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| **2.4** | **Victoria Street Engagement Process** |

**Executive Summary**

**Purpose**

To outline a community engagement process through which residents, traders and other key stakeholders will participate in developing a vision for the future of Victoria Street.

**Key Issues**

Council, in collaboration with local services and agencies, has invested significant effort and resources into reducing the impacts associated with illicit drug use and community safety concerns in Victoria Street.

No single intervention can adequately manage the complex and dynamic issues arising as a result of public injecting. Instead a range of responses are required that match the range of people, issues and consequences within a local community affected by public drug use.

Council is in a lead position to facilitate an open and genuine engagement process, where a shared understanding of the issues and solutions can occur.

Council has the opportunity to work with the community to make a greater difference outside the current realm it is working in. It is time for Council to partner with the community and be innovative given there has been little innovation in this space for the last decade.

The proposed public engagement approach is consistent with a basic principle that within any community there is a wealth of knowledge and experience which, if used in creative ways, can be channelled into collective action to achieve the communities' desired goals.

**Financial Implications**

The majority of resourcing can be covered through existing resources (such as staff capacity to assist with community engagement), however additional finances will be required to cover the costs of a facilitator, design and printing of resources and catering.

**PROPOSAL**

That Council endorse the proposed process for community engagement.

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| **2.4** | **Victoria Street Community Engagement Process** |

Trim Record Number: D16/101784

Responsible Officer: Group Manager - People, Culture and Community

[Help](https://intranet.yarracity.vic.gov.au/Divisions/Governance/Pages/Meetings.aspx)

**Purpose**

1. To outline a community engagement process through which residents, traders and other key stakeholders will participate in developing a vision for the future of Victoria Street.

**Background**

1. Injecting drug use has been a major issue in the City of Yarra for well over a decade, with public injecting, overdoses, and discarded needles and syringes being significant concerns for businesses and residents in the City of Yarra.
2. In 2015 alone, over 60,000 syringes were collected across Yarra as a result of public injecting – a 30% increase on 2014.
3. The factors that cause people to inject in public are diverse and complex:
   1. limited access to ‘safe’ accommodation due to homelessness;
   2. an urgent need to mediate withdrawal symptoms;
   3. a fear of being apprehended by police once they have obtained their drugs;
   4. fear of theft by other drug users; and/or
   5. a sense of comradeship among peers who are street-based users.
4. For many people, this is a confronting experience and can negatively impact their perceptions of safety and enjoyment of local amenity.
5. Council is well versed in the issues arising from illicit drug use in Yarra. It has co-funded research into both the feasibility and need for a supervised injecting facility in North Richmond, and the impact of public injecting on North Richmond.
6. Council, in collaboration with local services and agencies, has invested significant effort and resources into reducing the impacts associated with illicit drug use and community safety concerns in Victoria Street. These include:
   1. contracting Innerspace (cohealth) to manage Council’s syringe management services, which includes the Yarra Syringe Disposal Hotline, regular sweeps, installation and monitoring of syringe disposal units, and collation and analysis of data to inform when and where efforts should be directed;
   2. working with key stakeholders to develop and implement resources and protocols such the Drug Issues in Your Local Area postcard, and the Protocol for the Management of Illicit Drug Use Issues in Yarra;
   3. supporting local organisations working with marginalised groups of people, including people who inject drugs (PWID) through the community grants process;
   4. developing and adopting the Victoria Street Streetscape Masterplan, which aims to encourage crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) and improving the quality of the public realm;
   5. actively supporting the implementation of a Supervised Injecting Facility (SIF) and strategic advocacy for the implementation of additional harm reduction strategies in Yarra as a means of improving public amenity and increasing perceptions of safety, and reducing drug related harm; and
   6. establishing a Local Safety Reference Group with representatives from Victoria Police and Women’s Health in the North, the Yarra Drug & Health Forum, cohealth, Neighbourhood Justice Centre, North Richmond Community Health, and the Departments of Health & Human Services and Justice And Regulation.

**External Consultation**

1. Officers will meet with representatives from the Victoria Street Traders Association to discuss the best way to engage with the Victoria Street traders.
2. Officers will also seek advice from the DHHS North Richmond Housing manager regarding preferred method of engagement with public housing estate residents and groups.
3. The public engagement process will include key stakeholders including (but not limited to):
   1. Local residents (including from the Richmond Public Housing estate);
   2. Collingwood and Abbotsford Resident Association;
   3. Abbotsford Primary School, and West Richmond Primary School;
   4. Local businesses in and around Victoria Street;
   5. Victorian Aboriginal Health Service;
   6. Yarra Drug and Health Forum;
   7. Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS);
   8. North Richmond Community Health Centre;
   9. Innerspace (cohealth);
   10. Neighbourhood Justice Centre;
   11. Victoria Police; and
   12. Department of Health & Human Services (Office of Housing).

**Internal Consultation (One Yarra)**

1. There has been discussion about this project at an Executive level. In addition to this, a Project Control Group has been convened which comprises:
   1. Group Manager People, Culture & Community;
   2. Community Partnerships Unit Manager;
   3. Community Advocacy Team Leader;
   4. Senior Planner (Community Health & Safety);
   5. Senior Advisor Community Engagement; and
   6. Advocacy, Engagement and Media Unit Manager.
2. Once the process has been endorsed there will be further engagement with Yarra City Council Officers within key areas.

**Financial Implications**

1. The majority of resourcing can be covered through existing resources (such as staff capacity to assist with community engagement), however additional finances will be required to cover the costs of a facilitator, design and printing of resources and catering.

**Economic Implications**

1. The potential economic implications from improving amenity and perceptions of safety in the Victoria Street precinct include:
   1. increased property values of residential properties surrounding the Victoria Street precinct due to less public injecting, (as a result of improved perceptions of safety); and
   2. attracting greater business investment in the Victoria Street precinct due to less public injecting.

**Sustainability Implications**

1. There are no apparent sustainability implications.

**Social Implications**

1. Council works within a harm minimisation framework, in keeping with National and Federal policy. Harm minimisation recognises that people will use alcohol and other drugs, and incorporates strategies to prevent or minimise harm. The three pillars of harm minimisation are harm reduction, supply reduction and demand reduction.

**Human Rights Implications**

1. The highest attainable standard of health is a fundamental right of every human being. However, marginalised groups within the municipality are often less likely to enjoy the right to health.
2. Council policies and projects have the ability to either promote or encroach upon human rights, including the right to health, depending on the way they are designed or implemented.

**Communications with CALD Communities Implications**

1. Once the process has been endorsed, Officers will meet with representatives from the Victoria Street Traders Association to discuss the best way to engage with the Victoria Street traders.
2. Interpreters will be used as necessary throughout the engagement process, as will the use of translated materials and multicultural media.

**Council Plan, Strategy and Policy Implications**

Health Plan 2013-2017

1. The Health Plan 2013-2017 sets out Council’s strategy to improve the health and wellbeing of the Yarra community. Priority 2 in the Health Plan relates to Community Safety, and Priority 3 relates to Reducing the Harm from Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs. Each contains a number of strategies and actions. Of relevance are the following actions:
   1. advocate for the implementation of additional harm reduction strategies in Yarra as a means of improving public amenity, increasing perceptions of safety, and reducing drug related harm including supporting the peer administered naloxone program and advocating for supervised injecting facilities, extending the hours of needle and syringe programs, increasing outreach to people who inject drugs during evenings and weekends, enabling peer distributed needles and syringes, and installing syringe vending machines;
   2. improve the urban design and management of public spaces, considering Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED);
   3. maintain local amenity through decreasing the presence of discarded needles, syringes and related waste through the Needle and Syringe Collection Contract; and
   4. implement the Night Time Economy Strategy 2014-2018 including improving amenity and precinct functionality, and facilitating an increased range of entertainment options for the whole-of-community through strategic land use planning, improved community access to Council facilities and the programming of regular events.

Victoria Street Streetscape Masterplan

1. Additionally, Council has adopted the Victoria Street Streetscape Masterplan. The Masterplan is designed to guide future streetscape improvements in the Victoria Street precinct.
2. The Masterplan aims to define and retain the precinct’s community identity and economic vitality and to make it a vibrant, safe and attractive area, including CPTED.

Graffiti Management Framework 2015-2019

1. Council recognises the aspirations of property owners to have their properties free from defacement and broader community desires for well-maintained local streets or neighbourhoods. At the same time, Council supports the right to and importance of political and artistic expression, including the rights of street artists to undertake legal artwork.
2. Pertinent actions include:
   1. developing place management strategies for illegal graffiti hotspots and places with emerging graffiti issues;
   2. conducting programmed graffiti removal in retail precincts in partnership with business and property owners; and
   3. continuing to use alternative treatments…for precinct amenity improvement.

State Implications

*Reducing the Alcohol and Drug Toll: Victoria’s Plan 2013-2017*

1. The State Government’s 15 point plan sets out how the Victorian Government will promote the safe, healthy and responsible use of alcohol, tackle the misuse of pharmaceutical drugs, reduce illegal drug use, and assist the care, treatment and recovery of people with drinking and drug problems.
2. The plan is underpinned by a vision that all Victorians lead safe, healthy and fulfilling lives free from the harm associated with the misuse of alcohol and drugs.
3. The Plan broadly adheres to the pillars of harm minimisation, with a focus on strengthening laws, better referral to education and treatment, and improved harm reduction and prevention.
4. With regards to SIFs, the Plan states “further, the Victorian Government will not be establishing a supervised injecting facility as it believes harm reduction initiatives underway, such as doubling pharmacotherapy funding, have a higher impact and broader application than the establishment of such a facility.”

*The Victoria St Richmond Precinct Community Safety Strategy (Victoria Police, July 2015)*

1. The Plan acknowledges that “although…responsibilities for public safety arise from the general nature of their duties, it is apparent that we cannot arrest our way out of the social justice issues inherent to the Precinct…As a result, police can only influence community leaders’ cooperative arrangements…”

**Legal Implications**

1. There are no apparent legal implications.

**Other Issues**

1. Given the time of year, Officers recommend that the project runs from September 2016 – June 2017, with the bulk of the community engagement work occurring after February 2017. There are a number of competing concerns during that time, such as the election period over September – October 2016, Christmas and school holidays over December 2016 – January 2017, and community engagement on the new Council Plan in February 2017.

**Options**

1. The proposed approach is consistent with a basic principle that within any community there is a wealth of knowledge and experience which, if used in creative ways, can be channelled into collective action to achieve the communities' desired goals. This is a grassroots community development approach and thus is underpinned by the following: empowerment and self-determination; collective action; social justice; inclusion; respect; relationships; and advocacy.
2. The project consists of the following phases:

Phase 1: Planning (September 2016 – February 2017)

1. The project will be overseen by the Project Control Group, which will contain a mix of Council staff and external stakeholders.
2. The overall aim of the project is to engage with key stakeholders, including residents and traders, to develop a vision for the future of Victoria Street. Objectives include:
   1. improving public safety and amenity of the Victoria Street precinct for residents and businesses;
   2. enhancing the experience of visitors to the precinct; and
   3. minimising harm to people who inject drugs and the wider community.

Phase 2: Public Engagement (March – May 2017)

1. Phase 2 consists of three parts – Asking & Listening, Presenting & Deliberating, and Solutions & Recommendations.

*Part 1: Asking & Listening (March 2017)*

1. Preliminary community engagement with residents, traders and visitors will provide a mechanism for them to be heard, and for Council to gather perspectives about the nature of alcohol and other drug use in the Victoria Street precinct and the experiences of those living and working in the area.
2. Preliminary engagement may utilise such tools as fact sheets, online and face to face surveys, street-based pop up stalls and public meetings.
3. A short set of key questions will be developed to ensure consistency across stakeholder groups and tools used to gather the information.

*Part 2: Presenting & Deliberating (April - May 2017)*

1. Community perspectives gathered through Part 1 will be collated and analysed. Stakeholders will present the evidence in terms of effectively addressing public amenity and community safety, relating these back to key themes emerging from Part 1.
2. Part 2 will also provide an opportunity to map out which stakeholders play a part in addressing the issues raised, including local government’s role and how this differs from the State and Federal Government’s responsibilities.
3. Key stakeholders (including Councillors and organisations listed under ‘External Consultation’) will participate via invitation, ensuring the widest possible range of experience and expertise. The wider community may nominate to participate through an Expression of Interest process to ensure an even spread of perspectives.
4. Tools may include briefing papers and workshops involving both stakeholders and the wider community.

*Part 3: Solutions & Recommendations (April - May 2017)*

1. The purpose of Part 3 is to collaboratively identify evidence based and innovative solutions, including an overarching vision for the future of Victoria Street.
2. A key facet of Part 3 is the bringing together of all stakeholders, including Council, residents, traders, and key organisations.
3. Part 3 may consist of facilitated group discussions involving both stakeholders and the wider community, resulting in the collecting of potential solutions and creative ideas. These will be collated into short, medium and long term strategies which address the objectives.

Phase 3: Report writing and dissemination (May – June 2017)

1. The output from the project will be a final report with a set of key strategic recommendations addressing the project objectives.
2. The recommendations will be used as a way forward, as an advocacy tool and presented to State Government, as the basis for funding submissions or for example, the basis of developing community working groups to advocate for the implementation of different recommendations.
3. Officers will report back to Council on the community engagement process and subsequent recommendations in July 2017.

**Conclusion**

1. No single intervention can adequately manage the complex and dynamic issues arising as a result of public injecting. Instead a range of responses are required that match the range of people, issues and consequences within a local community affected by public drug use.
2. Council is in a lead position to facilitate an open and genuine engagement process, where a shared understanding of the issues and solutions can occur.
3. Council has the opportunity to work with the community to make a greater difference outside the current realm it is working in. It is time for Council to partner with the community and be innovative given there has been little innovation in this space for the last decade.

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| **PROPOSAL**   1. That:    1. Council endorse the proposed process for community engagement. |

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**Attachments**

There are no attachments for this report.