

Friends of Victoria Gardens

Submission re the Stonnington Draft Council Plan 2017-2021

The Friends of Victoria Gardens was established in 1987 as a grass roots community group with a deep interest in the maintenance and enhancement of the heritage value garden that is Victoria Gardens on High Street Prahran.

We have watched over the Gardens and engaged fully with Council in maintaining an improvement and enhancement agenda for this heritage garden.

This has served the Gardens and Council well and points to the importance of engaging directly with a community group rather than just responding to individual complaints from residents.

Demographic changes have continued to impact on the availability of open space in Prahran so much so that according to Stonnington Council Prahran housing density is to continue to increase with apartment block developments.

The following factors inform this submission and relate directly to the Draft Plan.

A Open spaces

1. Council's policy of 'creating open space' and the costs associated with such purchases appears to be at the expense of the budget that is set for the maintenance and enhancement of all current spaces.
2. There does not appear to be any planned increase to the number of gardeners and apprentices for the maintenance of the existing 'open spaces' as the only reference is for addressing the policy of 'creating new spaces' and these at a very high cost to ratepayers.
3. There is no mention of the need (and value to residents) to conserve the heritage values of heritage gardens like Victoria Gardens, Malvern Gardens, Central Park and Hedgeley Dene.
4. Increased housing density – in the form of apartments does not appear to have any requirement that developers attend to the provision of open spaces or roof top gardens.
5. Such new developments increase the rates (\$) that are collected from what was generally an existing single dwelling allotment. Yet there does not appear to be a commensurate budget improvement for the maintenance of existing gardens given that incoming residents seek these available open spaces.
6. The Gardens host a number of community events such as Opera in the Park, Spring into Gardening etc. These Council initiated 'community' activities receive considerable Council attention in the planning and

organisation of these events. The Victoria Gardens are also used with increasing frequency for club and family gatherings. Such events all contribute to the need for increased attention to lawns and to rubbish removal pointing to the need to not only 'educate' but to also provide adequate recycling and other rubbish bins.

7. The Victoria Gardens oval has become a meeting point for off-leash dog owners and though we recognises the need for such pets in an increasingly urbanized environment, there is little support for the maintenance of appropriate monitoring of off-leash activity. Dogs frequently roam the garden beds and relieve themselves as dogs do. Owners are not always careful to clean up after their dogs and are often hostile and aggressive when reminded that the only off leash area is the oval.
8. It is not that long ago that dogs roamed freely in residential streets and owners were not required to walk them on leash in the streets. This demonstrates that dog owner behaviour can and does change.

B Changing demographics

Changing family demographics have impacted on Prahran/Windsor. To give just one example, a small residential street parallel to Victoria Gardens now boasts 19 children (babies and toddlers). There were none 5-7 years ago.

1. There appears to be no provision made in the Draft for bringing forward improvement of playgrounds outside of the 17-year 'improvement' schedule despite the changing demographic that has been experienced in the past 7 years.
2. Despite this change, the 17-year schedule continues to be applied and the Lumley Playground will not receive a much-needed upgrade until 2021.
3. Consideration for such changes in family demographics (Prahran /Windsor) with an increasing number of families who will all need kindergarten and primary schooling does not appear in the Draft Council Plan 2017-2021.
4. It has taken years of lobbying and planning for Stonnington to finally receive a much needed government secondary school within the municipality.
5. The closure of Hawksburn and Prahran Primary schools has put considerable pressure on the only existing primary school in this area (the former Windsor and now renamed Stonnington PS). Yet there is no mention whatsoever in the Draft plan for starting the process of lobbying State Government for improved provision of government primary schooling, let alone support for municipal kindergartens.

6. All in all the lack of planning for kindergarten and primary school provision in Prahran Windsor puts more pressure on the available open spaces and playgrounds as these are the only play areas available to children .

C. **Community Development**

1. The Friends of Victoria Gardens is the only community initiated resident organisation that seeks to work with Council for the betterment of a heritage garden.
2. A resident approached The Friends of Victoria Gardens with concerns about the degradation of the Malvern Gardens and there is anecdotal evidence that gardeners have also received complaints that point to the steady degradation of these gardens. But any possibility to form a community organisation like the Friends of Victoria Gardens or for that matter to garner community support is left to residents without the time and knowhow to undertake such endeavours.
3. Similarly the need to begin the process of lobbying the relevant authority for additional Primary School and kindergarten provisions is also left to individual residents' endeavours.
4. This has led us to note with some interest that Stonnington sees community involvement/participation as being 'achieved' through 'surveys'; publications; the provision of facilities; 'events' and grants.
5. The current 'surveys' appear to serve the bureaucratic purpose of 'performance reviews', an internal system that has nothing to do with the way residents perceive the provision of services and one that does little to gauge and respond to resident needs or concerns. The survey might have some legitimate bureaucratic relevance but it does nothing to support community development or participation.
6. The provision of 'events', facilities and grants, though most welcome, does not in itself provide for 'community' development.
7. There appears to be little to no understanding of the role of community development facilitators and no such positions appear to be included in the Stonnington draft Council Plan.
8. The Friends of Victoria Gardens experienced the lack of community development facilitation during the 2014-15 period when we were required to participate in accepting imposed statuary in the Gardens. This alerted us to the lack of support for real community participation and the potential to wedge community groups against each other. Fortunately we (and the RSL) were successful in our endeavours to maintain the integrity of our recommendations and to demonstrate real community participation in action.

The Friends of Victoria Gardens lodge the following recommendations for Council's consideration

Recommendation 1 Open Areas

Given the increased density of apartment buildings and thus increased rate revenue from new apartments in Prahran

- That Council increases the budget for the maintenance of current open spaces in Prahran and employs an additional number of gardeners and apprentices to reflect the increased demand for open space and the increased use of existing gardens.
- That such a recommendation also includes increased support for all existing open spaces in the municipality and with particular attention to heritage gardens.
- That Council sets a % figure from all new rated properties to be applied to the maintenance of existing open spaces in the ward where these properties are being built.

As to dogs off leash, a number of different strategies may provide some respite but will need to be nuanced so that they do not cause a rift in community relations. Current strategies may well learn from those imposed by Council in the past.

- That signage designating the off-leash provisions in Victoria Gardens be more evident as the current signage is completely disregarded at the very gates where it is placed and dogs are let run off leash on entry into the gardens.
- That Council's publications carry very clear information of the damage to garden beds and lawns from dog owners ignoring off-leash arrangements.

Recommendation 2: Changing demographics

Given the changing demographic and the increasing number of families with toddlers and babies who use Victoria Gardens and the Lumley Playground adjacent to the Gardens

- That the Lumley Playground be scheduled for an immediate upgrade long before what is supposed to be its schedule in 2020-21.

- That Council identifies the specifics of the changing family demographic in Prahran Windsor and provides a projection of potential need for kindergartens and government primary schooling.

Recommendation 3: Community development

Though our main focus is Council's attention to 'open spaces' and heritage gardens, we are clearly aware that these are under pressure from fast changing family demographics, hence our additional interest in our member's needs for improved kindergarten and government school provisions in Prahran.

- That Council investigates the roles of full time Community Development Facilitators as employed by other Councils and provides a rationale as to why such a position (or various project specific positions to get projects off the ground) should be created and funded at Stonnington starting in 2018 -2019.
- That a community development process be initiated to support residents concerned with the degradation of Malvern Gardens and if needed for the other two heritage gardens, Hedgeley Dene and Central Park.
- That a community development process be initiated to support parents (whose children are or will be attending municipal kindergartens and hope to attend a government primary school) to begin to lobby for such to be included in municipal and state budgets in 2017-2021.
- That such community development activities be clearly advertised, supported and encouraged by Council.

Thank you,
Vihra Migios
President
Friends of Victoria Gardens
vmigios@gmail.com
ph: 95291959