

PECAN Submission to CoPP Council Plan and Budget, 2022/23

This submission reflects a number of issues we raised in our 21/22 and 20/21 budget submission as programs we sought then have not been acted on by Council to date. These issues are more urgent now as evidenced by recent floods, bushfires, more flora and fauna being listed as endangered, and sea level rises on our doorstep.

We support a number of measures in the draft – the commitment to EcoCentre redevelopment and ongoing funding, the commitment to partnership with Bayside especially in relation to stormwater harvesting, partnership with Melbourne Water on a new flood overlay to be incorporated into the Port Phillip Planning Scheme, the development of the Marine and Coastal Management Plan and the Coastal Adaptation Plan, Council’s involvement in the Inner Melbourne Partnership and most importantly, the development of the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) which if properly developed, adopted and implemented would embrace all the above projects and programs, and many others as well.

Our recommendations in summary

PECAN recommends that:

1. Council allocates or foreshadows Operational and Capital funding for the new Sustainability projects and future as outlined in attachment 4. Similar notations should be used in relation to the CEAP implementation, permeability measurement, etc.
2. Council includes EcoCentre and Environment Leaders funding in subsequent years.
3. Council and council officers engage with PECAN throughout the development of the CEAP.
4. Council includes new approaches to community education and engagement in the proposed Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP).
5. Council promotes CoPP’s sustainability initiatives at key public locations, such as St Kilda Town Hall, South Melbourne Market, Alma Park Stormwater Harvesting Facility.
6. Council establishes of a Climate Emergency Reference Committee.
7. Council lists the current advisory service to assist businesses reduce emissions as a Sustainability operating project with related financial support.
8. Council develops a Greening strategy that identifies clear priority precincts, with appropriate funding levels and differentiated canopy cover targets over 4 year bands.
9. Council allocates annual funding for property acquisitions from the Open Space Reserve fund.
10. Council officers undertake a formal assessment of the acquisition of the Duke Street property (adjacent to St Kilda library) to increase public open space.
11. Council advances funding for the Green Line from 2023/24 to 2022/23.
12. Council includes best estimates for permeability improvements in future years in the Budget. If this is not possible, then TBD notation should be added.
13. Council partners with Bayside Council to harvest stormwater from Elster Creek.

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PECAN Coordinating Group

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Reductions in forward estimates for Sustainability

It is disappointing to see that the costs of implementing a number of activities and projects have not been included in the Sustainability operating projects lists in the forward costings in volume 2 and 3. In a number of cases it may not be possible to estimate with certainty future costs. However, the presence of estimates would better reflect Council's commitment to these activities. The omission of budget for these activities risks being used as markers of Council's explicit intentions.

PECAN recommends Council allocates or foreshadows Operational and Capital funding for the new Sustainability projects and future as outlined in attachment 4. Similar notations should be used in relation to the CEAP implementation, permeability measurement, etc.

Further in years subsequent to 22/23 there is an overall reduction in the total to be allocated to sustainability operating projects. If we take out the one-off costs of Street lighting upgrades in 22/23, the reduction is approximately \$200,000 between 22/23 and 23/24. But it is important to understand that expenditure in future years will require to be increased as the programs whose range and depth cannot be clearly assessed at present will require appropriate funding.

We note and welcome that the 22/23 funding for the "EcoCentre contribution and funding for education programs" is included as a separate category in the details on page 70 of Volume 3 "How much it costs to provide the services".

We note that the Environmental Leaders course is not mentioned as a sustainability operating project. Perhaps the costs for this program is included elsewhere.

PECAN recommends that Council includes EcoCentre and Environment Leaders funding in subsequent years.

Climate Emergency Action Plan

Work on this is due to be commenced in the new financial year, and we consider it most important that a strong and broadly focussed Plan is prepared. We've been told that three options will be prepared, each with different reach and expenditure. The concept of a weak or light Emergency Plan is an oxymoron – an emergency demands strong responses.

PECAN recommends that Council and council officers engage with PECAN throughout the development of the CEAP.

Community Education and Engagement

In our last two Budget responses we have requested some quite modest actions by Council to highlight and display the sustainability measures it has put in place - Solar on numbers of its facilities- the St Kilda Town Hall, South Melbourne Market, and other smaller building assets used by and visible to the community, and the Stormwater harvesting facility in Alma Park. Measures of this kind are important in enlarging community understanding and awareness of what can be done in their own communities, and that this is not a remote problem the responsibility of the Federal or State Governments, but one which needs to be engaged with locally and which in fact the LGA requires. Council sustainability actions

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should be designed with two faces: one the practical measure, the other, the communication of that measure to the community.

PECAN recommends that Council promotes CoPP's sustainability initiatives at key public locations, such as St Kilda Town Hall, South Melbourne Market, Alma Park Stormwater Harvesting Facility.

Regrettably last year's Budget withdrew support for a number of engagement programs which were auspiced or funded by the Council. It is gratifying to see that the numbers of participants in these programs is still included as a key measure of indicators of Council connections in the annual reporting on Sustainability.

PECAN recommends that Council establishes of a Climate Emergency Reference Committee.

We have benefited from the Working Groups between Council and PECAN on Community Power (renewable energy, community batteries etc) and Green Blue Infrastructure (greening, canopy cover, urban heat island, stormwater harvesting, flood mitigation). They form an important bridge between PECAN and officers in key areas; we have benefited greatly from them and we appreciate the contribution of officers and we hope sincerely they will continue. But the Councillors, the key drivers of council policy and programs are not involved in these conversations. And despite all best intentions communication between Councillors and Officers is not always effective, and similarly between Councillors and community, and community and Officers. We think a new committee involving representation from Councillors, Officers and Community is an essential and effective mechanism as we go forward.

We hope to engage more closely with Council on improved education and engagement measures as work on the CEAP commences.

Community emissions

The precise level of community emissions is not available, but over 80% of Port Phillip's community emissions of around 1.6 to 1.7m tonnes pa of CO₂e come from Commercial and Industrial businesses in Port Melbourne and Fishermans Bend.

While reducing these emissions is primarily the responsibility of the Federal and State governments, Council's role in advocating for stronger action from these levels of government will be increasingly important. But Port Phillip's emissions profile is unusual in its concentration of emissions from commercial and industrial operations, unique in its characteristics of high tech enterprises, manufacturers and a major distribution centre alongside the Port of Melbourne and the Melbourne CBD. There has been a cursory exploration of who the enterprises in Port Melbourne and Fishermans Bend are, but in the expectation that both Federal and State emissions reduction programs will be stepped up, more can be expected of Council in developing programs to accelerate the local transition towards renewable electricity. It can be anticipated that the Victorian Government's Gas Substitution Roadmap will be strengthened this year, and Council will be able to play a role in that too. There needs to be a strong focus on this aspect of the CEAP as both Federal and State initiatives become clearer following their respective elections and adoption of new policies.

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PECAN recommend that Council lists the current advisory service to assist businesses reduce emissions as a Sustainability operating project with related financial support.

Greening Port Phillip

With new staff in place, Council is commencing work on a renewed Greening program. We have stated our concerns repeatedly over the last few years and have been advised that concerns will be addressed in the new program. To restate these concerns, they are as follows:

- The targets are inadequate: From 19% canopy cover to 19.2% cover by 2022/28
- The funding is inadequate: Our understanding is that \$450,000 of the current year's funding was required for forming upper canopies to provide safe clearances for electric wiring. How much of next and subsequent years funding will be required for this purpose?
- The program design was inadequate: It did not measure senescence within current tree stock, did not examine species selection in terms of resilience to increased heat and lower rainfall, or time to canopy maturity.

Council has not used the tools it has available to optimise greening across the municipality. It needs to integrate the following measures:

- Canopy cover across Port Phillip's neighbourhoods
- Existing open space levels within the neighbourhoods
- Urban Heat Island locations across neighbourhoods
- Transport, especially foot and cycling routes to shopping centres and major destinations like parks, beach etc.

PECAN recommend that Council develops a Greening strategy that identifies clear priority precincts, with appropriate funding levels and differentiated canopy cover targets over 4 year bands.

Public Open Space

There have been multiple representations to Council and Officers from PECAN members about the inequitable distribution of open space across the municipality. We recognize that these problems aren't amenable to overnight solutions, but Council responses have been peremptory, contradictory and essentially prevaricating in our view, and have meant lost opportunities particularly in the case of the linear park in Alexandra St.

We acknowledge that Council has adopted a number of temporary trials, but even if they all proved successful the additional amount of open space would involve small parklets. In the longer run the only way this problem can be solved is by annual funding for new land acquisition, a policy which has been in place in Stonnington since 2012 and has been successful in generating attractive new spaces across the municipality. We note that there are substantial funds available in the Open Space Reserve, and that the chart in Vol 2, p40 shows funding of new acquisitions for Open Space in 2022/23 of \$5.6m. How are these funds to be used?

At the Council meeting on Dec 8 we were told that Council would immediately begin to search for new acquisition prospects, but around about that time a property in Duke St behind the St Kilda Library was brought to Council's attention as a prospective purchase. It was peremptorily dismissed in one case as

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“facing South” and in another as being too close to a Pakington St property adjacent to the small park there; the acquisition overlay on that property has been in place for many years and in any case the additional land it could provide is not substantial. The Duke St property is still on the market and we don’t understand the objection to it as facing north, as it is flat, fully cleared with significant palm trees, is of significant size at 20x70 metres, and most important in our view is that it represents a strategic opportunity to secure land which is adjacent to the Library, a significant destination for families in St Kilda East and Balaclava. As the Library is due for redevelopment/rebuilding in the next few years, in our view the land in question seems to represent a significant opportunity to secure a resource which could form a valuable adjunct to the library redevelopment.

The purchase of the Duke St property is supported by CAPP, PECAN, local residents (who are currently collecting a petition supporting purchase of the land).

We have also been advised recently that Council intends to develop a Land Acquisition and Road Discontinuance policy by 2025. We hope that strategic opportunities which arise in the meantime are not discounted in the absence of this policy.

PECAN recommends that Council allocates annual funding for property acquisitions from the Open Space Reserve fund.

PECAN recommends that Council officers undertake a formal assessment of the acquisition of the Duke Street property (adjacent to St Kilda library) to increase public open space.

Green Line

PECAN is disappointed that the two funding allocations for the Green Line are weighted towards 2023/24 and recommend that this funding be brought forward to this financial year.

Since our inclusion of the Green Line in last year’s Budget submission, interest in extending it into the adjacent municipalities of Glen Eira and Stonnington has grown strongly. Councillors in Glen Eira are supportive and are meeting with this week with the CEO who we are told supports the concept and the linkage to the Elsternwick Park Nature Reserve. Community groups GECAN and the Elsternwick South-West Precinct are strongly supportive. In Stonnington the community group Rewilding Stonnington has assisted with the development of the project and local member Sam Hibbins is also supportive.

The Port Phillip section of the Green Line does not fall within the Albert Park electorate and PECAN has met with Nina Taylor, the Upper House member, and the local member, David Southwick, who is strongly supportive and has a Monash graduate student in his office working on the Green Line and other environmental projects. Incidentally Mr Southwick stated that when the Bailleau/Napthine government was last in office it funded Port Phillip Council for the development of the Balaclava Walk between Balaclava station and Grosvenor St, the section of the Green Line that Council is proposing for landscaping work in next year’s Budget.

We are proposing to seek State Government funding towards the development of the project, in conjunction with Stonnington and Glen Eira; apart from the project’s extension into the adjacent electorates and municipalities it is made more complex by the need for VicTrack’s involvement. We

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anticipate that if Port Phillip's proposed funding in 2023/24 could be brought forward to this Budget the case for State Government funding and support would much stronger.

PECAN recommends that Council advances funding for the Green Line from 2023/24 to 2022/23.

Permeability

PECAN supports the Permeability Assessment to be completed in 2022/23.

We note that measurement of increased permeable surfaces will be considered in the Act and Adapt update, and request that this measure is incorporated in Act and Adapt and the CEAP, as increasing development is accompanied by more impermeable surfaces, with attendant stormwater runoff and heightened risk of flood events.

PECAN recommends that Council includes best estimates for permeability improvements in future years in the Budget. If this is not possible, then TBD notation should be added.

Stormwater Harvesting

We support the Partnership with Bayside Council in Attachment 4 in relation to proposed stormwater harvesting from Elster Creek. This was an original objective in Port Phillip's collaboration with Bayside Council, together with flood mitigation, and its restatement is welcome as Elster Creek has year round water flow and is capable of providing the long-sought additional 80MLs of stormwater to meet Port Phillip's requirements.

PECAN recommends that Council partners with Bayside Council to harvest stormwater from Elster Creek.