated through parliament that he would be willing to meet with the school community, but that no meeting had yet eventuated.

A Victorian Government spokesperson didn't respond to questions regarding whether it would commit to finishing remaining works at the school, instead pointing to its track record of delivering school upgrades across the state.

"Our priority is – and has always been – that every child, no matter where they live, has access to a world-class public education," the spokesperson said.

"Building and upgrading schools is an investment in our kids' future and we have the largest school building program in the country - our \$18.5 billion investment has seen 123 new government schools funded and delivered more than 2,300 school upgrades."

"Victorians remember what happened last time Jess Wilson's Liberals were in charge of education – ripping \$1 billion out of schools and axing Free Fruit Friday – leaving families and students worse off."

The government added that the school received \$339,000 for playground upgrades and construction of a new kitchen area 2024–25 State Budget. This project is currently in the construction phase.

City of Melbourne councillor and Labor candidate for the seat of Melbourne at the upcoming state election Davydd Griffiths said, "As a former teacher, I believe our local students, families and educators deserve access to the highest quality facilities."

"Kensington Primary is a vital part of our local community."

"I have reached out to the school council president to hear about their vision for the future directly." ●

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TRADER PROFILE

North & West Melbourne Precinct Association



Studio Vico

“

Sylvia Hungria has always been drawn to the power of good design.

”

WORDS BY
JOYCE WATTS



She grew up in a creative family in Brazil, with a grandfather who was a modernist architect (a colleague of Oscar Niemeyer, the designer of Brasilia) and a mother who's a world-renowned botanical illustrator.

Surrounded by this rich artistic heritage, Sylvia's curiosity about design started at a young age.

"I remember being fascinated by the simplest things – like the label on a bottle of Ajax cleaning product. I asked my mother 'Who designs these things? How do you design the label on it?', Sylvia recalls.

This early interest sparked a lifelong passion for design which eventually shaped her career. Sylvia moved to Australia in 2002 to study Interior Design and Visual Merchandising. Her design career took off when she joined the now international brand T2 Tea in 2005 as the in-house graphic designer, where she honed her creative skills in branding, packaging design, and marketing.



In 2011, she took the leap to start her own studio, Studio Vico – named after her childhood nickname. Studio Vico is a design studio that blends Sylvia's talents in graphic design, interior design, and visual merchandising to help businesses create meaningful brands. Her work spans a variety of industries, from fashion and food to beauty and beyond.

"Whether it's designing packaging, creating brand identities, or developing marketing campaigns, I love the wide variety of briefs that come with owning my own studio," Sylvia explains. "I meet so many interesting people and it's always inspiring to collaborate with clients to learn and create something magical together."

But design isn't just about work for Sylvia

– it's also about community.

In 2021, she was hired to rebrand the North & West Melbourne Precinct Association, a project that allowed her to showcase the area's unique identity.

"Having lived between North and West Melbourne for over 15 years, I'd become deeply connected to the area. This project was about telling a story, building relationships and a sense of collectiveness in my local neighbourhood."

Shortly after starting the project, she was honoured to be elected President of the Association. Together with her passionate team, she advocates for local growth and the wellbeing of businesses in the area.

"My work with the Precinct Association is a natural extension of my design practice. I think good design is all about creating something that works and connects with people. It has the power to bring communities together and support businesses in meaningful ways."

Looking ahead, Sylvia is excited to continue growing both Studio Vico and her work with the Precinct Association.

"I'm always looking for new ways to evolve as a designer and to support our local businesses," she says. Whether she's working on a new branding project or supporting a local initiative, Sylvia's goal is always the same: to make a positive impact through design.

In everything she does, Sylvia is proof that design is not just about what things look like – it's about how it makes people feel, and how it helps communities thrive.

Studio Vico is located at 40-42 Leveson St. studiovico.com

The North & West Melbourne Precinct Association champions the small businesses that make our neighbourhood thrive.

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northwestmelbourne.com.au



Last chance to try Asian-inspired playful “pop-up”

“

Popular Victoria St pop-up Pebble Dining will close its doors on May after a six-month stint. Chef Cam Tay-Yap says he and his wife would love to find a forever home in the neighbourhood for their restaurant.

”



WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



Cam Tay-Yap didn't have any particular attachment to West Melbourne when he took on a sub-lease there last November.

But since opening a business on Victoria St the young chef's outlook has changed.

"Since we've been here, we've kind of really fallen in love with the space, the area, our neighbours," he says.

"I really love how community-driven this area is. It's been unreal."

For Cam and his wife and collaborator Trish Pham, maintaining friendships and welcoming people in is at the heart of their hospitality enterprise, along with the "playful, flavour-forward", Asian-inspired food.

Their "pop-up" restaurant, which opened on the border of North and West Melbourne in November, has the same spirit as that of its original incarnation, which he ran out of the carpark of his friends' Oakleigh climbing gym, Cam says.

Now the eatery has walls, a ceiling and a liquor licence but also still an outdoor area for dogs, so it is a place to hang out where "everyone's invited".

Pebble's latest format has also been informed by six months of recent travel around the international neighbourhood.

Cam, who first got interested in cooking by helping to feed his large household while still a student at Melbourne High School, trained and earned his stripes in fine dining.

After being taken on by Ben Shewry at Attica in Ripponlea, he went to work at three-Michelin star restaurant Core by Clare in London, and later, back home in Melbourne, became head chef at three-hatted Amaru.

In 2024 he was judged *The Age Good*

Food Guide's Young Chef of the Year, a recognition he shared with another young up-and-comer.

Over a 12-year restaurant career, he has been "fortunate enough" to work and make friends with "some amazing humans" around the world, the chef told *North West City News*, and his recent culinary adventures with Pham – which took the couple to Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, Bali and Japan – involved some of them.

"We did all these pop-ups and collabs at different restaurants throughout Asia – some of them have been with friends and some of them we went in cold and became friends with them afterwards," he said.

Back on the corner of Victoria and William streets, where the couple took advantage of a six-month vacancy in the leadup to the opening of a new tempura bar, they wanted to share something of their international experience.

The food at Pebble Dining is "creative", "playful and shareable", according to the chef and, while inspired by the countries the couple visited, not at all authentic to them.

"It's kind of a build-your-own adventure," Cam says, explaining also that the restaurant makes everything themselves and "want[s] to take what we do seriously without taking ourselves too seriously."

Being asked to recommend menu items is like being asked to choose your favourite child, he claims, nevertheless mentioning a few dishes and ingredients.

"We've got lovely stingray from Lakes Entrance." (It is served with banana leaf, pumpkin and crab curry and tromboncino squash.)

"We have these mushroom rendang hand



pies, which have been a crowd favourite since day one; chicken ribs have also been a crowd favourite."

"We have some squid and potato noodles, which are really, really delicious in like a laksa sauce; and a tomato terrine that kind of celebrates local produce and farmers."

Judging by the social media comments, the restaurant's potato flatbread is another clear crowd pleaser. They also serve a big steak.

Being Malaysian-Australian and not feeling completely at home in either country has been a source of angst for Cam in the past, he says.

But getting older and travelling more has helped him come to terms with his cultural identity.

As he sees it now, "I'm always going to be half Malaysian and half Australian and that's so fine".

"I have a very different outlook on the world and that's also a really good thing," he says.

For the eating public, that outlook looks to have inspired some exciting combinations.

The tomato and leek terrine with basil yoghurt and pineapple sambal is a case in point; so too the strawberry, red bean and green tea "pavlova".

As for drinks, there is "a stunning list of



wines and cocktails that we've curated to work well with the food – some from local winemakers, some not," Cam says.

Now in the most permanent iteration of his business so far, the award-winning chef is clear that he is doing exactly what he wants to be.

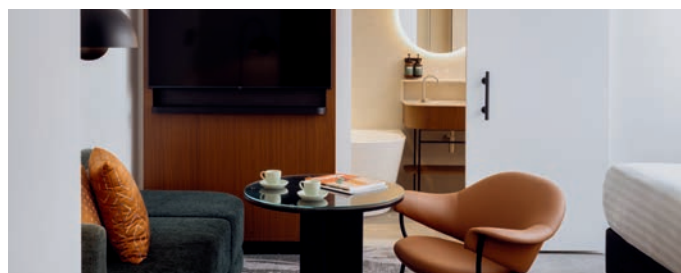
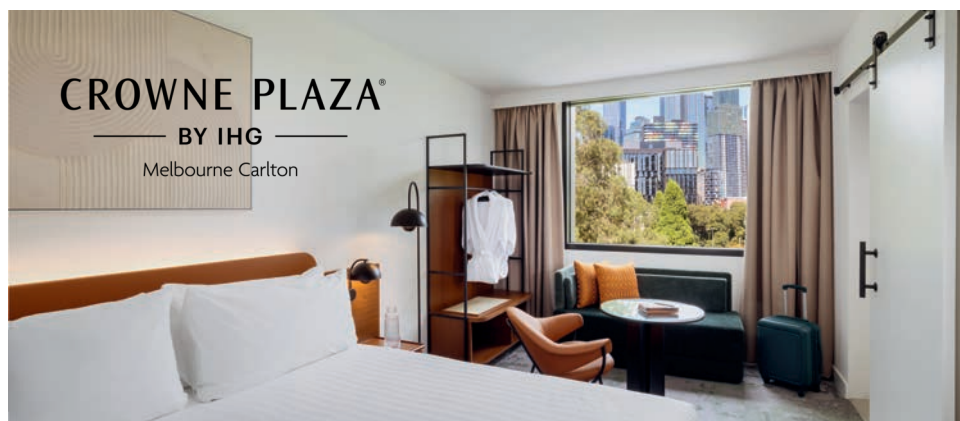
"Honestly, even if I had a million bucks, I wouldn't change this," he says. "This is the job for me."

What is unfortunate is that Pebble's time at 225-229 Victoria St is coming to an end.

While focusing on "finishing off the next four weeks really nicely" the couple are also keeping an eye out for new possibilities, Cam says.

"We are looking for, I guess, our forever home."

"We'd love to be able to stay in this area, but we'll just have to wait and see what the future holds for us." ●



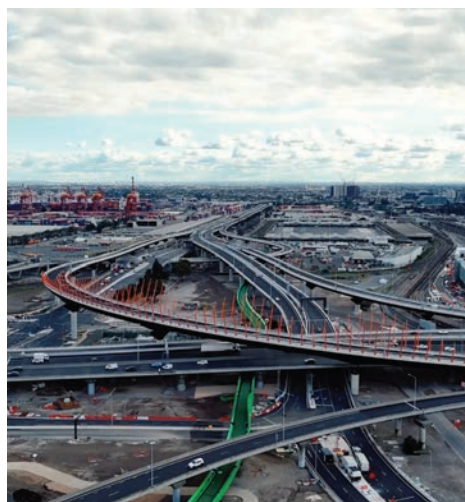
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Victoria St speed cuts and Hawke St greening among latest West Gate Tunnel responses

The City of Melbourne has provided its latest update on the impacts of the West Gate Tunnel, outlining a series of responses now under way across North and West Melbourne and Kensington as traffic patterns continue to settle following the tunnel's opening in December.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



Among the most immediate changes flagged is a long-sought speed reduction on Victoria St, with the Department of Transport and Planning proposing to lower the limit from 60 km/h to 50 km/h between Dryburgh and Curzon streets. The reduced 50 km/h limit is also set to extend further east along King St between Curzon and Dudley streets, with the changes expected to be in place by mid-2026.

For local residents, that is one of the clearer wins to emerge from the latest round of advocacy following months of concern about safety, rat-running and traffic impacts linked to the West Gate Tunnel and its associated freight redistribution.

The update, considered by councillors at the April 14 Future Melbourne Committee meeting, follows the intense debate at the November 25 council meeting, when councillors and residents criticised delays in the \$100 million Transport and Amenity Program and accused the state of taking a "wait and see" approach after the tunnel

opened. The new report says all follow-up actions requested at that meeting have now been completed.

It also confirms that the tunnel has been heavily used since opening. By early February, more than one million vehicles had travelled through the inbound and outbound tunnels, with more than 20 per cent of those vehicles being trucks.

That figure goes some way to explaining why Kensington residents have remained so focused on local freight impacts.

As previously reported by *North West City News*, a community petition calling for a truck ban on Kensington Rd was presented to council at its March 17 Future Melbourne Committee meeting. The latest council report acknowledges those concerns, noting that the City has heard directly from the community about increased truck movements in Kensington and has been working with DTP to review and mitigate them.

According to the report, that work now includes traffic counts at the intersection of Epsom Rd, Kensington Rd and Macaulay Rd, analysis of freight movements, development of a signage strategy to redirect heavy vehicles away from local streets, assessment of possible truck bans on Kensington and Epsom roads with DTP and the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator, and exploration of infrastructure changes to help deter trucks from key routes and intersections.

For West Melbourne residents, another major point of interest is the Hawke St project.

The report confirms that maps showing underground services and tree planting constraints were published in December 2025, with a more detailed map to be released this month after questions raised during community engagement. It also says the Hawke St consultation process was completed between December and February, and that a report on the greening concept is scheduled to go back to councillors on May 19. Design work is continuing with a view to going to tender in October 2026.

That timeline is still slow by local expectations, but it at least offers a clearer pathway after last year's embarrassing revelation that a major gas main and other service constraints had derailed the original linear park concept.

Further north, the long-awaited Spencer Street North Master Plan is also inching forward. The update says the draft master plan will be revised following internal stakeholder input and presented to councillors for initial discussion in August 2026. If endorsed, public consultation would then occur later in the 2026-27 financial year.

Dynon Rd is also progressing in stages, with Stage 1 upgrades between the CityLink underpass and Lloyd St moving towards

delivery and completion, while design for the Sims St intersection is due by June 2026.

The report also touches on broader environmental and open space issues linked to the tunnel project. It notes that operational environmental monitoring, including for noise and air quality, is commencing this month, while the Moonee Ponds Creek master plan remains one of the unfinished initiatives still being delivered in response to the project's environmental effects process. The City of Melbourne says it will now work with DTP on that master plan following the merger of the Victorian Planning Authority into the department.

Tree planting is also due to continue from April, although the report cautions that while the project is expected to meet its overall 5:1 replacement ratio, that outcome will not be achieved within the City of Melbourne itself. Discussions are continuing with project authorities about how to close that gap locally.

Taken together, the latest update suggests that after months of community frustration, the City is gradually moving from reaction to a more concrete package of responses. But it also reinforces how much remains unresolved.

Speed limits on Victoria St now appear likely to fall. Hawke St greening has a clearer next step. Spencer St North and Dynon Rd are progressing, albeit slowly. Kensington's truck concerns are now formally in the system. Yet the broader picture remains one of a city still trying to soften the effects of a tunnel it never wanted in the first place.

The next major milestones will be the Hawke St report in May, further traffic monitoring over the six-month post-opening period, and the Spencer Street North master plan returning to councillors in August. ●



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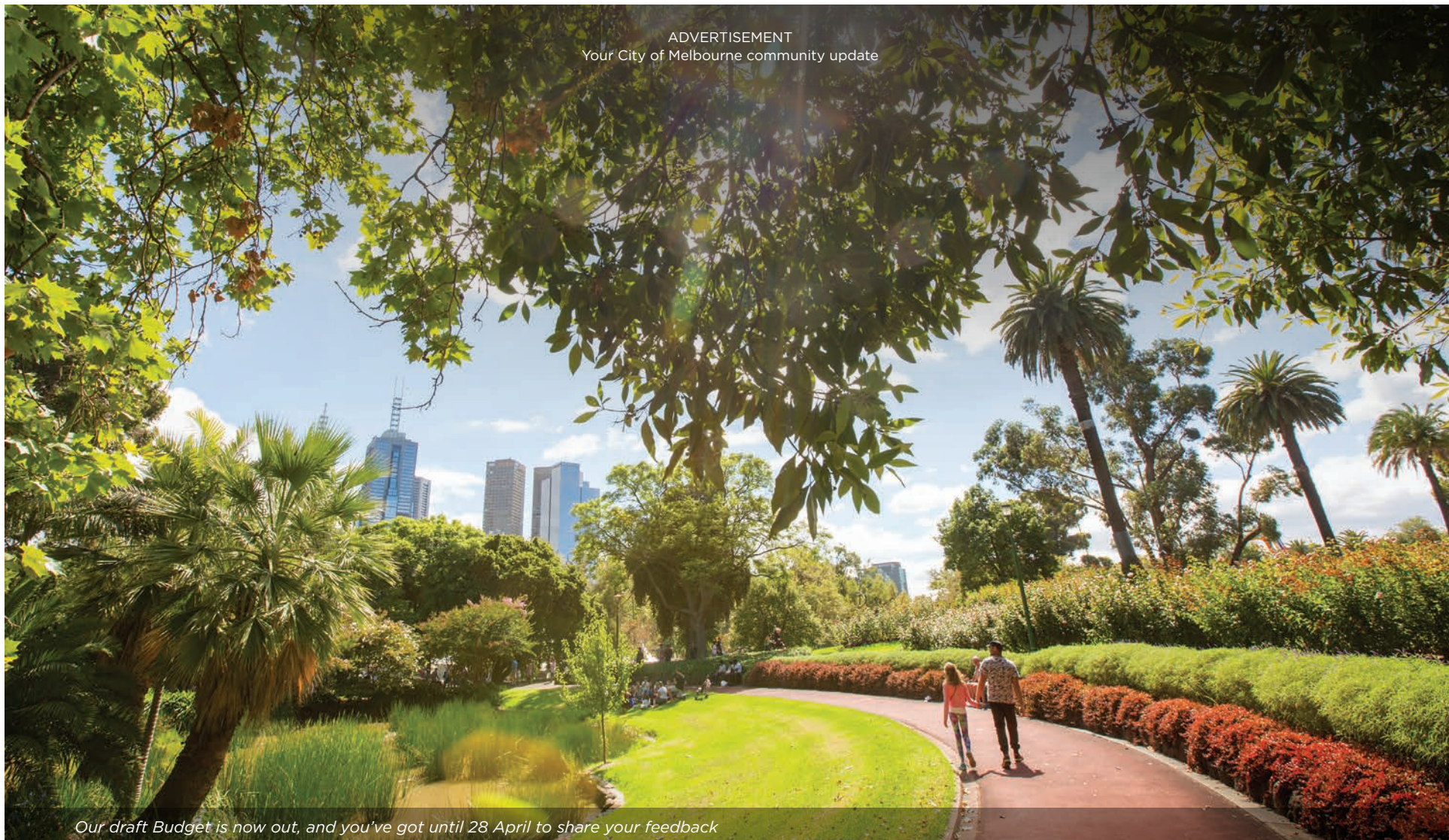


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Our draft Budget is now out, and you've got until 28 April to share your feedback


OUR BUDGET PLAN FOR A MORE LIVEABLE MELBOURNE

 Total budget:
\$804.8 million

 Capital works
program:
\$175.1 million

 Garden City:
\$26.4 million

 Surplus:
\$1.2 million

 Events, arts, culture,
activation:
\$41.2 million

 Safety and cleaning:
\$73.2 million

We know budgets aren't usually the most exciting time of year – especially when Melbourne has just squeezed in Moomba, the opening round of the AFL season and the Australian Grand Prix in one glorious weekend.

But this draft Budget really matters, because it sets out a plan to support a more liveable Melbourne.

It proposes investment in greener spaces, cleaner streets and more active laneways, and aims to make the city easier to get around and better connected.

It's supported by strong financial management, with this draft Budget delivering a third consecutive surplus and a path to being debt-free by 2032.

And because this is a draft Budget, we want to hear from you. Share your feedback using the QR code on the opposite page before 6pm on 28 April to help shape the final Budget.

There's a lot in it, but here are some of the ways you'll see the difference.



Feedback on the draft Budget 2026–27 can be provided on Participate Melbourne from 6pm on Tuesday 31 March until 6pm on 28 April.

BRINGING OUR STREETS TO LIFE



Our draft Budget invests in major events like NYE, which bring the city together

Melbourne's street life is part of what makes the city tick. This draft Budget strengthens that with a focus on lighting, precincts and events that draw people in and keep the city moving:

- **Lighting up Melbourne**
\$2 million to light up more streets and laneways, doubling last year's \$1 million investment, with upgrades in places like Hosier Lane, Collins Street and Hardware Lane to improve safety and support activity after dark.
- **Creating a new Little India precinct**
In Docklands, more than \$1.2 million will help bring Little India to life, with infrastructure, public realm upgrades, creative projects and events.
- **Backing the events that bring the city together**
Across the year, almost same as last year will support major events like New Year's Eve, Moomba and the Christmas Festival, driving visitation and backing local businesses.

GROWING THE GARDEN CITY

Greening Melbourne remains a priority in this budget, with faster delivery of parks and more trees across the city:



We're investing in more parks, trees and greener streets across Melbourne

- **More parks, closer to home**
We're fast-tracking the planning and delivery of 13 new or upgraded parks and green open spaces across the municipality, making sure nature is never far away in our Garden City.
- **3,000 new trees across the city**
We'll plant up to 3,000 new trees across the city, growing Melbourne's urban forest and bringing more shade and greenery to our streets. It will help make the city cooler, greener and more climate resilient.
- **A greener stroll to grab your groceries**
Design work is progressing on Market Square at Queen Victoria Market – the city's biggest new park in more than 50 years – alongside a greener, pedestrian-friendly Franklin Street connecting State Library Station to the market.



Keeping Melbourne active and connected

RESPONSIBLE RATES, PRACTICAL SUPPORT THAT GOES FURTHER

Keeping costs manageable while consistently delivering the services people rely on remains a clear focus:

- **Keeping rates as low as possible**
After we delivered a full rebate on the Victorian Government's 3% rate rise last year, ratepayers will see a 2.75% increase on their rates notice this year. Pensioners will again receive up to a 25% discount, and ratepayers can access support through payment plans and interest-free extensions.

- **Staying active, together**
To support community wellbeing, we're continuing our popular free fitness classes in the park, along with \$2 weekday summer pool visits and free summer swim lessons, helping keep people active and connected.



- **Helping put food on the table**
Rising food prices are putting pressure on households, and we're responding. This draft Budget invests in food security programs that rescue surplus food and deliver it to those who need it most. We will also expand our food rescue partnership at Queen Victoria Market, helping food relief providers reach more vulnerable people in our community.

CLEAN, SAFE AND EASY TO GET AROUND

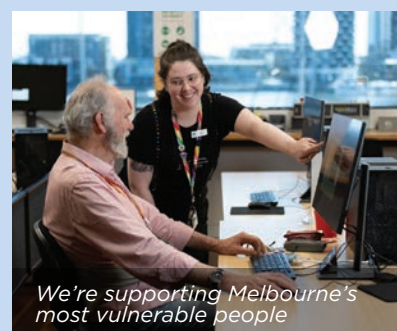
A great city works well day to day, and this draft Budget focuses on the essentials that make Melbourne safer and easier to navigate:



We're investing in a cleaner and safer Melbourne

- **More Community Safety Officers**
The number of Community Safety Officers will double, with 22 CSOs providing a stronger on-street presence.
- **Streets designed for people**
We're exploring ways to make it easier for pedestrians to move through the heart of the city, including extending Bourke Street Mall. Flinders Lane will also get a major refresh between Swanston and Degrave streets, with wider bluestone footpaths and more greenery and more space for the community to enjoy.
- **FOGO goes high rise**
For the first time, we're rolling out food and garden waste recycling to high-rise apartments, making it easier for more residents to reduce waste and keep apartment living green.

A FAIR GO FOR EVERY NEIGHBOURHOOD



We're supporting Melbourne's most vulnerable people

From local libraries to neighbourhood hubs, having community places close to home helps people connect and feel part of something bigger:

- **New spaces to connect, learn and come together**
A 6.3 million investment will see new and upgraded community hubs including Southbank Library and the North Melbourne Community Hub, offering modern spaces to connect and learn.

- **Supporting our most vulnerable**
For the first time, dedicated support will be introduced for people experiencing homelessness with complex mental health challenges. A \$2.3 million investment will expand services for those at risk or sleeping rough, building on the care and connection already in place.
- **Giving kids a strong start**
Giving every child the best start means supporting families early. This draft Budget invests \$500,000 in early childhood services, focused on those who need it most. These programs aim to boost literacy, physical activity, improve access to nutritious food, and provide family-centered support including early intervention and domestic violence prevention.



Projects like the Greenline are one way this draft Budget is investing in making Melbourne greener and more liveable

Residents are invited to meet City of Melbourne Councillors during our public consultation on the draft budget.

Residents can provide feedback on the budget and ask questions about issues that matter.

- 11am-1pm on 8 April at City Square (in conjunction with a 'fitness in the park' activity)
- 11am-1pm on 17 April at Queen Victoria Market
- 10am-12pm on 18 April at Young Husband Rose St Market
- 4-6pm on 24 April at Boyd Community Hub in Southbank
- 4-6pm on 27 April at Clayton Reserve dog park in North Melbourne



Feedback on the draft Budget 2026-27 can be provided on Participate Melbourne from 6pm on Tuesday 31 March until 6pm on 28 April.

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A tram ride through fear, memory and survival: *VIGIL* arrives at Arts House this April



This April, Melbourne audiences will have the chance to step inside a powerful new work that transforms one of the city's most familiar spaces into something far more unsettling.



WORDS BY
GABRIELLE SHI



Premiering at Arts House from April 22 to May 3, *VIGIL* is a bold new production by Outer Urban Projects that explores what safety really means and who gets to feel it.

Set aboard a tram moving through the city, the work follows a group of passengers whose lives and experiences collide in unexpected ways. Some carry memories of war, exile and political upheaval, while others are simply heading out for a night in town. As their journeys unfold, the tram becomes a space charged with tension, grief, memory and uneasy coexistence.

At its core, *VIGIL* asks urgent questions about violence, belonging and whose lives are protected, or ignored, in public space.

Described as a large-scale multidisciplinary theatre work, the production brings together performance, movement, music and community storytelling to examine the fault lines of race, gender, fear and everyday life in the city.

The project features a major creative



team, with writing by Bryan Andy, Kush Kuiy, Sahra Davoudi, Samah Sabawi and Patricia Cornelius, and is led by director and composer Irine Vela, with choreography by Tara Jade Samaya.

The production also includes an ensemble of actors, dancers, musicians and designers, alongside the El Amal Arabic-speaking women's ensemble from Banksia Gardens Community Services, grounding the work in lived experience and collective memory.

Many of the artists involved bring personal and cultural histories to the production, with the work shaped by stories connected to South Sudan, Iran and Palestine, while also acknowledging the truths of First Nations Australia.

Outer Urban Projects artistic director Irine Vela said the work was intended as both a tribute and a provocation.

"*VIGIL* is a collective homage to real acts of loss, of protest and our impulse to honour lives that have been forgotten," she said.

For Arts House, the production continues a strong focus on socially engaged and politically resonant contemporary performance.

Arts House head of programming Naomi Velaphi described *VIGIL* as an ambitious work that stretches beyond traditional theatre.

"*VIGIL* is an expansive and courageous project that bridges film, performance and community practice," she said.

"It invites audiences to think about safety, risk, empathy and complicity in ways that resonate far beyond the theatre."

Alongside the live performance, audiences can also experience a free film installation of the award-winning short dance film *VIGIL*, running from April 9 to May 1 at

Arts House.

Directed by Pippa and Tara Jade Samaya, known as the Samaya Wives, and featuring an original score by Irine Vela, the film explores the ripple effects of gender-based violence through immersive movement, sound and image.

It also offers a behind-the-scenes glimpse into the ideas and creative process behind the wider project.

With its tram setting, community collaboration and urgent political themes, *VIGIL* shapes as one of the more thought-provoking additions to Melbourne's autumn arts calendar.

VIGIL runs at Arts House, North Melbourne Town Hall, from April 22 to May 3, with the film installation on display from April 9 to May 1. Tickets are on sale now via Arts House. ●

Local comedy club focused on fun, mixed lineups

Around the corner from the Comics Lounge, tiny Club Voltaire has been hosting funny, free-spirited shows for more than two decades and the comedians are serving up the laughs every Sunday night, with or without the Comedy Festival.

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



Jake Zukerman is "not too sure" how he got into standup.

"It just looked like a lot of fun," he told *North West City News*.

For the past three years he and co-hosts Kya De Angelis and Montana Papadinis have been mixing up their sets with those of other comics as organisers of the Club Voltaire Sunday comedy night.

The 50-seat venue, down a laneway off Errol St, is "a nice little theatre", which is both secluded and intimate, Jake says.

"We look forward to it every week. It's our favourite show to do, a nice event."

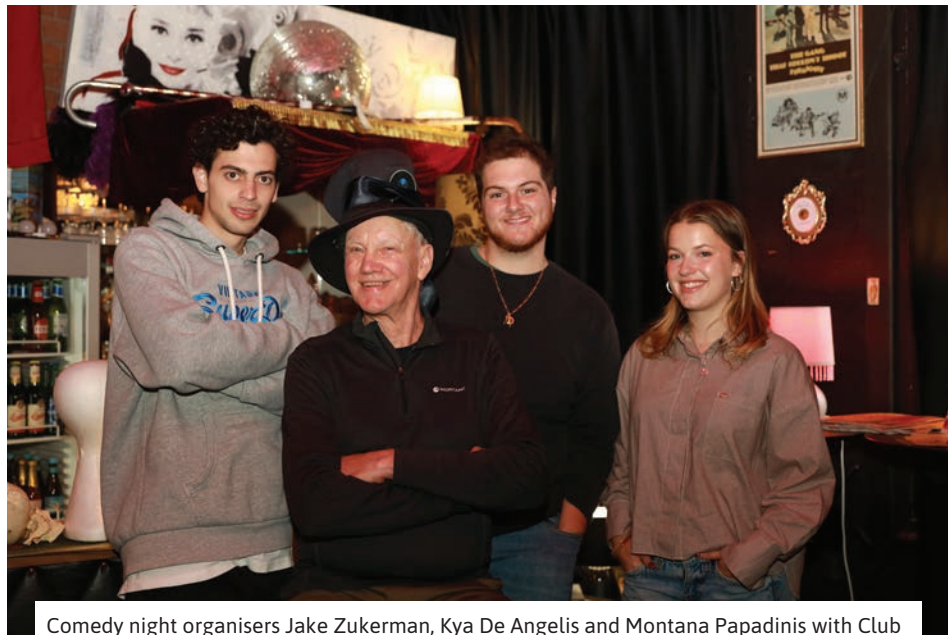
The night, running now for around 14 years, was also beloved of other comics, he said.

"We had Arj Barker come down once. He asked me, 'how long is my spot?'"

The organisers like to watch the show as well as perform in it and sometimes "just get enthralled" and forget they are the hosts.

Each week the lineup is "a mixed bag," Jake says.

"Some comedians are sillier than others, some are more professional than others,



Comedy night organisers Jake Zukerman, Kya De Angelis and Montana Papadinis with Club Voltaire owner Lindsay Saddington. Photo: Hanna Komissarova.

some are trying out new jokes, some doing stories, some sound effects, singing, dancing."

"We've had all kinds of comedians come through."

In March and April, the Sunday nights have been slotted into the Melbourne International Comedy Festival schedule, with a final show listed on April 19.

Afterwards they will continue.

The club has also been hosting a range of other festival shows, as it has for more than a decade.

Among those still running are: *Spineless* by presenter of Formula One comedy podcast *The Reserve Drivers*, Luke Rocca; *Psycho or Psychic*, a playful clowning and tarot card-reading performance promising

"ridiculousness" by Sarah Francis; and *The Maiden* and the *Matron Unhinged*, a "riotous" theatre cabaret show taking on typecasting" by musical performers Carol Whitfield and Tayla Thomas.

The Comedy Festival, along with the Melbourne Fringe, has been key in keeping Club Voltaire going, according to owner Lindsay Saddington.

Lindsay originally took on the four-storey Raglan St building for a performing arts school 23 years ago, then shifted to plan B when the school didn't work out.

With the owner's permission he "pulled down the walls on the first floor, opened it up and turned it into a performance club" and turned the ground floor into a gallery.

For "quite a few years" he was running

a gallery and a club both named after the French writer and philosopher Voltaire, who was an advocate of freedom of expression.

These days the gallery is gone, with half the ground floor converted into a small bar while on the mezzanine there is a tattoo parlour, and upstairs, subleased accommodation.

His being able to sublease the building has been the main reason the tiny venue has been able to survive, Lindsay says.

Over the years there has been regular burlesque, circus, cabaret, live music and open mic nights as well as theatre, art and comedy.

"Mainly now it's cabaret and comedy," Lindsay says, "but I'm trying to get a bit more music back."

"And you name it, we'll do it!"

The 73-year-old gets a sense of satisfaction from seeing up-and-coming acts take off, enjoys mixing with different people and has no retirement plans.

"We really love Lindsay," says Jake. "He's great. He's so easy to work with."

"And he's always talking to people; he's got his jokes."

"He holds it down a lot as well."

Following up from Arj Barker, Jake hopes to see Seinfeld come through the door on a Sunday if he's in town "or Jimmy Carr if he's free".

"I'll see if we can squeeze him on," the organiser says.

"Actually, we're happy with anybody really."

The free-spirited shows are fun, young, varied and full of good ideas, he says.

"Even when it doesn't work it's still pretty fun, we like to think."

"And if it's bad, we're sorry but it's only \$10."

For information on events visit clubvoltaire.com.au or comedyfestival.com.au ●

Councillors vote for independent Queen Victoria Market governance review

“

City of Melbourne councillors have voted 10-1 to commission an independent review into the management and governance of Queen Victoria Market, setting up what could become one of the most consequential examinations of the institution in more than a decade.

”



WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



The notice of motion, moved by Cr Rafael Camillo and seconded by finance chair Cr Owen Guest at the March 31 council meeting, calls for an external review of the market's management entity, governance structure, financial sustainability, trader and customer satisfaction, and alignment with council's strategic objectives for the precinct. It also seeks a five-month interim report and a final report within 12 months.

In presenting the motion, Cr Camillo described the market as "one of the beating hearts of Melbourne" and framed the review as an opportunity to strengthen rather than punish.

"This review is an opportunity, a chance to bring everyone together," he said. "It's not about criticism. It is about building on what we have."

Cr Guest, who had earlier the same day been described by the Lord Mayor as the council's "fiscal hawk" during the draft budget launch, backed the proposal in simpler terms, saying he saw it as "looking for a win-win".

On one level, the arguments for a review are easy to follow. The market is one of Melbourne's most significant civic and economic assets, the last major strategic review was in 2015, and there have been longstanding concerns among some traders and advocates about communication, transparency, operating costs and the way waste and utility charges are being passed on.

The motion itself cites the need for a contemporary review of governance, accountability and performance, and notes trader and community feedback about

affordability, activation, decision-making and balancing commercial outcomes with heritage and place-making objectives.

Friends of Queen Victoria Market, whose members packed the chamber on the night and applauded repeatedly as councillors spoke in favour, have welcomed the decision as a "turning point" in the long-running disputes surrounding the market's renewal. The group has for years opposed aspects of the council's wider renewal agenda, including Market Square, and in more recent months has supported trader protests against QVM Pty Ltd over rising charges.

In a statement to *North West City News*, the Friends of QVM said the review was "long overdue", but argue its value will depend on the final terms of reference, the depth of the inquiry and the independence of the consultant appointed.

They say the review should take a forensic look at the market's management structure, governance, finances and operational inefficiencies, while also properly considering trader, resident and wider stakeholder concerns, including the passing on of waste costs to traders.

The group also argues QVM was not "paying its way", pointing to ongoing council letters of comfort, and says the future of the open-air car park should be explicitly included because it remains critical to trader operations, customer access and the market's living heritage.

QVM Pty Ltd CEO Matt Elliott said, "We welcome the review".

"In recent years the market has navigated significant challenges, including a major renewal program, the disruption that comes with transforming one of Australia's most complex heritage sites while keeping it open and trading and the ongoing impacts of COVID," he said.

"Through all of that, visitation has grown strongly, new trader businesses have opened, and we've received positive independent audits annually."

"The last formal review was in 2015, and a lot has changed since then. It's appropriate for the City of Melbourne to take stock. We take our responsibilities to our traders, our customers and the City of Melbourne seriously, and we'll engage with this process fully."

But while support for the review was broad, the debate also exposed a series of important governance and timing concerns.

Cr Dr Olivia Ball was the sole councillor to vote against the motion. Her objection was not to the idea of review itself, but to what she argued was the wrong review at the wrong time.

"The elephant in the room that is not mentioned in this motion is the QVM renewal program," she said.

Cr Dr Ball argued that the market company was being judged in the middle of a renewal process that was still incomplete, materially changed the operating environment, and remained clouded by uncertainty around staging and timing. She pointed out that the council, as QVM's sole shareholder, had not updated its statement of shareholder expectations since 2017 and had not provided clear public direction on how and when the long-running renewal program would be completed.

In Cr Dr Ball's view, that omission matters. If the shareholder has not clearly reset expectations in light of a project now years behind schedule, then it is difficult to review the board and management in isolation from the council's own role in creating uncertainty.

That concern goes to the heart of the review's scope. The motion is focused on management and governance, not on the City of Melbourne's handling of the renewal program itself. Yet for many observers, the two are deeply intertwined. As Cr Phil Le Liu acknowledged in debate, the council has itself helped create a difficult operating environment, having chosen years ago to manage the renewal directly despite the

site's unusual complexity, including heritage constraints and the former cemetery beneath the southern car park.

There were also concerns about process. Cr Dr Ball unsuccessfully sought to amend the motion so that the terms of reference would come back to council for formal endorsement, rather than being prepared by the CEO "working with councillors". She argued that if the council was reviewing governance, it should hold itself to the highest governance standards and avoid behind-the-scenes collaboration without a clear decision gateway.

CEO Alison Leighton responded that either approach would be workable, saying the original wording still enabled a "collegiate approach" between councillors and management. But the exchange left unresolved the underlying question Cr Dr Ball was raising: whether collegiality is enough, or whether formal governance clarity is needed when the council is reviewing both the board and management of its wholly owned subsidiary.

That question is sharpened by the makeup of the councillor group itself. Among those who may help shape the terms of reference is Cr Mark Scott, who is also a Queen Victoria Market trader.

Another issue is cost. The motion asks for options and estimated costs for engaging an external consultant, but at this stage neither the consultant nor the likely price tag is known. That uncertainty stood out on the very same night the council endorsed a draft budget built around spending restraint, delayed capital works and a strong focus on debt reduction. Reviews of this scale can be extremely expensive over time, particularly if they involve broad stakeholder engagement, benchmarking and governance analysis.

There is also the question of whether the board itself should have been the first focus. In ordinary circumstances, it is typically the role of a board to review management. Here, the council is proposing to review both board and management at once.

Still, supporters argue that is precisely why an external review is needed. The current board has had continuity for some years, with figures such as chair Jane Fenton and Victorian Trades Hall Council secretary Luke Hilakari serving lengthy tenures. For proponents, that continuity strengthens rather than weakens the case for a fresh independent look.

The motion passed 10-1, with Cr Dr Ball's reasons for opposition recorded in the minutes. The next key step will be the drafting of terms of reference and the return of consultant options and costs to the council before the review formally begins. Whether it proves a constructive reset or an expensive distraction may depend less on the vote itself than on what exactly councillors choose to examine. ●

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Compost critters reveal a complex picture

A group of local residents glimpsed and touched for themselves evidence of “the huge, complex food web under our feet” when they took part in an insect information session at a Kensington Compost Hub event last month.

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



▲ *Hermetia illucens* – black soldier fly.
Photo: Dr Ian Smith.

When it comes to soil health, it is not just about worms, Dr Ian Smith will tell you.

“Everyone tends to think of worms when it comes to gardening but there’s a huge range of other insects that are just as beneficial to the garden that we don’t really focus on because they’re not as obvious, or sometimes we perceive them as pests,” he told *North West City News*.

The entomologist had the same message for a group of around 20 participants at a recent BioBlitz event at the Kensington Town Hall and adjoining community compost hub.

The March 1 City of Melbourne-organised “Compost Critters” session promised to teach people about beneficial insects and using instruments to find them while also recording participants’ observations via the crowd-sourced science app iNaturalist.

“There were a lot of kids having fun, digging around, seeing what they could find,” Ian said of the event.

Also enjoying himself was Kensington Compost Hub secretary Dave Goodman, who was “super into” the session.

“I found it fascinating,” Dave said. “I’ve been the main composter at that site for eight or nine years and I’m sort of self-taught.

“A lot of the things we discussed I’ve known about in general terms, but I’ve now got a lot of specific information.”

The presentation Ian gave to the group described the “ecological niche” of around two dozen commonly found compost species.

For instance, the family of sap beetles, part of a range of “decomposer” beetles, would break down “your juicy, high sugar items” such as fruits and tomatoes, Ian said.

They were among multiple waves of creatures that move into a compost.

Also, part of the picture are flies of different types and sizes, predatory beetles, decomposing mites and springtails, which are “really at the end of the line – they will break down even what the worms didn’t break down”.

The story is thus not just about one species but “a whole ecosystem of insects and organisms, breaking down the soil and releasing those nutrients back into the environment”.

After looking at soil samples under a



▲ Photo: Hui-Anne Tan.

microscope the afternoon workshop group had split up and had taken turns inspecting specimens and searching the compost and garden for the creatures on Ian’s list, using hand lenses and soft forceps to do so.

They found at least a third of them, including black soldier flies, ants, worms, earth mites, springtails and a couple of types of beetles.

While he had already known the hub’s compost was healthy, it was a type of validation to find the range of organisms in it that they did, Dave said.

Opened behind Kensington Town Hall in 2018 on land made available by the City of Melbourne, the community-run compost hub is an open-access public composting scheme to support local gardening and food growing.

It has since formed a network with five



▲ Springtails *Collembola*
Photo: Dr Ian Smith.

other community compost stations. Anyone interested in finding a place to leave their fruit and vegetable waste can look for the nearest site at peels.app. ●

North and West Melbourne, Kensington score key wins in cautious council budget

The City of Melbourne’s 2026-27 draft budget is, overall, a careful and fiscally restrained document.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



It delivers a third straight underlying surplus of \$1.2 million, keeps the council on a path to reduce debt to \$60 million by the end of the current term and to zero by 2032, and largely protects day-to-day services at a time of rising costs and a tight rates-capped environment.

But for North and West Melbourne and Kensington, the more immediate story is that this budget contains a meaningful cluster of local investments, particularly in community infrastructure, open space and neighbourhood amenity.

Such investments matter in these suburbs, which are absorbing growth from Arden-Macaulay, living with the consequences of the West Gate Tunnel, and continuing to press the council and state government for the local facilities that should accompany denser inner-city living.

Among the biggest local wins is a \$3.5 million allocation to

finalise designs for the new North Melbourne Community Hub in the Macaulay precinct, a long-awaited project intended to provide a more modern and accessible community facility for a growing population. There is also funding to create 2500 sqm of new open space at the Chapman St pocket park in North Melbourne, part of the council’s broader push to expand green space across dense inner-city neighbourhoods.

In Kensington, the budget proposes a \$6.4 million investment to transform a warehouse on Chelmsford St into a new community space for relaxation, exercise,

play and connection with nature and Country. In practical local terms, that is one of the stronger commitments in the whole budget.

The budget also continues to back neighbourhood-level recreation and wellbeing measures, including the expansion of the council’s free swim program and upgrades to local fitness equipment. These are not headline-grabbing items in the way a new building or park might be, but they speak to a budget that is still investing in everyday liveability.

That local focus sits inside a broader city budget that is prudent on paper, but not without

trade-offs.

As finance chair Cr Owen Guest made clear when the budget was released, the improved debt outlook has not been achieved by scrapping services, but largely by pushing parts of the capital works program further out. The city’s capital works forecast declines over the forward estimates, from \$175.1 million next year to \$161 million, then \$145.6 million and \$135.3 million in subsequent years. The council says this is about stabilising delivery. The risk, of course, is that projects delayed today may cost more tomorrow in a construction market still being squeezed by labour and materials inflation.

That matters for the inner north and west, where communities are already used to waiting.

At the same time, the budget’s clearest political emphasis remains safety and cleanliness, and that has direct local implications. The council is proposing to double its Community Safety Officer program from 11 officers to 22, supported by an extra \$1.7 million, while also expanding the Safe City camera network by up to 150 cameras and investing in a new dedicated outreach team to work alongside the CSOs and support rough sleepers and other vulnerable people.

For local communities, those investments will be watched closely. They come at a difficult moment for the program, after

The Age reported allegations from a former CSO about low morale, confusion around powers and problematic internal culture. The council has responded by standing behind the initiative, saying: “Our Community Safety Officers are making a real difference on Melbourne’s streets – supporting vulnerable people and stepping in early to prevent antisocial behaviour.” The city says the team has already been involved in more than 5000 interactions since launching in October 2025, and that officers receive training in trauma-informed engagement, mental health, substance use awareness, cultural safety and family and gendered violence prevention.

Still, the expansion is likely to prompt questions about how the program operates and its effectiveness.

There are also the unavoidable costs. Rates are rising again under the full 2.75 per cent state cap, after last year’s much-publicised rebate only deferred the increase. Parking fees will also go up modestly for the first time in eight years. That means households and local traders are being asked to pay more at a time when the council is simultaneously talking discipline and delay.

Consultation on the draft budget is open until April 28, with a special Future Melbourne Committee hearing on May 12 before final adoption on May 26. ●

Residents press Metro Tunnel team over rail noise near South Kensington

“

Kensington residents have stepped up their campaign over noise from the new Metro Tunnel entrance near South Kensington Station, with a recent community meeting laying bare ongoing frustration about rail squeal, delays in responses and limited access to monitoring data.

”

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



The meeting, held on March 18 at JJ Holland Park on the corner of Kensington Rd and Childers St, brought residents together with representatives from the Metro Tunnel Project Office and Rail Network Alliance to discuss noise linked to the new trains and track arrangement near the tunnel approach.

According to the official meeting summary, residents said they had grown increasingly frustrated by the time it was taking to address their complaints, including what they described as a lack of response to requests for noise monitoring data. They also reported that the noise appeared

worse from eastbound trains heading into the tunnel than westbound services, and said they did not believe the installation of an eastbound lubricator last year had improved the issue.

Residents further observed noise from braking trains descending into the tunnel and raised concerns about the future impact of Night Network services on the line.

Project representatives told the meeting they were taking the concerns seriously and said the team had been making regular site visits to observe train movements, timings and environmental conditions. But while residents believed the eastbound line was

the main problem, the project team said its own observations had identified more squeal on the westbound track.

As part of the short-term response, the project said Metro Trains had agreed to increase oil to the westbound lubricator within a fortnight, while longer-term maintenance conversations were continuing.

The bigger promise from the authority is that the current track arrangement is only temporary.

At the meeting, the project advised that the tracks entering the tunnel were not yet in their final configuration and that a temporary diamond track junction would

be removed in July and replaced with a straighter layout. According to the project office, that permanent arrangement is expected to provide long-term noise relief and also remove the “clunking” noise caused by wheels passing over gaps in the current junction.

Residents, however, pressed the project team on what would happen if the new track did not resolve the problem.

They asked about compliance monitoring, independent auditing, acoustic barriers, access to data, compensation for affected families and what recourse would be available if the final track formation still failed to meet noise requirements.

In response, the project office said the Metro Tunnel must meet the requirements of its Environmental Management Framework and the Passenger Rail Infrastructure Noise Policy once the permanent track is in place. If compliance monitoring showed non-compliance, the project said it would be required to investigate mitigation measures such as noise walls, façade treatments or double glazing.

The authority also said its modelling indicated the final track alignment would sit under the relevant policy thresholds, and that interim observations had not recorded any maximum noise levels above 85 decibels. Monitoring is being undertaken by AECOM, part of the Rail Network Alliance consortium.

Following the meeting, the project team wrote to attendees thanking them for making the time to meet and said it intended to provide monthly update emails, construction updates as close-out works continue in Kensington, and a further residents’ meeting after permanent track installation and compliance monitoring are complete. ●

Dumped “nangs” on the increase

The use of nitrous oxide, or laughing gas, as a recreational drug appears to be increasing in the CBD and West Melbourne, with local residents reporting empty cannisters being left lying around or stacked beside bins more and more frequently.

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



“They’re everywhere,” said one West Melbourne local, who recently spotted the containers, known colloquially as “nangs”, discarded in the CBD, Docklands, Flagstaff Gardens and near Festival Hall.

He had also seen a person by themselves apparently inhaling the gas in a laneway, he said.

Nitrous oxide, which is being used recreationally by young people in many countries around the world, is listed as a Schedule 6 poison under Australia’s *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act* – meaning it is considered to have moderate potential for causing harm, which can be reduced through strong warnings and safety directions on packaging.

The sale or supply of the gas for inhalation outside of medical settings is prohibited in Victoria.

In Melbourne, it is readily available, including via 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week home delivery by companies professing to sell it for culinary purposes.

An odourless, colourless compound used among other things to whip cream, nitrous

oxide, when inhaled, is “rapidly absorbed by the body and produces a rush of euphoria, heightened consciousness and disassociation that includes both anaesthetic and sedative components,” according to a report by the Victorian Coroner’s Court.

The effects last for about a minute.

But the environmental impacts may endure a lot longer.

According to a recent international report, the gas, which is also generated by agricultural fertilisers, is a major contributor to global warming, with a potential climate change impact nearly 300 times that of carbon dioxide over a 100-year time scale.

The steel cannisters it comes in – ranging from 6cm long bulb-shaped vessels to 3.3L tanks – are not reusable and in the City of Melbourne can’t be disposed of in recycling or rubbish bins.

The regular appearance of the containers, which are classified by the EPA as hazardous waste requiring specialised disposal, has been causing some local residents concern.

The council reportedly responds quickly to reports of the dumped vessels, removing

them from public places and taking them to steel recycling facilities.

And according to an RMIT chemical expert, the cannisters are unlikely to be an explosion risk to passersby.

They do, however, pose a tripping hazard.

Deputy head of research at RMIT chemistry department Vipul Bansal told *North West City News* the cylinders were pressure-tested and shouldn’t “burst by themselves”, and they would be even less likely to do so if they were partly used.

Any risk would come from high heat, he said.

“So, if they’re lying in the sun, they could burst if they’re full.”

In his view, the real risk was if the cannisters were improperly disposed of, and accidentally compacted or incinerated.

He also cited concerns about the health impacts on users.

While nitrous oxide was generally considered a comparatively safe recreational drug, its use was not without risk, according to Victorian Coroner Audrey Jamieson, who last year investigated the 2023 death of a 26-year-old Elsternwick man who suffocated after inhaling the gas through a mask.

Her report noted that 11 Victorian deaths between 2000 and 2023 where recreational use of nitrous oxide was a contributing factor had been identified – eight of them since 2020.

The deaths had occurred through either dangerous use of the gas, for example by administering it through a mask; using it in a dangerous setting, such as near water; or chronic high-level use, which dramatically impacted the user’s health, particularly through vitamin B12 deficiency and malnutrition, the Coroner said.

In early April the ACT Coroner released a report into another 2023 death, which occurred when an 18-year-old inhaled the gas before driving his Commodore into a pond in Canberra.

Both coroners recommended the legal frameworks around access to nitrous oxide in their jurisdictions be reviewed.

According to the Victorian health department, using the gas can cause “very serious health problems such as irreversible nerve damage, especially in large volumes or if used very frequently.”

Media reports have described cases where people have lost the use of their legs or developed psychosis as the result of heavy use.

The Department of Health and Human Services said the enforcement of regulations around accessing the gas was a matter for Victoria Police but that it was reviewing the regulations.

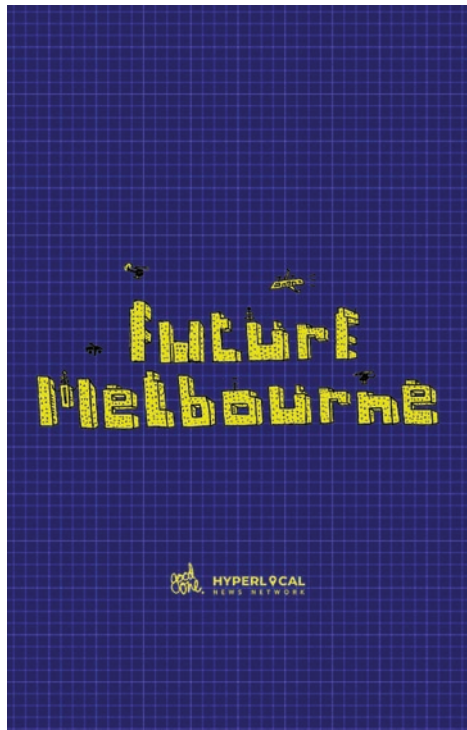
Victoria Police declined to comment on the issue.

The City of Melbourne said inappropriate disposal of nitrous oxide cannisters was investigated as a serious offence, with penalties ranging from \$814 to \$12,000 if an offender was successfully prosecuted.

The EPA didn’t respond to a request for information. ●

Future Melbourne turns to Arden-Macaulay with Rohan Leppert

“The latest episode of *Future Melbourne* turns its attention to Arden and Macaulay, two of Melbourne’s most important and most contested urban renewal precincts.



Hosted by Hyperlocal News publisher and editor Sean Car, the new episode features former City of Melbourne councillor, long-time Kensington resident and urban planner Rohan Leppert in a detailed discussion about the future of the fast-changing inner-north neighbourhoods.

The conversation explores what is at stake in two areas that sit at the centre of some of Melbourne’s biggest planning debates. From the promise of Arden’s new Metro Tunnel station to the long-running uncertainty around Macaulay’s planning controls, the episode examines how growth, infrastructure and community expectations are colliding in real time.

Arden and Macaulay have long been identified as major renewal areas, with thousands of homes and jobs planned across former industrial and underused land straddling North Melbourne and Kensington. But as the episode makes clear, the challenge is not simply one of development, but of how to get the balance right between density, transport, open space, flood management, affordability and liveability.

Leppert joins the podcast with deep local and policy knowledge, offering listeners both a history of the precincts and a plain-English explanation of the planning battles now playing out.

The discussion covers the original promise of Arden as a city-shaping project linked to a major new station, as well as the sense that the precinct still feels incomplete and under-realised despite enormous public investment. It also unpacks Macaulay’s more tangled story, where years of work on permanent planning controls have been disrupted by a dramatic reset led by the Victorian Government.

Other topics include the role of Moonee Ponds Creek, the politics of affordable housing, the importance of schools and parks in

new neighbourhoods, the rise of build-to-rent, and the broader question of who gets to shape the future of growing cities.

The episode is the latest in Hyperlocal News’ *Future Melbourne* series, which continues to build as a platform for deeper conversations about the big issues shaping the city.

Previous episodes have focused on Queen Victoria Market with CEO Matt Elliott, the future of Melbourne’s CBD and economy with Stephen Mayne, housing in the City of Melbourne with Housing All Australians founder Rob Pradolin, and Docklands with former City of Melbourne councillor Jamal Hakim.

Together, the series is developing into an accessible forum for unpacking the planning, economic, civic and cultural decisions that will define Melbourne in the years ahead.

For listeners interested in how cities are made and remade, the Arden-Macaulay episode promises to be one of the more substantive instalments so far.

The latest episode of *Future Melbourne* is available online now, with new episodes continuing weekly. ●



Serving the community



It was a tale, not of two cities, but of two sessions. As reported last month, the first session of Parkville Gardens Residents’ Association’s (PGRA) Women’s Safety Workshop, held on the Galada Ave Reserve on March 5, was a great success.

A good turnout, helpful presentations by Victoria Police and the City of Melbourne, animated discussion and, to round the evening off, a most enjoyable social supper.

Alas, for a variety of reasons, that broad success wasn’t replicated at the second session, which was attended by just a handful of participants. The biggest factor no doubt was the weather. The ominously dark skies eventually produced a thunderstorm.

Weather as threatening as that, plus a later starting time, and an off-site meeting place threw up too much of a challenge. But those who braved the conditions were treated to an introduction to the Trin Warren Tam-Boore Bellbird Wetland by Jenny and Peter from Friends of Royal Park.

The second feature of the evening was an interactive address by Upper House MP Sheena Watt in the Ross Straw sports pavilion. It turned out that her role as Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Action and Emergency Services saved us from having to cancel the rest of the evening.

With darkness setting in, it was discovered that the interior lights of the pavilion were not working. Fortunately, Sheena had a set of emergency lights in her car which she generously allowed us to use in the meeting space. Thank you, Sheena! Thanks also to Peter and Jenny, and to the City of Melbourne for funding the event.

Whatever disappointment we may have felt at this was swept away by the success of our annual children’s Easter egg hunt on the morning of Sunday, March 29. Fine weather, a terrific turnout of kids (especially the young ones), good fun and great community interaction. Just what we hoped for!

A very different event in character and scale took place nearby over the Easter weekend. It was Melbourne’s turn to host the annual Australian Sikh Games. Parts of Royal Park near Parkville Gardens were transformed. Crowds of people, traditional sports, food trucks, cultural entertainment and good weather all combined to generate a friendly celebratory spirit.

The principal source of funding for our events is the City of Melbourne. We are always most grateful for this support. At the same time, we stay on the lookout for other sources.

In recent years we have managed to secure funding from the Department of Education for children’s events and from Greater Western Water for a community festival. We have just submitted an expression of interest to our federal member Sarah Witty, for a grant from the Department of Social Services in support of volunteers.

We won’t know for some time whether we have been successful. Fingers crossed! ●

Tom Knowles

PRESIDENT
PRESIDENT@PGRA.ORG.AU



STATE MP

West Gate toll road traffic is choking our streets

Late last year, our community raised serious concerns about the impact of traffic from the West Gate toll road on our local streets.

Now, just months after the tunnel opened in December 2025, we’re beginning to see those serious concerns become a very big problem.

The tunnel was built to bring traffic from the west into the city – but it terminated right in the heart of our city with exits feeding directly into Docklands, North Melbourne and West Melbourne. At the time I raised serious concerns about this – no other modern city is building toll roads that terminate right in the middle of their CBD!

It was always going to be a recipe for traffic and climate disaster. Now our many residents are seeing more traffic on local

streets and rising safety concerns, pollution and congestion. Pedestrians, cyclists, and schoolchildren are feeling the impacts every day and residents no longer feel as safe moving through their neighbourhoods.

This isn’t what our community was promised. When we raised our initial concerns, the State Government pledged significant funding to manage traffic and improve safety on local roads. Yet many of these measures, from safer crossings to traffic calming and amenity improvements, were simply not delivered, and these are big broken promises from this Labor Government.

With the state budget due in May, I’m calling on the state government to deliver on its broken promises. In parliament last year, I highlighted that while \$100 million was promised to manage traffic and improve safety, only a fraction has been spent. The upcoming budget is the opportunity to fully

fund the safety upgrades and traffic mitigation measures our neighbourhoods were promised.

Our community deserves better. That’s why I’m calling on the government to urgently roll out the full package of promised safety upgrades and properly manage traffic impacts on our residential streets.

Join your neighbours in calling for safer streets and the government to deliver on its promises. Add your support at ellensandell.com/issue/westgate ●

Ellen Sandell

STATE MP FOR MELBOURNE
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Trekking through North and West Melbourne to Geelong, and fording the Moonee Ponds Creek

One of the earliest maps of Melbourne, the Robert Russell 1837 map, when Melbourne's population was only a few hundred shows a "Track to the Saltwater River and Geelong".

WORDS BY
GEOFF LEACH
HOTHAM HISTORY PROJECT

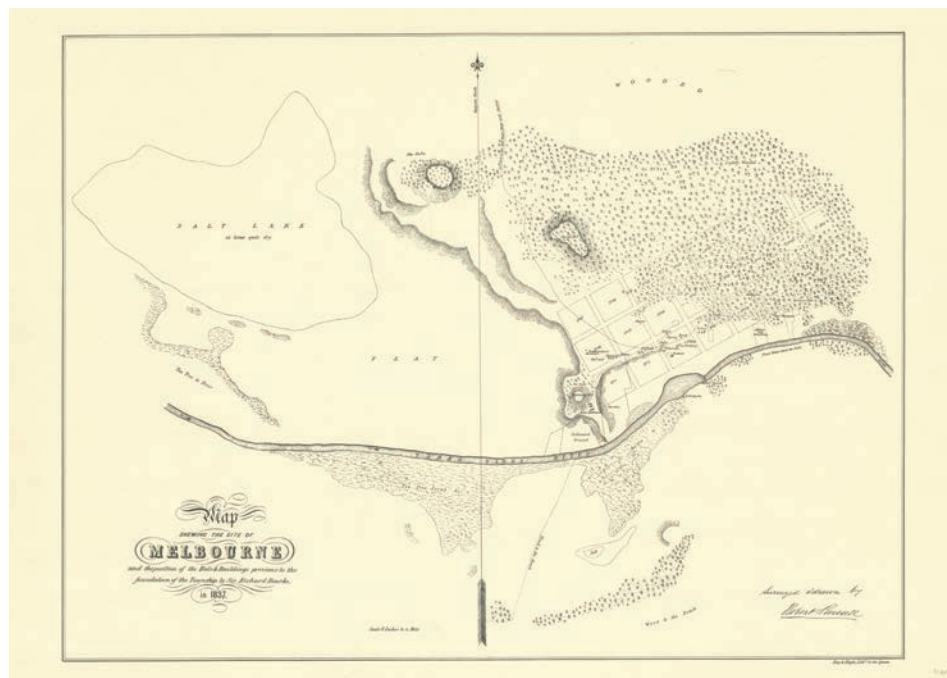
This map shows the track start at the corner of Flinders and Swanston streets, going diagonally westerly across to between King and Spencer Streets, then going north-westerly past Burial (Flagstaff) Hill, and the most northern section finishing around Hotham Hill, North Melbourne. That's as far as the map goes.

An 1836 map a year earlier by John Helder Wedge, a surveyor who was part of Batman's settlement group, also shows a track to Geelong.

A later 1856 map (centre bottom left) shows a track, likely the same track as in Russell and Wedge's maps, or a fork of it, going through "Section 16" just above Macaulay Rd, near Stubbs St and where Mark St and Robertson St are - which were one street in the original subdivision.

The Moonee Ponds Creek is shown as finishing at the top of Section 16, and not as running through it, although it did in some form.

While the track is not shown in the 1855 Kearney map (centre bottom right), two ponds are, and other maps as descriptions describe the area as a marsh or swamp.



The crossing would have been at the end of what is now Mark St, just above the lower pond.

Curiously there is now a rock ledge at about the same place as where the track on the 1852 map would have crossed the Moonee Ponds Creek, just up from Macaulay Rd, presumably some sort of ford. Here are two recent photos of the location.

When Citylink was built in the late 1990s the Moonee Ponds Creek between Macaulay Rd and Racecourse Rd was "naturalised". The old 1880s, or thereabouts, bluestone dead straight channelling was removed, and the creek was given a sinuous shape. Rocks were placed along the bank



and some trees planted in the creek bed.

Are the rocks in the photo above part of that naturalisation effort, or are they part of the "old volcanic basalt" lava? Either way perhaps the location is worthy of being recognised, as (near) where the "Track to the Saltwater River and Geelong" went across the Moonee Ponds Creek. Particularly as it is thought that some of the old tracks were based on First Peoples' walking tracks.

The tracks were gradually replaced by roads and rails, with few traces left, maybe this is one such trace, or could be imagined and remembered as such. ●

ENVIRONMENT

Are Indigenous decision-making processes required for new technological advances?

Indigenous decision-making processes have historically demonstrated high effectiveness through community-based, consensus-driven, and long-term sustainable approaches that have enabled resilience over thousands of years.

These systems prioritize collective wellbeing, stewardship of the land, and the inclusion of diverse perspectives, particularly through the guidance of Elders.

Whenever new technology moves quicker than the opportunity for community and society to think through consequences there inevitably is damage to the planet and our well-being with a handful of people making incredible gain.

Major tech companies (Google, Microsoft, Meta) are creating huge damage to our planet and potentially to our well-being through the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Industry. They are bounding ahead without the legal, ethical or social frameworks needed to govern them.

Then there is a scramble for retrospective policies/regulations to address what needed to be considered at the outset because of the resulting consequences.

A key example includes the rapid rise of social media and algorithm decision-making which have disrupted democratic processes and exacerbated inequalities before regulations could be established. And has



led to significant mental health damage among teenagers.

Social media platforms allowed for the rapid spread of fabricated information, which was exploited during major political events (e.g., the 2016 US election and Brexit) to manipulate voters before regulatory frameworks were in place.

We can look back further to when chemical sprays (insecticides) were introduced and the damage caused to insect and bird life that also led to a number of adverse effects on human health (according to published medical journals) that include

various types of cancers, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, infertility, leukemia and diabetes.

This is recurring again with the significant and technological development of AI. The AI industry consumes immense energy for training and running models, requires massive water usage for cooling its data centres (a single large facility potentially using approx. 19 million litres daily), generates significant electronic waste and requires the mining of finite, raw minerals.

Multiple sites have been approved for AI data centres without consulting with

community. They are significant sources of noise and light pollution impacting nearby communities and ecosystems as they operate 24/7 emitting a constant low-frequency hum from cooling and power systems.

Residents near these sites report decreased quality of life, with noise pollution linked to stress, sleep disturbances, and potential long-term health risks like cardiovascular issues.

Unchecked technological advances, particularly in artificial intelligence (AI), are often permitted by a combination of "Big Tech"'s push for profit, arguing that proactive regulation hurts development. Government initiatives that prioritise speed and economic growth over comprehensive community consultation. Existing laws often cannot keep pace with new tech resulting in erosion of privacy, lack of digital equity and transparency.

Indigenous cultures would check these technology advances by applying, long-standing, community-based, and holistic protocols that prioritise the health of "Country" – all-encompassing systems of land, water, sky, and people – over short-term efficiency or profit. ●

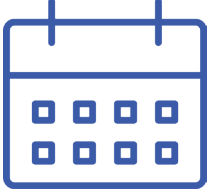
Jacqui van Heerden

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WHAT'S ON April



Experience the north west city buzz this month with workshops, markets, exhibitions and more.



THE HUMAN ALGORITHM
Immersive AI-generated video installation examining human cognition, philosophy, cloned voices, fragmented literature, and existential risks shaped by AI systems and ideology.

Kensington Town Hall
17 – 18 APRIL, 6.30PM – 9.30PM



A VERY JAPANESE BOILERMAKER NIGHT
Ticketed Melbourne event pairing Japanese craft beers with rare whisky selections, offering curated tastings from matching prefectures in a unique boilermaker experience.

Benchwarmer, West Melbourne
THURSDAY 23 APRIL, 7PM – 9PM



VAISAKHI: CELEBRATING KHALSA SAJNA DIVAS
Free Melbourne Vaisakhi festival celebrating Sikh culture with kirtan, langar meals, turban tying, and community activities hosted by VSGC.

Flagstaff Gardens, West Melbourne
SUNDAY 26 APRIL, 10AM – 3.30PM



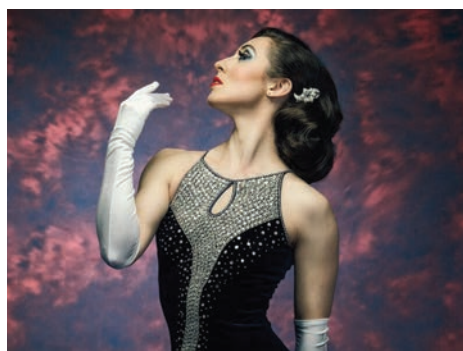
SARAH FRANCIS: PSYCHO OR PSYCHIC
Clowning performance sharing true psychic-themed stories, blending humour, characters, and emotional moments in a surreal journey exploring madness, identity, and connection.

Club Voltaire, North Melbourne
UNTIL 30 MAY, 9PM – 10PM



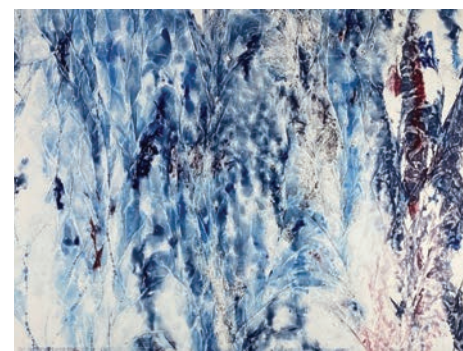
BAKERY HILL WHISKY DISTILLERY TOUR AND TASTING
Bakery Hill's 90-minute tour features whisky production insights, tasting six single malts, exploring barley and peat, plus exclusive distillery bottle purchases.

Bakery Hill Distillery, Kensington
UNTIL 30 MAY, 12.30PM – 2PM



SINCERELY YOURS
Musical tribute to Dame Vera Lynn featuring 1940s–1960s songs performed by live musicians, evoking nostalgia, emotion, and audience sing-alongs with refreshments.

Kensington Town Hall
TUESDAY 21 APRIL, 12PM – 3PM



KAREN PRAKHOFF RICKMAN: THE SHIMMERING EDGE
Printmaking exhibition exploring memory, time, and wetlands through fragmented photographs of Baigup Wetlands and the land–water boundary landscape.

West End Art Space
UNTIL 2 MAY, 11AM – 4PM



YOUNGHUSBAND MARKET
Youngusband Market brings Rose Street Market's creative vibe to a historic woolshed, transforming it monthly into a lively hub of local makers, art, workshops, music, food and community.

Youngusband, Kensington
SATURDAYS UNTIL 16 MAY, 10AM – 3PM



PAPER COLLAGE
Welcome to the expressive and playful practice of collage. Using second-hand paper materials you will explore different techniques to create a unique artwork. Tutor: Sarah Brownlow.

Kensington Neighbourhood House
SATURDAY 16 MAY, 2PM – 4PM



SONGBIRDS
Engage newborns to 18-month-olds with songs, rhymes, and stories, fostering early language development and rhythm. Programs run only during school terms, pausing for school holidays.

North Melbourne Library
UNTIL 9 DECEMBER, 10.30AM – 11AM



KENSINGTON MARKET
Browse the carefully curated range of homewares, sustainable goods, delicious homemade treats, freshly brewed coffee and ceramics. Enjoy live music while you wander around the beautiful town hall. Runs on the third Sunday of the month.

Kensington Town Hall
UNTIL 13 DECEMBER, 10AM – 3PM

Business Directory

ANIMAL WELFARE



Better behaviour starts here
Get expert, affordable help for your pet's behaviour – and support animals in need at the same time.
dogshome.com/behaviour

POLITICIAN



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PRECINCT




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