



Friends of Victoria Gardens Inc.

Submission re the Stonnington Draft Children Youth and Family Strategy

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. In time, this has also included the enhancement of the amenity of the Lumley Playground that is attached to the Gardens.

We recognise the importance of the Gardens and Lumley Playground to the wellbeing of children, young people, and families in Stonnington. Our interests run parallel to and confirm the research documented in the Draft.

The following outline in the Draft informs this submission: -

1. Council articulates the importance and needs of the strategy through the development continuum of children and young people and through community analysis showing increased residential densification.
2. The strategy identifies that *“the number and proportion of children and young people aged between 0 and 24 years has increased markedly in Prahran, Windsor and South Yarra between 2011 and 2016, with further moderate growth projected between 2016 and 2026”*.
3. The strategy acknowledges that *“demand for services and infrastructure to support children, young people and their families has increased notably in this part of the city in the last five years.”*
4. The strategy predicts that *“The population growth in the 0 – 24 age cohorts, will drive changes to the household profile for the city with a small increase in households with children projected to occur between 2016 and 2026, but more significant growth occurring in the western part of the city where the number and proportion of households with children will more than double.”*
5. Of relevance to the Lumley Playground the strategy identifies the following *“Access to quality playgrounds and open space is very important, and is one of the aspects parents and carers like most about bringing up children and young people in Stonnington.”*
6. And notes *“But it is also one of the areas they would most like to see improved.”*

In May 2017, we wrote a submission to the Council re the Stonnington Draft Council Plan 2017-2021, and followed that with an oral presentation. A key point in that oral presentation was clear feedback from a resident about the current state of the Lumley Playground on High Street: -

- “Backyards are becoming smaller, children are having less opportunity to access outdoor play at home and are relying more on public spaces. I grew up with play equipment in my backyard. My children will not have this.
- The current Lumley Playground is tired and 20 years old. It is not adventurous or challenging, and does not allow for imaginatively play. There is better and more modern play equipment available.
- The Lumley Playground provides a free destination for families to be physically active and socially connected. It contributes to our community and neighbourhood character. It is important that it is kept relevant.
- There is no shade –neither on the children’s playing surface nor under the park benches. As an example, it is impossible to feed a new-born in the shade and watch a toddler play in the playground.”

That playgrounds be adventurous, challenging and allow for imaginative play is included in the draft but there is no indication how this will be achieved given that our subsequent investigations have yielded the following: -

1. Council currently allocates \$100,000 per annum specific to the upgrading of children’s playground equipment.
2. The Independent Audit commissioned by Council in 2016 appears to have had terms of reference that did not include consultation with community organisations nor recommendations regarding upgrade

schedules that reflect changing demographics nor the relevance of upgrade budgets.

3. They “*recommended priority upgrades to other playgrounds*” and that “*it is not intended to bring forward the upgrade schedule.*” (email Ms Limpens 18/8/17)
4. Ms Limpens added the following, “*I envisage that the Municipal Health Plan will call for the development of a new Playground Strategy so that we can select the best locations for different types of play experience – this will be subject to the Budget process next year.*”
5. The relevance of a schedule for the upgrading of playground equipment designed long before the observable demographic shifts remains unchallenged in the Priority Action section of the draft Strategy.
6. Ms Limpens advice that “*Council’s Youth and Family Service team will also contact you directly to discuss local family needs.*” has not eventuated.

We commend the background research that informs the Vision and Themes outlined in this draft strategy but are confused by the Priority Action section of the draft. Most of the Priority Actions are internal to the way the Council’s departments and bureaucracy work, suggesting that there will be improvement for them to act as an integrated whole rather than as silos.

What is of relevance to the Friends of Victoria Gardens and the Lumley Playground is not only the generality of the “WHAT” that is listed in the Priority Action under each Theme that relates to children and playgrounds, but also that the Draft leaves the community in the dark

7. as it says nothing about the “HOW?” and
8. the “WHO?” will act to involve the community and to bring the provisions up to date.

In addition, there is

9. no reference to the yearly budget cycle and whether the 2018-19 yearly budget will now be increased where the priority action requires funds for it to be effected.

Though not specific to the work of the Friends of Victoria Gardens we note the absence of any assessment of the current primary school provisions for Prahran/Windsor and whether there is a need to begin the process of lobbying the State Government for an additional primary school for Prahran Windsor (there were three and now there is only 1, and this on a very limited site).

10. It would be useful if Council were to undertake an investigation of the projected need for government primary schooling in Prahran /Windsor and the adequacy of the current school on Hornby Street to meet that need.

In conclusion: -

11. Will Council assure the community that this draft strategy is more than a bureaucratic tick sheet to meet its obligations under the Local Government Act to prepare a Municipality Early Years Plan?
12. Will Council publish regular accounts of Priority Action plan work-in-progress?
13. How will Council effect its community participation priority action given that the current method of accessing this is through vague reports of ‘consultation’ ‘surveys’ and ‘draft’ plans such as this, with no indication of how the valuable outreach work that is needed to engage the community will be done in practice.
14. Will Council review its limited \$100,000 allocation for playground equipment upgrade and review the current playground upgrade schedule that no longer bears any relationship to the changing demographics or the effect of minimal garden space in new residential buildings?

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