



CITY NEWS

Farewell *North West City News* – but not goodbye

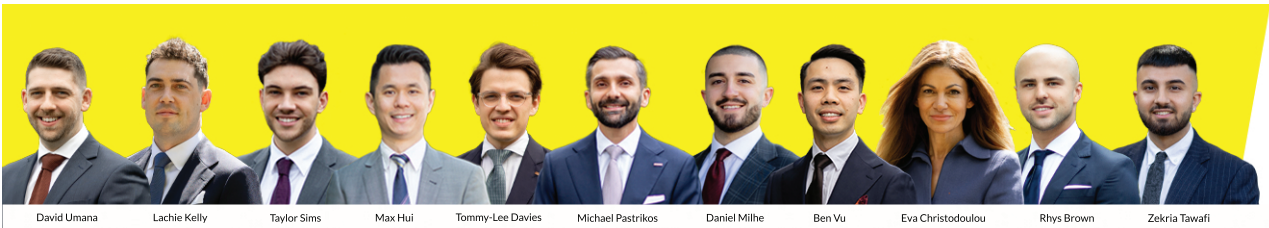
“After six years and 62 editions serving North Melbourne, West Melbourne, Kensington and Parkville Gardens, *North West City News* is signing off; but only in name.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR

Like its contemporaneous sibling *Inner City News*, this publication was born during one of the most uncertain periods Melbourne has experienced. We launched quietly during COVID, at a time when communities were isolated, businesses were struggling and many inner-city neighbourhoods had gone for years without a dedicated local newspaper. What began as an effort to restore regular local news to Melbourne’s north and west quickly became something much more meaningful.

These are some of the most special parts of our city. North Melbourne and West Melbourne are separate suburbs with their own histories and personalities, but their identities are also intrinsically linked. As a former North Melbourne resident, I have always felt there is something uniquely Melbourne about this part of the city. Its heritage is palpable. The streets, terraces, pubs, laneways, shopfronts and old industrial buildings give the area a character that is difficult to replicate. But over the course of producing this newspaper, we have learned that what really drives that identity is the community itself. There is an extraordinary level of care for these neighbourhoods from the people who live, work and run businesses here. It has been a privilege to work alongside the North & West Melbourne Business Association, whose commitment to strengthening the local precinct has been unwavering. Our partnership on the *North & West Melbourne Directory* has been another rewarding part of that relationship, and we are pleased that a new edition will soon be hitting the streets. The Hotham History Project has also been a constant source of knowledge and generosity, doing invaluable work to preserve and share the history of North and West Melbourne. Across in Kensington, that same fierce sense of local identity exists in a slightly different form. Kensington has always felt like a suburb with one foot in the City of

Continued on page 2.



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The deadline for edition 1 of
The Melburnian is September 4

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Farewell North West City News – but not goodbye

Continued from page 1.

Melbourne and another looking west towards its neighbours in Moonee Valley, but it possesses a heritage and community character entirely of its own.

We have been proud to support the Kensington Association as it has grappled constructively with enormous change.

The challenge has never simply been resisting growth, but ensuring that growth delivers a neighbourhood that remains liveable, connected and worthy of the community already there.

Throughout our six years, North West City News has documented some of the most significant urban renewal projects taking shape anywhere in Melbourne.

Arden is transforming the western edge of North Melbourne, while Macaulay continues to reshape parts of Kensington and the Melrose end of North Melbourne.

The West Gate Tunnel has brought another layer of major infrastructural change.

At the same time, residents of North Melbourne's public housing towers continue to face uncertainty over the future of their homes and communities – a story we have followed closely and one that will remain important long after this masthead disappears.

Parkville Gardens has been one of the quieter but proudest parts of the North West City News story.

The community will soon mark 20 years since it was established for the 2006 Commonwealth Games.

As a relatively young neighbourhood, there have not always been endless headlines coming out of Parkville Gardens.

But that has never diminished the importance of giving the local community a voice.

The Parkville Gardens Residents' Association has contributed to every single edition of this newspaper. Not one missed.

That consistency speaks volumes about the commitment of the people who have built the community over the past two decades, and we are incredibly proud to have played even a small role in helping amplify their concerns, achievements and identity.



There is something fitting about the contents of this final edition.

Our comprehensive coverage of the new Royal Park Master Plan looks decades into the future of what is arguably Melbourne's

greatest natural asset – a place relied upon by communities across North Melbourne, Parkville and beyond.

We also carry generation-defining planning news from Macaulay, updates on Arden and continuing advocacy around the future of public housing.

In many ways, those stories encapsulate what this newspaper has always been about: preserving what makes these neighbourhoods special while documenting the enormous change occurring around them.

That work does not end here.

From September, North West City News will become part of The Melburnian, our new citywide publication bringing together our five existing community mastheads.

The name on the front page will change, but our commitment to North Melbourne, West Melbourne, Kensington and Parkville Gardens will not.

The challenge for The Melburnian is to ensure these communities retain the strong local voice they have built through this newspaper while connecting their stories to the bigger picture of Melbourne's future.

There are many people to thank.

To our readers, thank you for picking up the paper, reading it, sharing it, writing to us and trusting us to tell your stories.

To our advertisers, thank you for making independent local journalism possible.

To the many community groups, traders, residents, advocates and contributors who have worked with us over the past six years – thank you for your support and generosity.

And to my team, past and present – thank you for the colossal amount of work that has gone into producing 62 editions.

North West City News may have had a relatively short life, but it's been six incredibly meaningful years.

It has been an absolute privilege. Thank you for embracing us.

We look forward to continuing the journey with you through The Melburnian. ●

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North & West Melbourne Precinct Association

Meet Ted – Brown Dog’s very own Brown Dog

“When you first walk into Brown Dog Furniture on Queensberry St, it is the exquisite reclaimed timber, exposed brick walls and artwork that catch your eye.”

WORDS BY
CHRIS JACKSON



Then there is Ted.
The three-and-a-half-year-old chocolate Labrador is the third Brown Dog in the family and a regular fixture of the North Melbourne store. For many locals, he has become something of a celebrity, with people often popping in just to say hello.
And for those less inclined towards a personal greeting, Ted is equally happy to stay in his bed and observe, being the quintessential “good boy”.
Owners Tamara and David Gorrie have operated Brown Dog Furniture since 2010, combining their backgrounds in design, craftsmanship, sales and marketing to create furniture inspired by the natural beauty of Cape Otway and Australian reclaimed hardwoods.

David grew up on a large sheep and cattle property and has always loved timber and furniture design, initially making pieces as a hobby. Tamara’s background is in corporate affairs and marketing, with a flair for relationships.
When family came to the forefront, the pair decided to combine their skills.
“How do we make a livelihood? Well, let’s put our skill sets together – my knowledge and timber craftsmanship, design, and your knowledge of sales and marketing and logistics – and start a furniture company.”



They bought a studio 20 kilometres west of Apollo Bay and, when it came time to choose a name, looked no further than their two chocolate Labradors.
“It really came down to Brown Dog, because of the beauty, the dependability, the beautiful nature, the comfort that Labradors bring – that really was everything that we wanted our furniture to be characterised by.”
That philosophy remains at the heart of the business.
Brown Dog sources exceptional

reclaimed hardwoods from old dairy farms and woolsheds, with every piece retaining its own character and story. The natural shapes of the timber become part of the design, creating furniture that is made to be individual rather than simply fill a space.
“We just needed a small space to demonstrate the timbers, the finishes, the quality of the craftsmanship,” Tamara says of the Queensberry St store. “We moved in in 2011 and have been here ever since.”
Chuck, Morris and now Ted have all come from the same breeder in Mansfield, with each becoming a much-loved part of the Brown Dog family.
“Ted is in the store with Tamara all week and he’s just so great with clients. He’s a wonderful mascot. Most people adore dogs and when they come in there’s genuine delight when they are met by this really friendly, gorgeous Labrador who is so happy to meet them.”
Now, Brown Dog is preparing to open another chapter with The Box Factory in Colac – a beautifully renovated 1948 sawtooth warehouse that will become a regional destination for art and furniture.
Back in North Melbourne, though, Ted remains very much part of the furniture – greeting customers, making people smile and embodying the same qualities that inspired Brown Dog in the first place. “Loyalty, trust, beauty, dependability, beautiful nature – all of those qualities in a Labrador is what we wanted our furniture to be characterised by.”
Brown Dog Furniture is located at 548 Queensberry St, North Melbourne. ●

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

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northwestmelbourne.com.au



Why Melbourne Matters

Ahead of November's state election, Melbourne is back in the political spotlight – and we want to make the most of it.

We've launched a new advocacy campaign: Melbourne Matters. Because when Melbourne does well, Victoria does too.

Many of the decisions that will shape Melbourne's future sit outside Town Hall – including housing, schools, transport and other essential infrastructure needed to support growing communities.

Our campaign focuses on 3 priorities: supporting Victoria's growth, creating safe and healthy communities, and protecting Melbourne's place as Australia's cultural capital.

MELBOURNE MATTERS FOR VICTORIA'S GROWTH

Melbourne is one of Victoria's fastest-growing areas and generates 22% of the state's economic output, but we need the right investment and policy support to help that growth succeed.

- We're calling on the Victorian Government to give Melbourne the same level of support and policy attention as other major growth areas as our population continues to grow.
- We also want to work with the Victorian Government to unlock public land and create more green space for our growing community. The Moonee Ponds Creek corridor is one example: 1.3 hectares of locked-up land unable to be accessed by 60,000 nearby residents.

MELBOURNE MATTERS FOR SAFE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

We know that people in our community are currently under pressure to make ends meet, and we're seeing crime and antisocial behaviour escalating in our public places.

Melbourne must remain a city that feels safe, welcoming and accessible for everyone, including the most vulnerable members of our community.

- We need continued support from the Victorian Government

to help keep Melbourne's streets safe, including a more visible and consistent safety presence in busy areas and known hotspots.

- Many people experiencing homelessness are also living with complex mental health challenges. Too often, when someone reaches crisis point, there are only 2 places for them to go: hospital or jail. We're calling for greater investment in crisis accommodation and proven programs like Street to Home that help break the cycle.

MELBOURNE MATTERS AS AUSTRALIA'S CULTURAL CAPITAL

Melbourne's arts, music and events scene is a huge part of what makes this city special – and with the creative economy contributing more than \$41 billion to Victoria each year, it's also a major economic driver.

- Major events like our New Year's Eve celebrations play a huge role in bringing the city to life and attracting visitors from around Australia and beyond. An extra \$1 million in state funding

would support the expansion of programming and offerings.

- We're calling on the Victorian Government to restore funding to organisations like Creative Victoria and Visit Victoria. Creative Victoria's funding has fallen by almost one third since 2022, with cuts starting to take a real toll on Melbourne's creative sector.

As we approach the state election, Melburnians should expect ambition from all sides of politics – and politicians should expect to hear directly from the people they represent.

Call your local MP. Visit their office. Ask them what their vision is for Melbourne and whether they are prepared to fight for it.

That matters, because Melbourne matters.



Events like Moomba Festival are major economic drivers for Victoria



Melbourne at dawn, courtesy of Visit Victoria



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Lord Mayor and residents slam state over Macaulay planning controls

Lord Mayor Nick Reece has launched a stinging attack on the state government's handling of Macaulay, accusing Planning Minister Sonya Kilkenny of undermining more than a decade of planning work.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



contributions, although questions remain over the long-term funding and delivery of drainage and flood infrastructure.

A separate "Part B" contribution has now been introduced for flood infrastructure, applying the interim Arden rate of \$3646 per dwelling to Macaulay.

The "Part A" infrastructure contribution has also been included at a July 1, 2025, base rate of \$16,478.70 per dwelling. Once indexed, the combined Part A and Part B charges are expected to total around \$20,843 per dwelling.

That is substantially lower than the previous interim Macaulay contribution of \$25,976.

Developments that have already paid the higher interim rate are expected to be eligible for partial refunds, potentially returning several million dollars from council-held development contribution funds.

Despite the new charge, permanent arrangements for major drainage infrastructure are still being developed.

An interim development contributions arrangement will stay in place until May 28, 2028, while the Department of Transport and Planning works with Melbourne Water on longer-term controls.

Dr Kennedy said that uncertainty remained one of the community's central concerns.

"This is not so much a planning breakthrough as a formalisation of the uncertainty that has characterised Macaulay urban renewal," she said.

"Residents are being told the controls are 'locked in', yet we still have discretionary Floor Area Ratios, an interim Development Contributions Plan while permanent arrangements are developed, unanswered questions about flood planning."

She also questioned whether the public transport network would be equipped to support the additional population.

"We also have no clear commitment to increased capacity on the Craigieburn and Upfield rail corridors," Dr Kennedy said.

"If Macaulay is expected to accommodate significant growth because it is a Train and Tram Zone, the community deserves far greater transparency about the infrastructure, services and planning assumptions that will support that growth."

The government says the new Built Form Overlay will establish clearer development

rules for Macaulay, with buildings generally ranging from four to 15 storeys and greater density concentrated closer to transport and CityLink.

A government spokesperson previously said the Minister had considered advice from the advisory committee, department, agencies, the council and community consultation before approving the changes.

"For years, some of Melbourne's best-connected suburbs have been locked up and it's pushing young people and families out. We're changing that," the spokesperson said.

"We are setting clear rules that will fast track developments to build more homes closer to jobs, transport and services."

The gazetted package also includes one significant win for the council, with a Public Acquisition Overlay applied to land required to expand Robertson Street Reserve.

However, other sites the council had sought to secure for future open space and infrastructure have not been included, leaving key questions unresolved around Macaulay Terraces, drainage land and government-owned sites.

Cr Reece said that lack of commitment was a major concern.

"There is still no commitment to unlock government-owned land in Macaulay to support this level of development – underutilised land that the City of Melbourne could transform into open space," he said.

"We want more people to be able to live near the city – and we want those future residents to live in neighbourhoods with the infrastructure that make them great places to call home."

"I'm calling on the state government to make that commitment to our community."

The City of Melbourne's structure plan envisaged about 10,000 residents and 9500 jobs, supported by new parks, community facilities, streets and flood-mitigation works.

Cr Reece said the council supported greater housing growth, but warned homes alone could not create a successful neighbourhood.

"Homes need jobs. Homes need parks. Homes need community facilities. Homes need transport connections. And in Macaulay, homes need proper drainage and flood protection," he said.

Dr Kennedy said residents remained wary because earlier commitments to infrastructure had still not been delivered.

"The community has heard these promises before," she said.

"Open space along the Moonee Ponds Creek corridor was a cornerstone of the 2012 Arden-Macaulay Structure Plan, yet remains undelivered more than a decade later."

"That history matters. It is difficult to build confidence in an ambiguous new planning framework when key community benefits remain unrealised, infrastructure delivery remains uncertain, and our community's liveability has been progressively eroded." ●



North Melbourne courtyards and car park given green boost under council grants

Three residential greening projects in North Melbourne will share more than \$200,000 through the City of Melbourne's latest Urban Forest Fund grants program.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



Councillors endorsed the funding at their July 28 meeting, with projects in Abbotsford St, O'Shanassy St and a residential owners' corporation car park among six successful applications across the municipality.

The largest North Melbourne allocation is \$100,000 for a project at 80 O'Shanassy St, where an existing communal courtyard will be transformed into a biodiverse and climate-responsive landscape for residents and local wildlife.

A further \$54,100 will support the second phase of "Kids in the Car Park", an owners' corporation project designed to expand greening and improve growing conditions for trees within a residential car park.

The council has also allocated \$49,177 to "Greening 302 Abbotsford Street", which will convert an underused communal area into a new green space for residents.

Together, the three North Melbourne projects will receive \$203,277.

Lord Mayor Nick Reece said the grants would support projects capable of delivering visible and lasting benefits.

"We're funding the high-impact greening projects that will help us accelerate the Garden City," Cr Reece said.

"Located across some of our busiest streets and iconic destinations, these projects will deliver new greening for the greatest number of people."

The North Melbourne projects are part of the sixth round of the Urban Forest Fund and were assessed for their environmental impact, community benefit, technical feasibility, amenity and value for money. ●

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Hip hop meets gaming in world premiere at Arts House

The worlds of hip hop, gaming and contemporary performance will collide at Arts House this month with the world premiere of *GG*, *CONJAH* and *PSUEDO* from August 26 to 30.

WORDS BY
TANISH PRABHU



Created through the creative partnership CONJAH and PSUEDO, the experimental work explores gaming culture, avatars, autonomy, play and collaboration through movement.

Leading artist Ooshcon, an award-winning hip hop theatre choreographer and performer of Samoan and Palagi heritage, brings a practice shaped by street dance, animation, contemporary movement and Pasifika perspectives.

Based in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Ooshcon has performed and choreographed internationally, including his solo work *Glitch* and the award-winning experimental hip hop theatre production *Blueprint*. He also directed Aotearoa's first Krump-theatre work, *HYPAMASS*.

Known as "The Decipherer of Circles", Ooshcon said the name reflected his connection to the cypher – the circle traditionally used in street dance communities as a space for movement, expression and communication.

"Decipherer of circles comes from being

connected and committed to street dance cultures," he said.

"There's often a coded language that, if you aren't aware of, you might not be able to decipher."

That idea of movement as a language sits at the heart of *GG*, where hip hop provides the foundation for a performance influenced by gaming and animation.

"Hip hop is definitely one of the cores – the core pillars of this show would be gaming, culture, avatar and autonomy," Ooshcon said.

The production also marks another chapter in Ooshcon's eight-year creative partnership with Jahra Wasasala through CONJAH.

"Leading from a space of collaboration is what resonates with us and what generates the most effective work," he said.

For Ooshcon, the world premiere is also an opportunity to consider the relationship between performer and audience.

He said artists had a responsibility when audiences chose to give them their attention.

"When someone does give the time and privilege of their attention, what you share can impact their lives in a positive manner," he said.

Rather than prescribing a single response to the work, Ooshcon said he hoped audiences would leave having felt something.

"What I would hope is that they feel something because I think if anything in this world, apathy is the cause of so many problems," he said.

"The solution is empathy, which can be encouraged and even generated from good art."

GG, *CONJAH* and *PSUEDO* will have its world premiere at Arts House from August 26 to 30. ●



New-look Joe Taylor brings Thai flavours to Errol St

Errol St's reincarnated Joe Taylor Bar, which opened with new owners and a Thai theme in July, offers an atmospheric escape and an enticing menu of fresh, creative drinks and dishes.

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



Walking in off the street on a wintry early evening the front room of Joe Taylor's is a welcoming space, lit up warmly with a large chandelier, lamps along the wall and tea candles burning in lampshade-styled glass holders along the bar.

Quasi-formal furniture and fittings are belied by the staff T-shirts and the open shelves of wine and records on display.

Co-owner Scott Nottle, who is moonlighting behind the bar, chooses one of these, a Jamiroquai album, and whacks it on the turntable.

A small sticky rice mango cocktail, when it arrives, offers the simultaneous pleasures of a dreamy desert and a mood-improving tippie.

From beneath a pillowy inch of coconut cream and mango puree comes white rum infused with toasted sticky rice, pandan liquor and lemon, leaking slowly.

In developing the cocktail menu, the owners have "focused a bit more on lower alcohol spirits and liqueurs, so the drink's not sort of knocking you to the side or overpowering the food," Scott says.

An earlier version of this drink, served as a martini, had packed a serious punch.

Meanwhile a snack of spanner crab tart

with savoury pandan custard and compressed nashi pear turns out to be a small but amazing bite – packaging up an exciting mix of fresh and contrasting textures and flavours.

"We don't do boring here," Scott remarks.

The bar is Scott and his wife Pakchima Punapaprasurt's "first foray into night venues" and a departure from their original plan for the place.

Pakchima, who goes by the name "Minnie", is a chef who previously worked at Coburg cafés Grounds of Eden and The Glass Den, among others.

She set up the popular Bola Bake in Airport West in 2022, which Scott left a job in customer service to work in.

When the couple took on Joe Taylor they originally planned a pasta-based menu.

But a delay of two years in getting permits in place meant Minnie and head chef, "Chef Tan", had "a very good think about things" and decided to take the food in a different direction.

Scott says his wife, who he met 24 years ago when she was an international student, is the one with the talent and creativity.

"I decided a long time ago just to trust her plan."

Whatever the formula, it looks to have paid off, with the new bar restaurant "full-on [busy] from day one" and receiving strong reviews.

"By and large, everyone's loved it," Scott says.

"It's been fantastic."

But the operators don't want to just "rest on [their] laurels," according to the co-owner.

They plan to regularly rotate and evolve both the wine and food menus.

"We want to give our customers a reason to keep on coming back, so they can keep on trying new things," Scott says. ●

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Council escalates push for Kensington truck bans

The City of Melbourne will intensify its push for truck bans in Kensington after new monitoring showed significant numbers of heavy vehicles are using local streets to avoid West Gate Tunnel tolls.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



At its July 21 Future Melbourne Committee meeting, councillors unanimously endorsed an alternative motion calling for stronger mitigation measures to protect Kensington, North and West Melbourne, Southbank and other inner-city neighbourhoods affected by changed freight movements since the tunnel opened in December.

The council report confirmed that while traffic patterns in North and West Melbourne had largely aligned with expectations, Kensington had experienced an unexpected increase in heavy vehicles on local streets through Epsom Rd and Kensington Rd. Officers said analysis suggested some trucks were avoiding toll points on the West Gate Freeway and tunnel, instead using local roads to reach their destinations.

Acting general manager infrastructure and amenity Karen Miller told councillors the data showed "three times as many trucks in Kensington" after the tunnel opened, with vehicles appearing to leave the freeway and travel via Geelong Rd, Epsom Rd and Kensington Rd towards the port.

According to the council, traffic counts completed in March and April found almost three times as many six-axle heavy vehicles per day using Epsom and Kensington roads compared with the same period in 2025.

Macaulay Rd was found to have a similarly greater number of heavy vehicles per day compared with 2025.

The council will now seek 24/7 truck bans on Kensington Rd between Dynon Rd and the intersection of Epsom Rd and Macaulay Rd, as well as time-based truck bans for certain vehicles on Epsom Rd between Racecourse Rd and the Kensington/Macaulay Rds intersection.

The Epsom Rd proposal would align with existing Macaulay Rd restrictions, which prohibit trucks between 7am and 7pm Monday to Friday and 7am to 1pm on Saturday, while exempting vehicles above 3.7 metres due to the height limit at the Racecourse Rd rail bridge.

The alternative motion also strengthened the council's position on Macaulay Rd, requesting an unconditional truck ban for the local section of the road in Kensington and North Melbourne. Macaulay Rd is Kensington's main high street and is already subject to restrictions, but its current exemption allows over-height vehicles above 3.7 metres to use the route.

For residents, that exemption has become one of the major flaws in the current system.

Kensington Association chair Dr Kate Kennedy told councillors the community

had been warning about truck impacts since the West Gate Tunnel planning process began.

"In 2016 the association was involved with making original submissions to the West Gate Tunnel project," Dr Kennedy said. "Our number one point was can we have some traffic monitoring for truck movement and traffic movement in Kensington. Now it's 10 years and this is only happening now."

She said the over-height exemption on Macaulay Rd was not a true truck ban, but more like "a deterrent policy" for trucks that might otherwise become stuck at Newmarket rail bridge.

"I just wonder, with keeping that on, are we just going to be then sending trucks through Epsom and Macaulay Rds?" she said.

The issue has become increasingly urgent in Kensington, where the council received a petition in March signed by more than 1000 community members concerned about heavy vehicles on Kensington, Epsom and Macaulay roads following the tunnel's opening.

Resident Ben Herbert, who helped drive local advocacy on the issue, welcomed the council's acknowledgement that Kensington had experienced unintended truck impacts, but asked for clear timelines and a stronger advocacy strategy to ensure the state government acted quickly.

In one significant development during the meeting, Ms Miller confirmed the Department of Transport and Planning had approved changes at the Epsom Rd, Kensington Rd and Macaulay Rd intersection, which would prevent certain long vehicles from making the turn onto Kensington Rd.

When Mr Herbert asked whether 19-metre vehicles would soon be legally prevented from turning onto Kensington Rd, Ms Miller clarified the restriction applied to 17-metre vehicles and confirmed the answer was yes. "That's an even better result," Mr Herbert

said, adding that it would give residents and businesses a clearer basis to challenge operators using Kensington as a rat-run.

Kensington Business Association president Sean McConville said enforcement would be critical, warning that signs alone would not stop trucks.

"Truck bans are not effective without enforcement," Mr McConville said, pointing to Francis St in Yarraville, where he said camera enforcement had led to hundreds of fines and changed truck behaviour.

He said Macaulay Rd's existing signage "doesn't work", with trucks still seen daily along the strip.

The alternative motion specifically calls for truck ban conditions and enforcement in the City of Melbourne to match those used in Hobsons Bay and Maribyrnong, including the use of no-truck-zone cameras.

Lord Mayor Nick Reece said the West Gate Tunnel was having a clear impact on local streets.

"Blind Freddy can tell you that," Cr Reece said. "But in the world of good transport and infrastructure planning, we do need to build evidence bases and have data to support major investment decisions."

In additional comments, Cr Reece said the opening of the West Gate Tunnel had been accompanied by truck bans on seven roads in the western suburbs and that the city wanted similar measures in the inner city.

"We will not stand by and allow big trucks to use our local streets like highways, putting our community at risk," Cr Reece said.

"Our community told us there was a problem. We've crunched the numbers. Now we need the State Government to work with us to keep trucks off these roads before tragedy strikes."

The council will also seek a 24/7 truck ban for Kavanagh St in Southbank and ask the Lord Mayor to write to the Minister for Roads in support of additional mitigation measures. ●

The Melburnian

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Master plan charts bold 20-year vision to grow and reunite Royal Park

“The City of Melbourne has unveiled a sweeping new 20-year vision for Royal Park that seeks to make Melbourne’s largest inner-city park bigger, darker, greener and – ultimately – whole again.”

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



The final Murrup Biik – Royal Park Master Plan 2026, which went before councillors on August 18, represents the most significant rethink of the 161-hectare park in decades and builds on the influential 1984 and 1997 master plans that shaped much of the landscape seen today.

Its ambition is summed up in a simple idea: Royal Park has been progressively “nibbled away” by roads, railways, car parks and development, and the park of the future should be “re-established, united and whole once again”.

More than 1800 people participated in consultation during 2024 and 2025, with biodiversity, lighting, recreation and fragmentation among the strongest themes. Following criticism of the draft, the council commissioned an independent peer review, resulting in a substantially revised document that has been broadly welcomed by park advocates.

Friends of Royal Park member Kaye Oddie described the final version as a “much, much better document”, particularly welcoming its stronger emphasis on biodiversity, ecology and Wurundjeri collaboration.

One of the clearest changes is lighting. The draft attracted strong opposition from residents and environmental groups concerned that additional lighting would erode Royal Park’s traditional role as a “dark park” and harm nocturnal wildlife.

The final plan explicitly calls for darkness to be maintained and unnecessary lighting minimised, while pursuing international recognition as an “Urban Night Sky Place”.

Dark refuges such as the Grassland Circle and golf course would remain unlit throughout the night, while lighting elsewhere would be concentrated around sports grounds, key destinations and major movement corridors. The plan adopts the principle of lighting only where needed, when needed and no brighter than necessary, with a general dark period between 10.30pm and 5am.

There has also been a retreat from some of the draft’s more intensive recreation proposals.

Ideas for new tennis courts, miniature golf and several large multi-use recreation spaces have been removed, while Lawn 7 will remain principally an informal recreation area rather than being converted into formal sporting fields. The final direction is for the area to remain largely open and grassy, without the lighting and built infrastructure contemplated in the draft.

A new assessment framework will instead guide future recreation proposals, providing greater scrutiny of whether activities are appropriate for Royal Park and whether they conflict with its environmental values.

The treatment of paths has also changed substantially. Rather than formalising numerous routes through sensitive areas, including the Grassland Circle, the final plan recognises informal tracks and removes much of the earlier language around widening and paving.

Another controversial draft concept – a loosely defined “biolink” through the park



▲ An AI-assisted image of the proposed full MacArthur Road closure from the final Royal Park Master Plan.

– has disappeared altogether. In its place is a broader approach that treats Royal Park as an ecologically significant landscape as a whole, with greater emphasis on strengthening habitat and biodiversity connectivity across the entire park.

Concerns over commercialisation around heritage buildings such as Walmsley House have similarly softened, with the final plan focusing more heavily on public, community, cultural and nature-based uses.

But the plan’s most transformative ideas are contained under its principles to “Grow the Park” and “Unite the Fragments”.

Royal Park once covered around 400 hectares. By 2013, successive excisions for roads, rail, the zoo, hospital and sporting facilities had reduced it to around 164 hectares.

Rather than simply defending what remains, the new plan adopts a “net gain” ambition – progressively reclaiming land from roads and car parks. It also strengthens the council’s longstanding “no net loss” policy by requiring an accurate baseline of parkland area so future losses and gains can be properly measured.

Surface parking currently occupies about five per cent of the park. The long-term objective is to remove much of it from the park’s interior, rationalise existing spaces and investigate underground parking beneath Melbourne Zoo and the State Netball and Hockey Centre.

Informal parking north of the zoo, around sporting fields and beside pavilions could progressively return to parkland.

Some changes appear relatively achievable. Old Poplar Rd and the Women’s Pavilion car park could disappear as part of future rail works, while sections of The Avenue could be closed, returning road space to parkland. The same goes for Brens Pavilion Drive, Poplar Rd and the Ross Straw Field Pavilion Driveway.

Others are far more ambitious.

The plan proposes eventually removing Brens Drive – the principal entrance to the State Netball and Hockey Centre and Urban Camp – and replacing it with a shorter access route aligned more closely with the tram corridor.

Along Park St, the council wants to investigate narrowing the oversized road reserve to reclaim around 4160 square metres of additional parkland.

Most consequential is Elliott Avenue and MacArthur Rd.

The master plan describes the 1950s decision to carve the arterial route through Royal Park as “fateful”, severing the park’s north and south.

In the shorter term, the council wants

to explore reducing the road footprint. Its longer-term ambition, however, is to remove Elliott Avenue and Macarthur Rd altogether and restore a continuous landscape through the heart of Royal Park.

The proposal would be politically difficult given the volume of traffic carried by the route, but it captures the central philosophy of the plan: reversing decades of fragmentation rather than accepting it as permanent.

That long-term protection is also politically significant. The document explicitly identifies a revived East West Link as a threat that could again place construction sites, ventilation structures and road infrastructure within Royal Park, reinforcing the importance of having a strong long-term planning framework in place.

The railway is another major barrier.

Alongside new pedestrian crossings and bridges, the plan proposes investigating whether a section of the Upfield rail embankment could eventually be replaced with an elevated viaduct.

That could restore the original landform beneath the railway, reconnect waterways and allow people and wildlife to move more freely between parts of the park. An alternative would involve pedestrian tunnels through the embankment.

The impending Park St level crossing removal provides another opportunity, with the council hopeful that surplus rail land could ultimately be reclaimed as parkland.

The Royal Park Golf Course could also be significantly reshaped, with all nine holes consolidated west of the railway. While not a new idea – versions of it have appeared in earlier master planning – the final plan puts it firmly back on the agenda.

The Council estimates this could return around 40,000 square metres south of the tracks to general parkland while removing around 50,000 golfer movements across the Poplar Rd level crossing each year.

Water is another defining theme.

The plan proposes daylighting buried drains and former waterways, improving the Billabong, restoring Royal Park’s creek and creating new wetlands and water sources for wildlife.

A proposed swale associated with the future removal of Brens Drive remains contentious. Friends of Royal Park instead wants the council to investigate reinstating the historic creek line west of Brens Drive rather than creating a new alignment.

The group also wants the council to go further in expanding the narrow Royal Park creek corridor near the former CSL land, advocating for government-owned land along the western boundary to contribute

to a wider biodiversity corridor.

The plan also outlines a long-term objective to reconnect the park with Moonee Ponds Creek, including investigation of a wildlife and water connection beneath major transport infrastructure – an idea that adds another layer to the broader ambition of repairing connections severed over generations.

Despite its support for the overall direction, Friends of Royal Park says one issue still requires further consultation: vegetation.

Ms Oddie said the group wanted greater clarity about proposed changes to planting associations and how increased understorey planting might alter Royal Park’s characteristic open grassy woodland.

“We just want to be able to discuss why they want to change things,” she said, calling for further engagement with environmental groups and people with long-standing knowledge of the park.

At the centre of the plan is also a strengthened partnership with the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung people.

The name Murrup Biik, meaning “spiritual land”, was provided by Wurundjeri Elders, while Caring for Country principles are embedded throughout the plan – from cultural land management and ecological burning to waterways, night skies, education and future decision-making.

The master plan contains 252 actions and many of its grandest ideas could take decades – or never be realised at all. Major road, rail and parking changes would depend heavily on state government cooperation and future funding.

But that is partly the point.

Like the master plans that preceded it, Murrup Biik is designed less as a construction schedule than a generational statement about what Royal Park should become.

Its strength may ultimately be measured by how well it survives political cycles. The previous Royal Park master plan endured for decades and, according to former councillor Rohan Leppert, the final Murrup Biik document is considerably more cohesive and potentially durable enough to do the same.

If even a substantial portion of the vision is realised, future Melburnians could inherit a park with fewer roads and cars, restored waterways, stronger wildlife corridors, larger areas of native landscape and far better connections between areas that today feel like separate parks.

For a place that has spent more than 150 years being gradually carved apart, the defining ambition of the next era is remarkably simple: begin putting it back together. ●

Older public housing residents rally to save their homes

A large group of older residents from public housing towers slated for demolition descended on state parliament this month with a petition calling for the plan to be halted.

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



The protest came as part of the stepping up of a campaign against the loss of their "forever homes" by the Older Person's High Rise residents of seven towers, including in Flemington, Kensington and North Melbourne.

The redevelopment of the group of seven towers, which includes buildings in St Kilda and Prahran, was announced as the "third tranche" of the government's program to knock down and replace the 44 structures, with residents given the news in January that they would need to leave by early 2028.

Around 150 people, some of them quite elderly, gathered on Spring St on a wet wintry Wednesday and sang, chanted and protested for more than two hours while a delegation went into the parliament to try to meet with housing minister Nick Staikos.

Seventy-eight-year-old Elizabeth Ellis from 29 Crown St, Flemington, told North West City News the experience had been galvanising.

"It hit me in the face on Wednesday," she said. "We are being targeted."

For Ms Ellis being granted a public housing unit in the quiet Crown St complex for over 55s 12 years ago had been like "winning the golden ticket".

Before that she had been homeless for nine years, relying on couch surfing, hostels and share houses – options that seriously reduced her control over her life.

Now she doesn't just have housing stability but also community, she said, and for her, getting evicted means "not just losing your home; it's losing your life."

Deb Cardona's father, John, who is suffering from cancer and had a heart attack early this year, has spent 29 years at Crown St.

As a young man the 84-year-old had actually worked digging the foundations of the building.

News of the eviction had hit him hard, his daughter said.

"We didn't want to tell him, but we had to."

"People don't realise the impact is psychological, social, financial, spiritual and mental – it's all of those things."

While housing authorities are providing support to find new homes and resettle people into them, many of the vulnerable Crown St tenants are concerned about a shift from public to social housing, which

will require them to pay market rate utility bills and buy their own washing machines.

They have also heard from former public housing tenants that rents, while initially equivalent, often increase after a guaranteed contract period.

At Crown St, there is a mood to fight the demolition.

Along with their trip to parliament, activist residents had been involved in a letter-box drop and engaging with neighbours, Ms Ellis said.

The demolition and the construction of new buildings would likely involve a lot of traffic, noise, dirt and cranes, she had told them and may even see nearby homes lose value.

"Everyone around here knows about [the issues] and I told them to watch [the protest on] TV on August 5," she said.

In their next strategic move the residents plan to demand a mass meeting with their Homes Victoria housing officers.

The idea behind this is for residents to express: "We won't accept what you offer us, except what we demand," Mouli Ghosh, an organiser with protest group 44 Flats United (44 FU), said.

Ms Ghosh said there were past examples of public tenants banding together and defeating redevelopment plans when they mobilised a lot of supporters.

More public actions and more pressure on different politicians was planned, she said.

Ms Ellis said she was very hopeful that protest action would push back the date of demolition or lead to "an architect [who] will say that everything's OK for the next 10, 20, 30 years."

"Because we're just not ready to go."

A spokesperson for the Victorian Government said that while the process wasn't easy, "leaving older Victorians in unsafe, ageing buildings isn't kindness – it's neglect."

"The age, condition, and overall structural constraints of the high-rise buildings mean they no longer meet the liveability, amenity, accessibility and energy efficiency standards our residents deserve," the spokesperson said.

"We're supporting residents every step of the way to move into a better home, on their terms and with real support - not rushing anyone out the door." ●



Melbourne Town Hall displays Peace Prize

Melbourne Town Hall has taken temporary possession of and put on display a medal presented to the winners of Australia's only ever Nobel Peace Prize.

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



The gold medal was awarded in Oslo in 2017 to the Australian team behind the creation of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) whose efforts had resulted in a weapons treaty.

Groups from other countries involved in the ICAN network also received medals, while a larger version of the prize was presented to its international office in Geneva.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) after it was adopted by the UN in 2017, came into force in 2021.

It has now been signed by more than half the countries in the world, although not the nine declared nuclear weapon states and not Australia.

On display with the Nobel medal at Melbourne Town Hall is a fragment of a porcelain bowl recovered from Hiroshima and an ink painting by a Sydney-based Hiroshima survivor and artist, Junko Morimoto, with the start of the items' display timed to coincide with the 81st Hiroshima Day anniversary.

Hiroshima Day, on August 6, marks the 1945 bombing of the city in which 140,000 people are estimated to have been killed.

In answer to a recent public question

about the council's commemoration of the day, Greens councillor Dr Olivia Ball pointed out that the City of Melbourne had "a long and proud history" of supporting nuclear disarmament, having declared Melbourne a nuclear-free zone in 1983, more recently joined international organisation Mayors for Peace and last year marked the 80th anniversary of the horrific bombings by calling on the federal government to ratify the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

According to one of the prize's recipients, ICAN founding member Dave Sweeney, Melbourne is one of 50 councils around Australia calling for the federal government to sign the TPNW.

This is urgent, he argues, in view of AUKUS arrangements which after the recent expiry of the US-Russian nuclear arms reduction treaty, look set to see Australia host six B-52 bombers and four US nuclear submarines retrofitted to be nuclear weapons-capable.

The anti-nuclear campaigner says the Nobel medal has already been shown off locally in libraries and schools, and has travelled the country in backpacks and "been passed around bush meetings in regional Australia".

"ICAN Australia has very much got a view that this is the people's medal," he said.

"It was ordinary folks getting together collectively to try and pull off something pretty extraordinary, and we are actually ... on the way."

A cheque for US\$1 million, which was also part of the prize, was divided up among ICAN's international groups, with greater shares going to those in most need.

Cr Dr Ball said later this month, the council would consider renewing the call for the federal government to ratify the TPNW. ●

ELLEN SANDELL

GREENS STATE MP FOR MELBOURNE

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State fast-tracks Arden tower despite council warning

The Victorian Government has approved a controversial high-rise development next to the new Arden Station less than two weeks after City of Melbourne councillors warned the project risked undermining more than a decade of planning work for the precinct.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



Council officers had warned the proposal was one of the first major development applications in Arden since Amendment C407 implemented the Arden Structure Plan in 2022, and that approving a site-specific control so early in the precinct’s life could set a precedent for future development.

The original proposal substantially exceeded the preferred controls for the Arden Central Innovation sub-precinct, with the eastern tower proposed at 162 metres compared with a preferred height of 81 metres. Its floor area ratio of 15.54:1 was also well above the preferred 10:1.

Councillors were also told the project sought exemptions from mandatory shadowing requirements, public open space contributions and development contributions. Officers estimated the exemption from the Arden Development Contributions Plan alone could cost about \$17 million to \$17.5 million in infrastructure contributions.

At the time, Cr Campbell said the Minister should not approve the proposal without finding another way to fund that infrastructure or compelling the applicant to do so.

Lord Mayor Nick Reece was equally blunt, describing the application as “so over the odds” and warning against abandoning the rules that had been developed for Arden.

“Yes, we want to see projects going here in the City of Melbourne. We are, after all, a pro-development council and we support development,” Cr Reece said. “But we don’t want to throw out the rule book.”

Announcing the approval, Mr Staikos said the government was “building homes where people want to live – close to jobs, transport and services.”

“Only Labor is getting homes built – Jess Wilson’s Liberals just want to block them,” he said.

The approval is likely to intensify concerns about Arden’s future, with the precinct only beginning to emerge around the new Metro Tunnel station while major questions remain unresolved around schools, open space, drainage, infrastructure and the delivery of Arden Central.

For critics, the decision offers an early and troubling indication of how the Development Facilitation Program may shape one of Melbourne’s most consequential urban renewal areas. ●



Push for more murals across Melbourne’s neighbourhoods

A new City of Melbourne push could see more blank walls across the municipality transformed into large-scale murals, with councillors to consider investigating a co-funded program for private property owners.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



Cr Andrew Rowse will move a motion at the August 18 Future Melbourne Committee meeting calling on council management to report back by the end of November on ways to increase the quantity, quality and geographic spread of public-facing murals.

Central to the proposal is an investigation into an Urban Mural Fund, which could see the council and private building owners share the cost of commissioning artists to transform prominent walls overlooking streets, laneways, parks and business precincts.

Cr Rowse said the aim was to encourage more property owners to work with local artists rather than leave large walls blank or vulnerable to tagging.

“We’re putting forward a motion this Tuesday at council to support private property owners to collaborate with local artists to create more murals in our public facing realms such as our high streets,” he said.

The motion argues that privately owned buildings account for a significant proportion of Melbourne’s most visible wall space, but the cost of artists, design, project management and installation can discourage owners from commissioning works.

It asks the council to explore a pilot across different neighbourhoods and building types, while considering requirements

around owner consent, maintenance, minimum display periods and what happens when properties are sold or redeveloped.

The proposal would also examine whether murals could help activate business precincts, support Melbourne’s creative sector and reduce recurrent graffiti on frequently targeted walls.

The motion comes after the disappearance of a popular mural on the corner of Errol and Queensberry streets in North Melbourne caused considerable disappointment in the local community.

The wildlife-themed work, painted by Blender Studios artists Adrian Doyle and Matt Hannah in 2023, was painted over in June despite having become a recognised neighbourhood feature. Its removal also highlighted the vulnerability of public-facing artworks located on privately owned buildings.

The push follows another recent local call for more public art, with cycling advocate Aaron Moon urging council to transform CityLink’s concrete columns along Moonee Ponds Creek into a “silo art trail”.

Mr Moon pointed to existing Indigenous waterway-themed murals beneath CityLink in neighbouring Flemington as an example of how otherwise stark infrastructure could become an attraction while discouraging graffiti.

Cr Rowse’s motion specifically seeks to expand mural opportunities beyond Melbourne’s famous central-city street-art locations such as Hosier Lane and into neighbourhoods across the municipality.

It also calls for the council to study successful programs elsewhere, including Montreal’s internationally recognised mural initiatives, and consider ways of attracting further private and philanthropic investment.

If supported, councillors would receive a report on possible models and costs before the end of November. ●

Inaugural Flem/Ken Writers Festival draws a crowd close to home

The inaugural Flem/Ken Writers Festival went off with a bang over the July 17-19 weekend, with more than 300 people turning out for workshops, author conversations, poetry, storytelling and the literary vibe.

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



featuring readings from Helen Garner and slam poet Mo Sudi, while the Sunday afternoon blues poetry slam saw Mo and two other performers pick up pieces of poetry written by locals and perform it on the spot.

The kids workshops run by Footscray outfit 100 Story Building were oversubscribed and very popular, Amy said.

And in general “everyone just seemed to have a really lovely time” at the festival.

“Authors were very open and generous, and quite a few people were saying, ‘I can’t believe I’m just at the end of my street listening to this conversation or watching this performance’.

“So it was really great to be able to put that on for everyone, myself included, because part of wanting to do this was to be able to have these events that would be more accessible to me too,” Amy said.

Flemington & Kensington Bowling Club president Davydd Griffiths hailed the new event as a “fantastic” one for the club, which acted as the “hub” for it.

“The volunteers who organised it did a magnificent job of enticing a heap of amazing local authors out of their garrets, giving the community a chance to celebrate the talent that we’re surrounded by every day,” he wrote on social media.

According to Amy, a bookseller from Collins had come with 15 boxes of books and left with three – evidence that a lot of residents had not only learnt about local authors but had been able to support them. The festival will be back, she said.

“I’m working on the program.

“Local authors can get in touch so we can stock their books and keep them in mind as we think about programming.” ●



Authors Tony Birch and Murray Middleton at author talk *Whose story is it?* with journalist and storyteller Najma Sambul. Photo by Leah.

Safety fears over new Racecourse Rd tram stop crossing

The pedestrian crossings at either end of a new tram stop in Racecourse Rd are unsafe, according to local residents, including a woman who suffered serious injuries when she was hit by a car at one of them.

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



The new route 57 Smithfield Rd/Racecourse Rd tram stop, opposite the Flem/Ken Bowling Club, has been built to accommodate the 25-metre-long, low-floored G-class vehicles that aim to make accessing them easier for pedestrians.

Completed a couple of months ago, it replaced two former Racecourse Rd stops that were controlled with push button pedestrian crossing lights, but the new stop is marked with just a couple of signs.

On the morning of July 31, a local resident in her thirties was on her way to work, crossing Racecourse Rd to catch the tram into town, when she was hit.

"From my experience using this crossing, I had concerns about the overall safety and the behaviour of vehicles approaching it," she said.

"I specifically waited and made eye contact with an approaching driver before beginning to cross, which felt essential."

But part-way over she heard a larger vehicle approaching at speed.

"I turned to look and saw a truck travelling towards the car without appearing to slow down," she said.

"The truck collided with the rear of the car, pushing it towards me."

"The impact lifted me onto the bonnet of the car, and I was carried forward by the force of the collision and the continued force of the truck. I then lost consciousness."

When she came to, she was lying on her back on the asphalt with a police officer standing over her.

The significant pain of being moved onto a stretcher saw her lose consciousness again. Ambulance Victoria said they had responded to reports about the crash at around 8am, with Advanced Life Support (ALS) paramedics assessing and treating the patient at the scene and taking her to hospital.

The woman, who came to at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, was found to have sustained a fractured skull and brain bleed, and

fractures to her shoulder, foot and pelvis.

Police confirmed they believed a car that had been giving way to her at the zebra crossing had been hit by a truck.

Neither of the drivers had been injured.

"Investigators believe there was a collision between an Isuzu truck and a Kia Cerato, which has caused a pedestrian to be hit," a spokesperson said.

They were continuing to investigate and appealed for anyone with information to get in touch via Crime Stoppers on **1800 333 000** or **crimestoppersvic.com.au**.

The woman who was hit told North West City News the new zebra crossing not only lacks traffic lights but is located in a section of Racecourse Rd where two lanes merge into one and surrounding trees impede the visibility of signage.

Kensington resident Michael Uren, who drives through the intersection often, agreed the merging of lanes out of the Epsom Rd roundabout before the crossing

was a significant safety issue.

"I can see that [crash] happening on the in-bound lane because of the quick merging of two lanes before the tram stop, and because the line markings of the car parking that was there previously haven't been removed and so cars are still parked there, which makes it even more hairy," he said.

"There's no flashing lights on the zebra crossing, which they probably should have."

Overall, there seemed to have been "a sort of half-finished job" done on the new infrastructure, he said.

Another Kensington local, cyclist Andrew Rowe, had nearly been hit three or four times at the crossing, he said.

On one occasion, he was wheeling his bike across it when an elderly man whizzed past, narrowly missing him, and honked at him, looking angry.

"Having a pedestrian crossing in the middle of the road is a new thing around there," Mr Rowse said.

"All the other [road features] are controlled by traffic signals."

He also believed a confusing range of speed limits in the area, some of which changed at different times of the day, resulted in drivers ignoring them.

Despite being traumatised, the injured woman, who lives on Ascot Vale Rd, is focused on her recovery and determined to get on with her life in the neighbourhood.

"It's my home," she said.

"One split second can't hold me back from feeling safe and comfortable in the suburb overall."

The Department of Transport was contacted about the crossing but didn't respond by deadline. ●

Heritage mapping disputes head to panel as council moves to fix planning errors

Three disputed heritage mapping issues in Kensington, Carlton and the CBD are set to be referred to an independent planning panel as the City of Melbourne moves to tidy up a series of errors in its planning scheme.

WORDS BY
SEAN CAR



Three submissions sought changes to proposed heritage corrections.

In Kensington, Holy Rosary Primary School at 37-43 Gower St has opposed plans to extend the heritage overlay across the full length of its Gower St fence, arguing parts have been altered and additional controls could complicate future safety and access works. The Kensington Association supports the correction, while council officers say the remaining historic fence warrants protection.

At the former Ingram Bros Warehouse at 145-147 Bouverie St, Carlton, the Carlton Residents' Association argued that an existing heritage overlay incorrectly covers only half of the site and should extend across the entire property. Council officers agree a mapping error exists, but the landowner has objected to the proposed change, citing impacts on development potential and concerns about the consultation process.

At the former Standard Bank of Australia

Ltd building at 415-417 Collins St, the property owner has challenged the site's contributory heritage status and called for a contemporary heritage assessment. Council officers maintain the site has been appropriately assessed and say the amendment is simply correcting a longstanding mapping omission rather than imposing a new heritage designation.

Council management has recommended splitting the amendment in two so the contested heritage matters can proceed to an independent planning panel without delaying the remaining changes.

The uncontested portion would proceed towards adoption, including rezoning the Chelmsford St site and correcting protections for a significant Chinese Honey Locust tree at 607-619 Bourke St.

The report says the changes are intended to make the planning scheme clearer, more accurate and less administratively burdensome. ●

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From refugee beginnings to rebuilding again and again: the Rachel Do story

“ Since arriving as a refugee and growing up in public housing in Kensington, Rachel Do has built a property portfolio as well as a successful business. Now the mother-of-three is launching a book about her dramatic ups and downs. ”

WORDS BY
JENNY DENTON



Rachel Do has had experiences many Australians could barely imagine. As a seven-year-old whose family had links to the former South Vietnam government, she made the desperate journey away from her homeland by fishing boat. During the escape the family was split up, and Rachel ended up spending three years in Indonesia with her father while her mother waited in the Philippines with her brothers. Arriving in Australia in 1992 aged 10, Rachel found herself in a country “where we had to learn everything [including English] from scratch”. Her parents soon separated and the time she had spent apart from her mother made their relationship difficult. “Somehow we were never able to reconnect,” she says. While her mum worked incredibly hard to support and educate the kids Rachel and her siblings had little in the way of extended family, community or financial resources in Melbourne. “Books were the first thing that I had access to, and self-help books, books about finance, motivated me to work really hard,” she says.



The significance of that early influence has stayed with her and helped convince her to put together her own written story, complete with self-help elements. As a teenager Rachel attended St Aloysius then Mt Alexander High and finished her VCE. After being thwarted in her ambition to become a flight attendant on account of her height – she was 4cm too short – she enrolled in then dropped out of tourism management at La Trobe University and did a short marketing course. She had been working in various hospital-ity jobs when she decided to join a friend who was doing some training in the beauty industry.

“I just did the course and I loved it, and I’ve been doing that work now for the past 20-plus years,” she says. Driven and extremely hard-working, the newly-minted beautician opened her first salon when she was 23. Around this time, she also sold her Mitsubishi Lancer for a deposit and bought her first apartment, a purchase that would lead to others. Rachel’s first salon turned out to be too small and she got out, next buying into a franchise which evolved into another bad situation. That resulted in her taking the dramatic step of walking away with nothing but a large debt.

But then, after identifying a gap in the market for an eyelash specialist, she started Holy Lashes in North Melbourne. Within a short space of time Rachel had two more of the salons and another three were opened by other operators. Then COVID struck. The lockdowns were initially “terrible” and incredibly stressful for the busy businesswoman but after experiencing an initial “meltdown” she realised that her fixation on building a future had caused her to miss out on a lot, particularly her kids’ lives. “I was never fully a mum until COVID, when I put aside all that financial stress [I was under] and enjoyed that time with the girls,” she says. Rachel’s story has some other big highs – like her second marriage to an old friend who had been adopted by her young daughters. And the fact that instead of serving drinks on planes, as she once hoped to do, she is now learning to fly them. But in her book, *Not Rich Yet but Getting There*, she doesn’t shy away from the lows either. Among other things, her at-times harrowing life’s journey has included a series of miscarriages and serious family violence. She writes also about business and investment decisions that didn’t work out. “In the memoir I share all my failures, I don’t just talk about the success,” she tells *North West City News*. “I want anyone who’s experiencing hardship to feel they’re not alone. “Once you’ve read it, [you’ll see that] it wasn’t one time that I had to rebuild. I had to rebuild many times.” She talks also about the “mindset” behind her achievements – essentially to be prepared to try, fail and “move on to the next thing”, to “just get up get on with life!” “What separates people who have achieved any form of success from those who haven’t is the mindset and the determination and all the hard work behind that,” she says. Rachel Do’s self-published book *Not Rich Yet but Getting There: A Refugee’s Journey from Debt and Loss to Financial Freedom* will be launched at Willows & Wine in West Melbourne on Sunday, August 30. It is available on Amazon. ●

FEDERAL MP

North and West Melbourne: the people and places that make our community strong

There is something special about spending time in North and West Melbourne. Yes, our neighbourhoods are growing and changing, but what continues to stand out is the strength of the community behind that growth.

WORDS BY
SARAH WITTY
FEDERAL MP FOR MELBOURNE

Recently, I visited the North Melbourne Community Centre and was reminded just how important local community spaces are. Thanks to Carolyn and Nadine from Y Victoria and Centre Manager Allysha for showing me around. There were children and carers enjoying Play Gym, women making use of the women-only gym hour, and outdoor courts alive with soccer, basketball, netball and futsal. It



is much more than a recreation facility. It is a place where people meet, friendships are formed and everyone can feel welcome. That same sense of connection was on display at the Jean McKendry Neighbourhood Centre, where I enjoyed performances by the Chinese Arts Association of Melbourne. Traditional dance and Chinese opera

provided a wonderful reminder of the depth of cultural talent and diversity we have right here in our community. I have also been hearing from organisations supporting people at some of life’s more difficult moments. At Canteen Australia, I learnt more about the counselling, peer support and practical assistance they provide to young people affected by cancer and their families. At North Melbourne Language and Learning, I met students building their English skills and confidence, while at River Nile School with Minister Andrew Giles I heard how VET in Schools is giving young people practical skills and pathways into exciting careers. Then there are organisations like Good Cycles, which has helped more than 800 young people facing barriers to employment since 2013. It is a terrific example of how a social enterprise can create opportunity while strengthening the local community. I also recently met Father Stuart Soley, Parish Priest at Saint Mary’s Anglican Church, to hear about the important role

the parish plays in bringing people together and supporting those who need a helping hand. And, of course, our local businesses are an important part of community life. I’m always pleased to support businesses such as Bread Club on Queensberry St and Baguette Station on Wreckyn St. Alongside all this community activity, we need to make sure our infrastructure keeps pace with growth. The Albanese Government has provided \$750,000 through Roads to Recovery for upgrades to Wreckyn, Queensberry and Shiel streets in North Melbourne. These projects might be about roads, but ultimately, they are about people: making it easier and safer to get around our growing neighbourhood. From community centres and schools to social enterprises, local businesses and our streets, it is these everyday connections that make North and West Melbourne such wonderful places to call home. I’m proud to keep working with our community to make sure our neighbourhoods continue to thrive. ●

ENVIRONMENT



All the medicine we need is in nature

Nature is always trying to remedy. In our neighbourhoods you will see pioneer plants relentlessly breaking their way through cracks in cement and pathways to remind us of the environment we should be living in.

These plants tirelessly continue to try repair the damage and bring balance to a world of asphalt and cement.

In cities like Melbourne so much of nature has been removed that we have to intentionally green our neighbourhoods. Often this green space competes with development of housing, buildings, sports stadiums and other pressures of inner-city living.

Faced with our past behaviours which damaged our soils, the resulting narrative is “these contaminated soils need covering up” – creating more impervious surfaces and less nature. An alternative is to repair the soil so we can grow our medicine in the cities.

A growing body of evidence shows that time in nature improves our sleep, boosts our moods and lowers risks of diabetes and cardiovascular disease among others. Nature therapy and forest bathing (shinrin-yoku in Japan) have been shown to improve mental health and lower the odds of anxiety and depression.

In the US, research shows where there are fewer parks, fewer trees and less investment in green space, health suffers. Neighbourhoods shaped by disinvestment that lacks safe green and blue spaces experience higher air pollution, noise pollution, less trees, urban heat islands and greater health burdens.

Their research reveals stark differences between low-income neighbourhoods, and wealthier parts of the city where fewer

trees and more asphalt results in several degrees hotter in summer than wealthier parts of the same city. These differences reflect higher asthma rates, more heat-related illnesses and greater cardiovascular stress. In the US, your post code is a powerful predictor of health, because it signals socioeconomic status and shapes daily exposure to or exclusion from nature.

The daily presence of nature with its quite rhythms and restorative power, should not depend on your postcode or income. Natures medicine should be available to all.

The healing properties of plants in their original form, are well documented and Nature plays a crucial role in many of the modern medicines used today.

Most Indigenous cultures have long centred health in relationship to land. Aboriginal Australians have used native plants as bush medicine for thousands of years.

Larrakia Elder Richard Fego, based in Darwin, is teaching medical students how nature can heal and leads Indigenous knowledge session and bush medicine workshops. “We are surrounded by food and medicine,” he says.

The Urban Forest Fund (now offering community grants) provides an opportunity to continue to increase the trees and understory in our city and the launch of City of Melbourne’s Garden City Guidelines encourages and allows community to create more green space and biodiversity without needing a permit. ●

Jacqui van Heerden

CO-CONVENER OF TRANSITION TOWN KENSINGTON

JACQUIVANHEERDEN@GMAIL.COM



PARKVILLE GARDENS RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Change is on the way

Sixty articles down the track, this will be my last for *North West City News* before it's reborn as *The Melburnian*. Change is in the air!

That goes for the Parkville Gardens Residents' Association as well as this publication. At our upcoming AGM in October, I will hand over the reins of leadership.

In my six years as president there've been two Popes, two Prime Ministers, three Premiers and two Lord Mayors. On that basis, it's time for a fresh face here in Parkville Gardens.

Is that face yours? Please ask yourself that question. It's been a privilege for me to serve the Parkville Gardens community as president for the past six years. It's enabled me to be more deeply grounded in the neighbourhood while connecting me and the community more broadly to the City of Melbourne.

These are the two facets to the role. The first is to lead PGRA in its engagement with the local community, promoting a climate of inclusion and belonging, fostering pride in the neighbourhood and supporting practical measures to make the precinct more liveable than ever.

The second is to connect with authorities and agencies beyond our boundaries, most especially with the City of Melbourne, Victoria Police and other residents' associations. Our relationship with the City of Melbourne is crucial. Grants from the council are the primary source of funding for our organisational responsibilities and for the events we hold, along with occasional grants from other bodies such as Greater Western Water and the Victorian Department of Education.

We're most grateful for all this financial support, but also and especially for the key role played by our neighbourhood partner who is our liaison with the council.

The salary package for the position of president is impressive in its simplicity. It's full of zeroes. The same goes for committee members. We serve out of love for the community and that's immensely rewarding in itself.

Please consider putting your hand up to serve. All positions will be declared vacant at the AGM. Some committee members will offer to continue but they'll be happy to have new company.



Our secretary/treasurer would love to hand over the finance portfolio, and I'm handing over the presidency. If you would like to discuss your options, please contact me at president@pgra.org.au. I'd love to hear from you.

Let me finish with a brief rollcall of upcoming events. The AGM is tentatively planned for Thursday, October 22. Halloween falls on a Saturday this year.

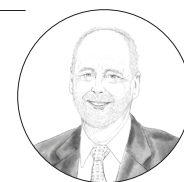
Our final event for 2026 promises to be particularly memorable. It's 20 years since the Commonwealth Games were held in Melbourne. In 2026 what is now the Parkville Gardens neighbourhood was the athletes' village.

We're delighted to announce that the Mayor of the Commonwealth Games Village, renowned Australian athlete Steve Moneghetti, has agreed to be our speaker on the night of Thursday, November 19. Confirmation of these dates will follow in due course with posters on our noticeboards and flyers in every letterbox. It should be a great night. See you there! ●

Tom Knowles

PRESIDENT

[PRESIDENT@PGRA.ORG.AU](mailto:president@pgra.org.au)



HISTORY

Hotham (North Melbourne) Town Hall

The North Melbourne Town Hall (known today as the Arts House) was officially opened on June 27, 1876.

WORDS BY
FELICITY JACK

The closest the Hotham History Project came (unknowingly) to acknowledging its birthday was the Winter Solstice celebration, held recently on June 20. It was organised by the Courthouse Hotel and volunteers from the Hotham History Project ran tours of the bell tower.

Pride of Hotham, A tale of North



Melbourne and a red-headed architect was written by local identity Bill Hannan and launched by Barry Jones on June 27, 2006, the 130th anniversary the day of the opening of the Hotham Town Hall.

The book is wide ranging. It covers the geographical, historical, and social contexts in which the building was constructed. It provides studies of Victorian architecture, the shenanigans of the Hotham councillors who were responsible for raising the money for the construction of the building, and, in particular, George Johnson, the red-headed architect, who also designed the Meat Market and several other town halls throughout Victoria, including Daylesford, Maryborough and Fitzroy.

The grand opening ball took place that same evening. Bill writes that “there was no stage yet, and the band is on a raised platform where the stage now is. The entrance door is on the right. The essential architecture of the hall is as it is today, but the gaslights on the walls and ceiling have been supplanted. The number of dancers has been variously estimated. The *Argus*

estimated about 300 while the *Weekly Times* and *The Illustrated Australian News* made it between 400 and 500. Tickets, apart from invited guests, cost 20 shillings for men and 10 shillings for women.

The book is beautifully illustrated by Bill's friend and well-known Melbourne identity Gil Freeman who sadly died on March 25 of this year.

The book is available on the Hotham History Project website for the amazing cost of \$45. It's worth every cent! ●

Photo: State Library of Victoria.

Want to know more about Hotham History Project?
hothamhistory.org.au



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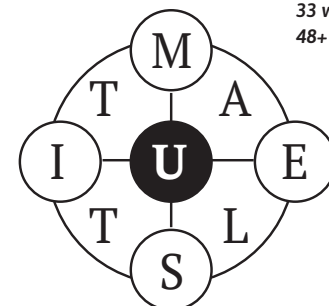
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WHAT'S ON
August

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

LIBRARY UP LATE X NOW OR NEVER
Explore State Library Victoria after dark with live music, immersive installations, DJ sets, creative experiences and futuristic artworks as part of Now or Never.

State Library Victoria

FRIDAY 21 AUGUST, 7.30PM – 10.30PM

MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
MIFF returns with 250+ acclaimed films, premieres, filmmaker Q&As, special events and immersive experiences from around the world.

Venues across Melbourne CBD

UNTIL 23 AUGUST, 10AM – 10.30PM

NONGKRONG FESTIVAL: JIMBARAN BBQ
Fed by Made returns to Melbourne for Nongkrong Festival, joined by Suku to serve Jimbaran-inspired Balinese seafood, including grilled fish, prawns, clams, calamari and sambal in a hands-on feast.

Benchwarmer, West Melbourne

SUNDAY 23 AUGUST, 3PM – 9PM

WINTER NIGHT MARKET
Queen Victoria Market's Winter Night Market runs Wednesdays June – August, offering global street food, drinks, shopping, live music, artisan stalls and interactive "Keys to Winter" performances.

Queen Victoria Market

WEDS UNTIL 26 AUGUST, 5PM – 10PM

MARK NIEHUS: DIFFERENT MIDNIGHTS
Different Midnights explores solitude through paintings, moving image and poetry, revealing shared human experiences and emotional connections across a city at midnight.

West End Art Space, West Melbourne

29 AUG – 18 SEP, 11AM – 4PM

THE FATHER'S DAY FOUNDING FIVE: A SINGLE MALT WHISKY TASTING
Celebrate Father's Day with David Baker and family, tasting five rare Bakery Hill whiskies, sharing stories, charcuterie, craft beer and bottle-filling.

Bakery Hill Distillery

SUNDAY 13 SEPTEMBER, 2PM – 5PM

CHILDREN'S PLAY: RAGNAR KJARTANSSON
Children explore drawing, storytelling and theatrical play in Ragnar Kjartansson's interactive exhibition, designed to inspire creativity and imagination.

National Gallery of Victoria

UNTIL 4 OCTOBER, 10AM – 5PM

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

STRUM AND SING UKULELE GROUP
Whether you're a seasoned strummer or a beginner, this is your chance to pluck those strings, soak up the good vibes and connect with enthusiastic people. Each session has a different theme, and there are spare ukes if you don't have one yet.

Flemington & Kensington RSL

UNTIL 17 DECEMBER, 6PM – 8PM

WATER MARBLING WORKSHOP
Discover the art of water marbling with Amanda from In Aetheria Studio. Learn techniques, experiment with flowing inks, and create unique, mesmerising designs in a therapeutic workshop.

In Aetheria, Lvl 2, 75A Stubbs St Kensington

UNTIL 31 DECEMBER, 10AM – 9PM

Business Directory

ANIMAL WELFARE

THE LOST DOGS HOME
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

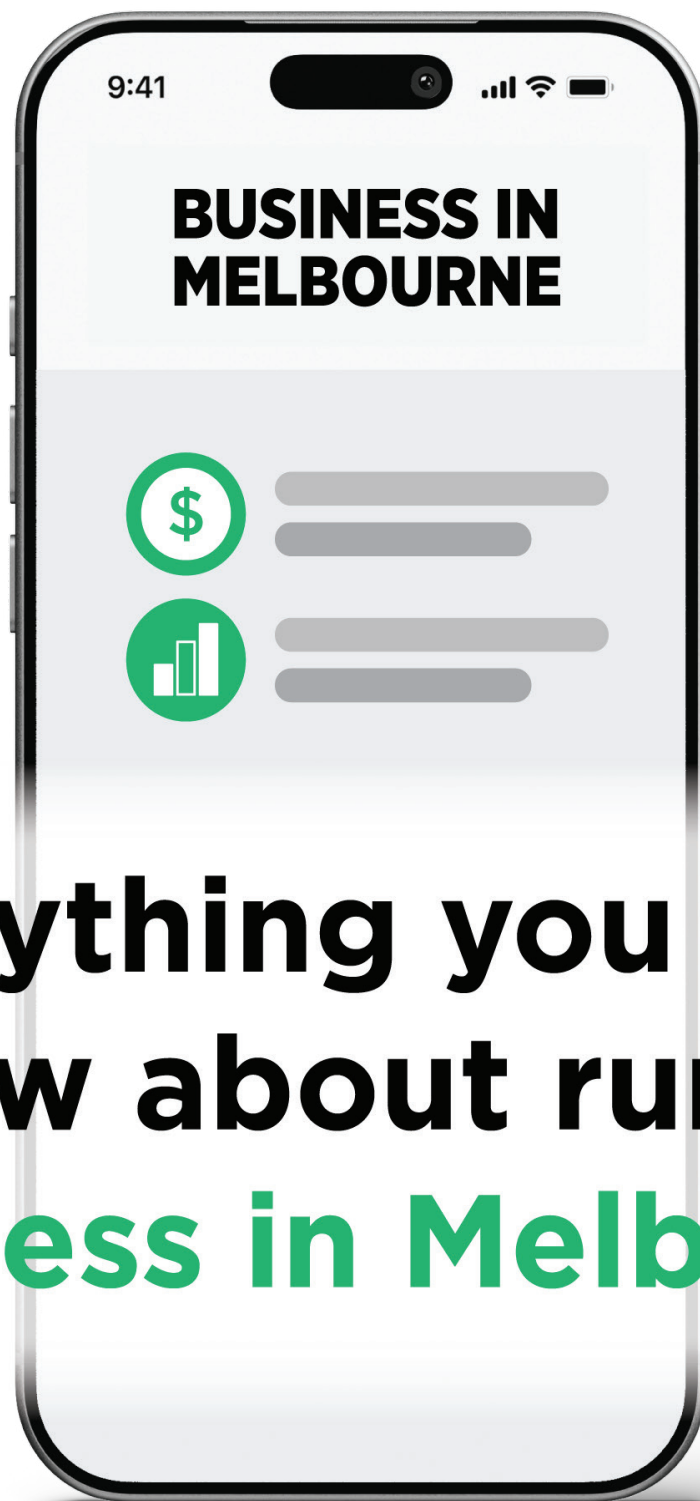
ELLEN SANDELL
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PRECINCT

NORTH + WEST MELBOURNE PRECINCT ASSOCIATION

SCHOOL

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