

People's Panel to guide Council's 10 Year Financial Plan

Tuesday 9 July, 2014

For the first time, a People's Panel of every day Melburnians will be formed to make recommendations to Council on where and how it should prioritise spending over the next decade.

Over a three-month period, a People's Panel of residents and ratepayers will be given open access to information, expert opinion and financial data to make recommendations to Council on priority projects, initiatives, revenue and spending as part of a 10 Year Financial Plan.

The People's Panel will comprise 43 residents, business owners and students who will be randomly selected to represent a broad cross-section of the City of Melbourne community.

Councillor Stephen Mayne, Chair of Council's Finance and Governance Committee, said the People's Panel was a ground-breaking transparency initiative that would allow community members to make informed decisions on how Council spends ratepayers' money.

"Our city is changing at a rapid pace, and although our financial position is the envy of councils around Australia, our funding is finite. Spending can't keep pace with growth forever and we need to consider what we need to do to build the Melbourne we want while addressing these challenges," Cr Mayne said.

"Rather than the conventional approach of looking at our spending one year at a time, we're asking every day Melburnians to join a People's Panel representing a cross-section of our community to make recommendations on how we should spend our money.

"The People's Panel to help us make informed decisions as we develop our 10 Year Financial Plan."

The City of Melbourne has sent 6500 letters to randomly selected businesses and households inviting them to join the 43-member People's Panel. A further 1000 invitations have been sent to students living in the City of Melbourne inviting them to join the panel.

From those indicating they can make the time to attend, a further random draw will be conducted that is broadly matched to the City's Census profile by age, gender and ratepayer mix.

Independent research organisation The newDemocracy Foundation will work with the City of Melbourne to design and run the selection process and oversee the People's Panel.

Iain Walker, Executive Director of the newDemocracy Foundation, said: "All levels of government face hard decisions when it comes to managing their finances. The City of Melbourne is ensuring that a cross section of our community – residents young and old, together with businesses of all sizes – gets to explore the challenge in great detail across more than 50 hours of detailed examination to see if they can find common ground on solutions they want Council to act on."

Once appointed, the panel will have access to information, presentations from experts of its choosing and relevant data to help inform its recommendations back to Council.

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“Although Council is ultimately responsible for decision making, this process will give us first-hand feedback from residents and ratepayers about what is important to them,” Cr Mayne said.

“As part of our commitment, Council will listen to the People’s Panel’s views when developing its 10-Year Financial Plan and formally respond to all of its recommendations.

“Putting it to a panel is an approach I’m confident will give us valuable insight into what really matters to the people who live and breathe this city, and help Council get it’s priorities right,” Cr Mayne said.

Broader community engagement will also take place across the city. Anyone can have their say online at Participate Melbourne, the City of Melbourne’s online engagement hub, and through community events.

In another first, people will be able to use an online financial planning tool to show Council where they think it should allocate its resources and spending over the next decade.

Visit www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/participate for further details.

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